Further to your e-mail of 21 August 2014, I am responding to the request for evidence in relation to the above. Prisoners (Control of Release) (Scotland) Bill propose that prisoners sentence to four years or more for sex offences 10 years or more for other crime will no longer be entitled to automatic early release from prison at any point in their sentence.

This Bill also includes a proposal to reduce reoffending by improving prisoner release arrangements. It allows a release date to be brought forward by one or two days to ensure immediate access to support services in communities to help break the cycle of offending behaviour. The one or two day early release also allows prisons to avoid releasing prisoners on a Friday, which allows anyone needing a care package or support to have this in place and allow staff a couple of days to monitor stability before entering the weekend period. Similarly, the new Bill stipulates that prisoners should not be released on a weekend or public holiday and that their release date should be moved to a date prior to the weekend or public holiday date.

We would welcome this proposal as this enhances prisoner release arrangements and promotes supported integration into the community through allowing time to establish required links within the community before their actual release date. We are aware that the hours following prison release can be critical in determining whether a person desists from offending or re-enters into criminal activities. Immediate access to relevant and responsive support services following release can greatly improve the chances of an individual’s reintegration into the community and their self-assurance to take charge of their lives. Through introducing a defined flexibility to prison release arrangements, we believe that valuable links to the services in the community could be improved.

Previously prisoners could be released after servicing two-thirds of their sentence. The Bill will end automatic release for certain categories of prisoners. This will mainly apply to prisoners who receive a prison term for four years or more for a sexual offence (or for that period for consecutive sentences, where part of the offences are for sexual offence) and for prisoners who receive imprisonment for ten years or more. These individuals will be released via the Parole Board. It is expected that a number of these individuals will serve more than two-thirds of their sentence.

We do not consider that there are direct financial implications arising from the Prisoners (Control of Release) (Scotland) Bill for the local authorities.

There may be indirect implications arising from this Bill in the future as a result of some prisoners being retained in prison for longer periods.

Research evidence suggests that programmed work is more effective in the
community and delaying the opportunity to work with offenders could translate into risks being delayed rather than being addressed. Initially this could create a sense of reduced reoffending but has the potential to give rise to greater risks at later date.

Yours sincerely

Harry Stevenson  
Executive Director