neighbourhood by neighbourhood:
local action to reduce re-offending
The Coalition on Social and Criminal Justice is comprised of a number of experienced public and voluntary sector organisations that work to reduce crime and better protect the public. Coalition members are: Clinks; Crime Concern; International Centre for Prison Studies, King's College London; The Local Government Association; The Prince's Trust; The Prison Reform Trust and SmartJustice; and The Probation Boards' Association.
summary

67 per cent of people released from prison go on to re-offend within two years.

Government estimates that re-offending costs Britain £11 billion a year.

Some 50,000 people are sent to prison for less than six months each year.

The Coalition on Social and Criminal Justice believes that using local partnerships and local knowledge is the way to manage offenders successfully. Community based sentences can offer a more effective alternative to prison sentences in the right circumstances.

Where are we now?
Despite falling crime rates:
• the prison population has hit record levels – prisons have almost reached existing capacity;
• for those leaving prison, re-offending rates are rising not falling;
• government plans to introduce supervision on release for short-sentence prisoners (custody plus) have been postponed.

We have an important opportunity to change the way offenders are managed, both in custody and in the community. The criminal justice system must be more transparent and accountable locally, so that in our villages, towns and cities, justice is seen to be done and its delivery is locally controlled. People who live and work in our communities have a personal and collective stake in breaking the cycle of crime and re-offending.

Our solution
The government’s target is to reduce the rates of re-offending by five per cent by 2008 and by 10 per cent by 2010.

We know that:
• employment can reduce the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half;
• stable housing can reduce re-offending by more than 20 per cent;
• education and training is vital;
• family contact is important because it can provide a safe support structure and network for the offender upon release and beyond;
• drug treatment planning and programming which offer seamless treatment both in custody and after release can have excellent success rates.

The Coalition on Social and Criminal Justice believes that:
• the key to successful transition from prison to living back in the community is councils, health service, probation, police, Job Centre Plus, housing associations and the voluntary and community sector working together. They can provide the continuous and consistent management that individual offenders need.

The National Offender Management Service must recognise this, and establish a framework for commissioning local services that:
• allows flexibility – with different local partners able to pool their local expertise and devise the right response to individual needs;
• builds capacity to manage offenders across local services;
• works more sensitively with the needs of the local community and recognises its aspirations for long term well-being.

Celebrating success
Much can be achieved through involving local organisations, and local councils in particular. In developing its solutions, the Coalition on Social and Criminal Justice has drawn on experience from existing projects running successfully up and down the country – such as:

The Depaul Trust – Durham. This supports people after their release from Deerbolt Young Offenders’ Institution. Of the 75 leavers whom the charity has worked with in the last 12 months, only 35 per cent are known to have re-offended. Every young person on this project secured accommodation on the first night of release with the help of project workers. Once suitably housed, a worker is then assigned to the individual to help them find work and training courses.

Merseyside Probation Area – Fire Setting Material Removal Scheme. In 2004 Merseyside Probation Area, Liverpool City Council and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) set up a scheme to remove waste and bonfire materials across the area around the period of Halloween. Five teams of offenders sentenced to Community Punishment Orders spent two weeks clearing the area of hazardous materials both prior to and after bonfire night. The programme was designed to educate the offenders about the problems caused by deliberate fire setting. The number of anti-social behaviour fires attended by MFRS in Liverpool was cut by 44 per cent.

The future
The Coalition on Social and Criminal Justice anticipates that the increased use of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) will achieve a joined up approach to reducing the rates of re-offending. Greater involvement of communities in the reintegration of ex-offenders back into the community is fundamental to addressing the worrying trend of increased levels of re-offending on release from prison.
The coalition

The Coalition on Social and Criminal Justice is made up of a number of experienced public and voluntary sector organisations that work to reduce crime and better protect the public. Coalition members are:

- Clinks
- Crime Concern
- International Centre for Prison Studies, King’s College London
- The Local Government Association
- The Prince’s Trust
- The Prison Reform Trust and SmartJustice
- The Probation Boards’ Association

Introduction

Despite falling crime rates, the prison population has hit record levels, public confidence in the criminal justice system has been severely tested and re-offending rates have risen. In 1992 51 per cent of those released from prison were reconvicted within two years; by 2004 the two year re-offending rate was 67 per cent. In comparison, in 2004 the two-year re-offending rate for those given a community sentence was 53 per cent.

