Justice Committee

Inquiry into purposeful activity in prisons

Written submission from HMP Kilmarnock Visiting Committee

1. Purposeful activity and how it can be measured

   a) By the numbers who arrive at the prison and are unable to read or write against the numbers who leave the prison literate. It can also be measured by the percentage of prisoners returning after being released.

   b) Meaningful activities such as a form of apprenticeship, city and guild qualifications, being able in some cases to study for A Grades or in the case of prisoners with some qualifications to make an improvement on both fronts and other work to make it meaningful and something that they perhaps can continue once they have left the prison.

   c) To ensure that prisoners’ minds are fully occupied with the ability to work computers and for those with more artistic ability to have advisers able to encourage them to take up those interests outside prison.

   d) Barriers could be lack of encouragement from prison staff and/or relatives who visit. Also if a prisoner, on release, returns to his home environment he could quickly revert to his old ways and meet up with those who probably helped to create his problem.

   e) This can only be achieved if there are more meetings between the private prisons and the Scottish Prison Service.

   f) This totally depends on all personnel of the prison service and other services working together for the good of the prisoner.

Other points

Each prison should have an independent Social Work Department. Each prisoner should also have his own social worker, who can help them with their ambitions, concerns and ensure that accommodation is available after leaving the prison. There should also be a follow-up procedure which should last for at least six months.

The Government should encourage companies, with over 100 employees, to allow space to employ say 4% of those who leave prison. These companies should have the ability to terminate the employment should the worker not come up to expectation. However if successful this will give the ex-convict a purpose in life.

Prevention is better than cure - more time should be spent by social workers to investigate dysfunctional families which ultimately leads, particularly young people, becoming involved in crime. This can surely be done by head teachers of primary schools being encouraged to report any concerns that they may have on any of their pupils. No child is born bad - it’s what happens in the environment in which they are
brought up.

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22 January 2013