

## Justice Committee

### Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2014-15

#### Written submission from the Howard League for Penal Reform Scotland

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment upon the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2014/15 as it relates to the Justice portfolio.

The aim of the Howard League for Penal Reform in Scotland is to promote just responses to the causes and consequences of crime. Scotland's imprisonment rate is one of the highest in western Europe and far too many people reoffend after release from prison, particularly those who have served short term sentences.

We wish to make two points about the Draft Budget 2014/15.

#### **Balance of resources for custodial and community-based disposals**

As we understand it, the Scottish Government remains committed to the findings and recommendations of the report of the Scottish Prisons Commission (2008). Speaking September 2007, the Justice Secretary said: *"I refuse to believe that Scottish people are inherently bad, so why are we locking up twice as many offenders as Ireland or Norway?"* The report recommended reducing Scotland's prison population by *"focusing the use of imprisonment on those who have committed serious crimes and constitute a danger to the public"*. And yet, since the report was published in 2008, the prison population has risen further.

We are therefore concerned to note that the budget for the Scottish Prison Service will rise in real terms from £364.5m in 2013/14 to £375.2m in 2014/15, including capital expenditure. Excluding capital expenditure, we note that the budget rises in cash terms from £342.0m in 2013/14 to £368.9 m in 2014/15, and is held at £368.2m in 2015/16, which will still represent a real terms increase over the period. Conversely the budget for community justice will experience a small real terms decrease from £31.9m in 2013/14 to £31.7m in 2014/15 and a further decrease to £31.1m in 2015/16.

If the Scottish Government is serious about reserving prison for the most serious and dangerous offenders and making greater use of community-based disposals, it is hard to see how this will happen without a greater shift in resources from custody to community justice. The budget for community justice is less than 10% of the budget for the Scottish Prison Service.

#### **Capital expenditure on the female prison estate**

As you will know, Scotland's female prison population has doubled over the past decade and we were pleased that the Scottish Government accepted most of the recommendations of the report of the Commission on Women Offenders (2012). The report recommended the closure of HMP Cornton Vale and the establishment of a

*“smaller, specialist prison”*. It also recommended *“the establishment of a powerful community justice service with strong and robust alternatives to custody”*.

With the proposed new facility at HMP Inverclyde, as well as the plans to create a regional facility for women at HMP Edinburgh, we remain concerned that there is to be no reduction in capacity for female offenders within the prison estate. We are concerned that this will militate against greater use of community disposals for female offenders. Given the damaging effects of prison on women and their families, it is vital that resources are directed towards community-based solutions to women’s offending behaviour.

Howard League Scotland  
11 October 2013