The Coalition on Social and Criminal Justice is keen to ensure that the eventual shape of the new offender management system provides a realistic, balanced, and effective approach to crime reduction, reducing re-offending, increasing community safety and building on public confidence and understanding.

To achieve this, the coalition believes:

- the key role of local authorities in reducing re-offending should be fully utilised;
- the government should seize the opportunities provided by the new local delivery landscape emerging around Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and strengthened Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to achieve joined up working on offender management;
- the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) should become more fully integrated into existing local delivery mechanisms;
- a beginning to end offender management system with a named offender manager for each offender should be provided;
- there should be greater community involvement in offender management and re-settlement;
- there should be a greater role for the voluntary and other sectors in providing services which are known to reduce the chances of re-offending;
- fewer low and medium risk offenders should receive custodial sentences;
- that any new arrangements for probation services should be locally accountable, to build public trust and confidence.

Closer working between prison and probation services is a prerequisite for the seamless management of people who offend. However, to meet the needs of many of the most prolific offenders in prison and the community, the active participation of the police and close joint working between a wide range of partners beyond the criminal justice system is needed.

In particular, the new arrangements must increase the involvement of local authorities, local employers, communities, faith groups, social enterprises and not-for-profit organisations. The system must avoid becoming a criminal justice ‘silo’ that fosters better communication between prisons and probation at the expense of wider commitment from local partner agencies, and the trust and involvement of local communities. Employment, housing, family contact, healthcare and education, along with effective offender supervision, form the proven means to reduce re-offending. These must be integrated with the criminal justice system.

The Local Government Association (LGA) report Going straight argued that the criminal justice agencies alone were not able to provide or to guarantee effective resettlement of prisoners and that greater recognition should be given to the major role that local authorities can play in reducing re-offending. As the report illustrates, there are already many instances where services that are key to reducing re-offending and building safer communities are managed at a local level.

---

3 Local Area Agreements are agreements between central government and the local area (the local council, Local Strategic Partnership and other key local partners) which set out the priorities for the local area. They are based around a set of outcomes and targets, negotiated and agreed between the locality and ministers, with implementation overseen by the relevant Government Office. LAAs will cover all of England from April 2007.
4 Local Strategic Partnerships are single, non-statutory, multi-agency bodies which match local authority boundaries and aim to bring together at a local level the different parts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. They are now responsible for preparing and delivering the outcomes of local area agreements, including crime prevention and offender management targets.
5 Local Government Association (February 2005) Going Straight reducing re-offending in local communities
People who live and work in local communities have a personal and collective stake in breaking the cycle of crime and re-offending. It is in these communities that offending takes place and where prisoners will live on their release. Evidence of ‘what works’ in the rehabilitation of people who offend points to the fact that effective solutions are community based and are delivered locally.

The system must be more transparent and accountable at the local level so that local communities can see justice being done and be involved in its delivery. By giving local people the opportunity to have some input into the type of work offenders carry out in their areas, Community Payback is a step towards this.

Local councils and locally elected politicians provide robust and accountable leadership, building greater community understanding and ownership of the options, costs, and risks of managing offenders in different ways. Through LSPs they can deliver a network that goes beyond and adds value to the criminal justice system. LAAs now offer a structure through which joined-up measures to reduce re-offending across different agencies can be delivered and to help put into effect national standards and priorities.

Most work to reduce re-offending and protect public safety must be delivered locally, through community links and networks. The high-quality and visible local delivery of this work is the surest way to create public confidence.

