

Justice Committee

Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2015-16

Written submission from the Howard League Scotland

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment upon the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2015-16 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 note that there is an inconsistency between table 9.02 and table 9.03, with the first showing budget for community justice services falling from £32.3m in 2014-15 to £31.8m in 2015-16 and the second showing a cash freeze. It would be useful to clarify which is the case and, if there is a reduction planned, to which level 3 line it will apply. In either case, however, we note that the budget for community justice services will again experience a real terms decrease.

We also note that the overall budget for the Scottish Prison Service will experience a real terms increase from £382.3m in 2014-15 to £390m in 2015-16. Whilst the budget for current expenditure will decrease from £368.9m in 2014-15 to £356.2m in 2015-16, we note that capital expenditure will rise, from £13.4m to £40m, with that capital expenditure being set aside in 2015-16 to

“continue to implement the modernisation of the prison estate for female prisoners, including a new dedicated facility at HMP Inverclyde and the provision of a regional unit for women at HMP Edinburgh” and

“take forward work on the planned replacement of HMPs Barlinnie and Inverness”.

We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government remains committed to the goal of reducing Scotland's prison population. However, 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 central budget for community justice services is less than 10% of the budget for the Scottish Prison Service. Even taking into account the ring-fenced grant for Criminal Justice Social Work of £86.5m, which we note is also unchanged in cash terms, the total budget for community justice is still only one third that assigned to prisons.

In his statement to the Scottish Parliament on 6 November 2012, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice highlighted that he had set aside £60m for the construction of HMP Inverclyde. But at a session of the Justice Committee on 5 August 2014, Colin McConnell, Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service, explained that the budget for HMP Inverclyde's construction is now £75m (a 25% or £15m increase on the original budget).

We would in particular welcome insight into the analysis carried out by the Scottish Government in support of this increased financial outlay. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice has frequently pointed towards the Scottish Government's constrained finances to explain its inability to channel greater resources towards community justice services at the present time.

Howard League Scotland
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