The context: mind the gaps

Lord Carter’s report Managing Offenders, Reducing Crime was published in January 2004 and in response the government announced the creation of the National Offender Management Service. The report advanced the ideas of offender management and of contestability: the contracting of services to the best provider. Offender management meant ensuring that the progress of offenders through the criminal justice system was individually managed across a patchwork of institutions and providers. Coherent management was one of the key ways of reducing re-offending. The report recommended the bringing together of the prison service, the probation service and the management of private contractors under the National Offender Management Service. However, the Carter Report did not just identify ‘gaps’ between probation and prisons. It also stressed community links, “There remain gaps in the system, with, for example, interventions in prison often not being followed up in the community.”

Another benchmark report, Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, published by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2002, with an introduction by the Prime Minister, probed the best way to stop re-offending. It put the cost of re-offending by ex-prisoners at £111bn a year. It also identified some simple measures to reduce re-offending. Employment reduces the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half, stable housing can reduce re-offending by more than 20 per cent. Education and family contact are also crucial. The report identified huge gaps between prisoners leaving prison and registering with a GP for continuing treatment or access to healthcare. Finally, it identified a terrible gulf between prison and drug treatment in the community, helping to account for the high rates of mortality among ex-prisoners in the weeks after their release.

Together these factors which do most to reduce re-offending; housing, employment, healthcare, employment, family support, would enable an ex-prisoner to more easily resettle in his or her community.

Reducing re-offending takes local intelligence and deep, well-developed local networks. Securing a job for offenders or ex-offenders means offender managers working with local agencies and local employers and knowing the local employment market. Housing not only requires local knowledge in all cases, but also in some will require a sensibility towards local community feelings that goes far beyond anything that could be known or guessed remotely.

---

7 Social Exclusion Unit (July 2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners
Since its creation, NOMS has published a number of plans and strategies including the National Reducing Re-offending Action Plan and the National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan. The coalition welcomes the government’s commitment to building on partnerships and working with LSPs and LAAs as set out in A Five Year Strategy for Protecting the Public and Reducing Re-offending. However this commitment must become a reality and the government must use existing local delivery mechanisms to achieve its aims.

Successful offender management is delivered in large part through local partnerships and local knowledge. An East Midlands Demonstration Project has been set up between NOMS, Local Government East Midlands and local authorities from Leicestershire and Rutland to develop a ‘local partnership working toolkit’. The aspirations of the Alliances (Civic Society, Corporate and Faith, Community and Voluntary Sector) established by the government in November 2005 reflect the importance of engagement at a local level. Links with the voluntary sector, employers, local authority services, education, police and many others are vital, just as better links between prison and probation are. In many cases crime, victimisation, offenders, ex-offenders and even fear of crime will be tightly concentrated in particular neighbourhoods or areas. Prison governors talk of receiving much of their intake from a small area. A huge amount of criminal justice investment is focused on small areas.

Recent research carried out in the north east of England has found tight geographical concentrations of people who offend, both adult and youth, in areas of highest deprivation. In one local authority area, half of offenders known to the probation service come from fewer than a quarter of the electoral wards, with more than a third of the thousand people, living in just three out of 22 wards. Despite high levels of need among people who offend, information about them is rarely shared between the statutory and voluntary agencies that could help – a survey of local authorities as part of the research for Going straight, found that only three per cent of local authorities are notified about all releases into their local area.

Local government
Going straight recommended that local authorities be funded to co-ordinate the work of local partners in providing support to people who offend returning to their communities. The key to successful transition lies in an integrated multi-agency approach drawn from the local authority, health service, probation, police, Job Centre Plus, housing associations and the Voluntary and Community Sector – the kind of model that has already improved interventions for young offenders.

NOMS
The coalition strongly supports continuous and consistent management of individual offenders and the principles that underpin it. Most of those sent to prison will have experienced a lifetime of social problems, which have not been properly addressed. Community-based projects provide better long term safety for local communities rather than recycling offenders through a series of short term prison sentences.

The coalition therefore welcomes the offender management model of the Carter Report as a way of reducing re-offending, and hopes that NOMS can deliver on that promise. However, it is vital that NOMS develops a national framework for encouraging and funding local solutions to crime and re-offending. This will not happen reliably, or across the board without a determined commitment to involve local partners. The new partnership and delivery landscape which has emerged since 2004 and been reinforced in the recent local government white paper, around LAAs and strengthened LSPs now provides a major opportunity for this to happen.

Commissioning
The coalition believes that commissioning should take place at different levels – nationally, regionally and locally – depending on what best meets local needs.

The current commissioning and contestability model proposed for NOMS affords a major role to the regional level, with 10 Regional Offender Managers responsible for commissioning services for offenders in prison and the

---

8 Home Office (February 2006) A Five Year Strategy for Protecting the Public and Reducing Re-offending
community. A wholly regional approach to commissioning would run counter to the aims shared by government and the coalition of strengthening multi-agency partnership working via LAAs and LSPs. There is a significant risk that a commissioning system involving only regional commissioning via the Regional Offender Managers may not be sensitive enough to the specific needs of localities. A better approach would be joint commissioning at a local level where it would support more joined up provision and avoid duplication in the bidding process.

The proposals for Probation Trusts, as provider only organisations, are also problematic as they threaten to reduce the strength of existing local links. Since there is no guarantee of continuity even for Probation Trusts at the local level, it is vital for faith groups, small charities, employers and others to have a stable local partner to which they can anchor. It would be a perverse outcome if NOMS replaced the current patchwork of voluntary local engagement and partnership with a top down, albeit regional, system.

The coalition also believes that local services and local commissioning can go beyond delivering outcomes required, improving local people’s experience, increasing trust and confidence for witnesses and victims alike. Local ownership of resettlement and the provision of community punishments could increase the participation and confidence of black and minority ethnic communities. It is often at the community level, too, that gaps are identified and innovative solutions found. Involving local democratically elected leaders, community leaders and the local press offers the best chance of involving the general public in an informed and constructive debate on the relative merits, costs, and risks of different forms of working with offenders. Currently, such debate is seriously lacking in the UK with criminal justice too often being seen by the public as ‘their’ and not ‘our’ issue.

The coalition therefore suggests that the commissioning framework of NOMS must:
• allow local flexibility in commissioning arrangements to achieve a more joined up provision and avoid duplication in the bidding process;
• enable local partners to pool their local expertise and devise strategic responses to need;
• build capacity in the local market place;
• work more with the grain of local community sensitivities and aspirations for long-term well-being.

This is not necessarily about providing extra resources for people who offend, or offender management, it is about tailoring services in a way that best protects communities and lessens the likelihood of further offences.
Community sentences
Little is achieved by sending more than 50,000 people to prison each year for less than six months. The largest group of these offenders is convicted of theft or handling stolen goods, followed by motoring offences such as driving whilst disqualified. About 15 per cent of those sentenced to less than six months were sentenced to ‘other offences’, these include a range of crimes such as breaching anti-social behaviour orders, drunkenness or minor public order offences. Although sentencers say that, in the case of the most persistent offenders, it is important to express society’s view that enough is enough, such sentences bring few benefits and damage offenders’ jobs, accommodation and family support. Research shows that these factors can prevent re-offending in the future. There is also a risk that incarceration can harden anti-social attitudes or introduce offenders to gangs, drug addiction or potential accomplices.

When short-sentence prisoners come out of prison there is little in the way of support or supervision. The Social Exclusion Unit reported four years ago that adult offenders serving less than a year are released “in a completely unmanaged fashion, nothing is done with them on release, and indeed because there is no responsible agency, to which they are handed over, very little is done in preparation for release. Yet short-term prisoners have the highest re-offending rates.” It is little wonder that the last Home Office review of sentencing found the lack of utility in short prison sentences to be one of the most serious deficiencies in the present framework.

Rather than simply leave the current arrangements for short term prisoners in such an unsatisfactory state, the government should enable local authorities to co-ordinate arrangements and commission the necessary services and stimulate a major voluntary sector initiative to assist the resettlement of such offenders.

As well as local authorities, the voluntary sector has a key role to play in effective resettlement. It has experience and expertise in housing, mentoring, drug and alcohol treatment and employment training, the interventions most required by people leaving prison.

The expansion of the Community Justice approach, through the Department for Constitutional Affairs Community Justice Centre pilots in Liverpool and Salford, offers an opportunity for a new approach. Its objectives - making the court responsive to the community, breaking cycles of re-offending and ensuring the visibility of court orders - are ones that the government recognise cannot be delivered by the courts acting alone. As the Delivering Simple, Speedy, Summary Justice Report states “...Community Justice must be driven forward in partnership with other key players including the other criminal justice agencies, local authorities and the wider voluntary sector”. One of the key principles of Community Justice as defined in the document, promoting the social inclusion of people who offend, involves “…developing pathways to support the re-integration of offenders back into their community”.

The government’s decision to postpone implementation of the sentence of ‘custody plus’ offers an opportunity to develop an approach to sentencing and resettlement at the very local level which increases both safety and fairness in the most deprived communities.

---

12 Department for Constitutional Affairs (July 2006) Delivering Simple, Speedy, Summary Justice, page 33
13 Ibid: 37
The way forward: achieving sustainable reductions in re-offending.

The coalition suggests that:

- local councils, through elected members, increasingly take on the challenge of providing the leadership, governance and the vital links to local people which are needed to rebuild public confidence. All local councils should be encouraged to realise the longer term financial benefits and benefits for the whole community that can be realised by close joint working with partners to reduce re-offending;
- LSPs be enabled to deliver close joint working with a range of partners beyond the criminal justice system, building on the strengthening of the role of LSPs proposed in the recent local government white paper and forthcoming Local Government Bill;
- LAAs are developed as the primary means of achieving joined up working across agencies to reduce re-offending, and hold those agencies to account;
- the government must ensure better integration of the NOMS agenda with the developing LAA and LSP agendas;
- any new arrangements for probation services must be locally accountable and part of the new landscape of local partnership working.

The potential benefits of closer integration with LAAs and LSPs are:

- reducing re-offending moves closer to the mainstream of local partnership activity and multi-agency solutions;
- government expectations of local councils and partners, in helping to reduce re-offending, can be communicated to all local partners;
- the relative priority of these expectations and targets, as against other national outcomes, can also be made clear to all involved;
- local authorities and their partners would not need to set up parallel processes and partnerships to tackle re-offending. This work could be overseen and directed through the same arrangements (LSP and its thematic sub-partnerships) as for the LAA as a whole;
- progress can be tracked through the regular Government Office/local council/LSP dialogue with LAAs. This involves a 6 month review and an annual LAA ‘refresh’. The need for a separate Whitehall monitoring of council/LSP contributions to offender management is lessened, if not eliminated;
- locally based accountability of offender management activities can be similarly integrated within the expanded overview and scrutiny role across the totality of LAAs, as proposed by the Department for Communities and Local Government and Home Office;
- local partners (police, NOMS/probation, Connexions, Registered Social Landlords, Primary Care Trusts) can be involved through existing joint working arrangements on the LAA, overseen via the LSP, reducing the need for separate partnerships and meetings;
- consultation and involvement with local people on offender management issues can be linked into wider activity on the LAA and local sustainable community strategy.

There is already a level of integration between offender management and LAAs.

At present:

- LAAs involve a ‘safer and stronger’ block through which LSPs/councils are asked to define better outcomes on safer communities/crime and disorder;
- for round 3 of LAAs (i.e. those now being prepared for an April 2007 start) the Home Office has added to the LAA framework a ‘mandatory outcome’ on reducing re-offending, as one part of wider targets on crime reduction and Respect;
- while there are no specific area-based government funding streams to support the work of councils/LSPs in delivering on re-offending targets, some areas have access to funding streams which can be used for this purpose. Funding to tackle Prolific and Priority Offenders comes via CDRPs;
- several areas in earlier LAA rounds have already included targets on offender management and related projects/initiatives to deliver these in their LAAs, because these have emerged as a significant collective priority for public sector, business, and voluntary and community sector partners;
- NOMS has issued recent guidance on the scope for using LAAs as a means of achieving concerted local action on reducing re-offending.

The challenge now is how much further this integration can be taken.

Although different structures and strategies apply in Wales, we hope that the essence of the recommendations in this paper could be translated to fit the Welsh context.
The Depaul Trust – Durham
This trust works with the probation service and housing agencies, and supports people after their release from the Deerbolt Young Offenders’ Institution (YOI) near Durham. Of the 75 YOI leavers the charity worked with in 2005, only 35 per cent are known to have re-offended. Funding for the offender re-settlement programme, which helps 16 to 25-year-olds, has come from Northern Rock Foundation. Every young person on this project secured some form of accommodation on the first night of release with the help of the project workers. Once the young people are suitably housed, workers then help them sign up to training courses and find work. The young people are also helped with benefit arrangements, to give them an income and reduce the temptation to steal.

The Bridges to Inclusion Programme
The Bridges to Inclusion Programme has been set up by Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council to reduce offending by vulnerable young people, or those likely to offend. The programme has linked over 100 community mentors (recruited from the local community, Knowsley MBC workforce and local businesses) to young people who have been referred through the Youth Offending Team, local schools, children’s services, children’s homes and the council’s Youth First programme. The scheme is led by the council in partnership with Merseyside Police, Crime Concern, Knowsley Community College, National Youth Agency, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Prince’s Trust.

Merseyside Probation Area - Fire Setting Material Removal Scheme
In 2004 Merseyside Probation Area, Liverpool City Council and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) set up a scheme across Merseyside to remove waste and bonfire materials across the area around the period of Halloween and bonfire night. Five teams of offenders sentenced to Community Punishment Orders spent the fortnight prior to the event clearing hazardous materials from the areas and continued to clear up debris after bonfire night was over. The offenders’ attitude during the campaign altered from initially believing that bonfires “were for kids” and “wouldn’t do any harm” to an understanding of the problems caused by deliberate fire setting incidents. There was a 44 per cent reduction in the number of anti-social behaviour fires attended by MFRS in Liverpool for the last two weeks in October and first two weeks in November with approximately 72 tonnes of materials removed, helping make Liverpool a safer place for residents.

The project was repeated in 2005 and given its success it has been extended to a citywide provision over a longer period in 2006/07. This extended provision will help the employment prospects of offenders who will be offered a package of support including an in-depth careers guidance interview and access to training courses.

Planters for Charity
An innovative scheme set up by Merseyside Probation Service, Liverpool City Council and BBC Radio Merseyside saw offenders on Unpaid Work using recycled wood provided by the council to make planters for use across the area. The filled planters were then offered for a minimum donation of £10 to listeners of BBC Radio Merseyside. The offenders taking part in the production of the planters learnt new skills, and had the opportunity to gain an NVQ award at the end of it.
For further information please contact the Local Government Association at:
Local Government House
Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

or telephone LGconnect, for all your LGA queries on 020 7664 3131
Fax 020 7664 3030
Email info@lga.gov.uk

For a copy in braille, in larger print or audio tape contact LGconnect

promoting better local government

Photographs courtesy of the Probation Service

© Local Government Association
November 2006
LGA code F/EPO51
ISBN 1 84049 533 2

Published by the LGA
Printed by 4 Print Limited