Justice Committee

Public Services Reform (Prison Visiting Committees) (Scotland) Order 2014

Written submission from Frank Gourlay

Having already contributed to our Dumfries Prison Visiting Committee response, I do not intend to respond to each of the four main questions under debate, but rather to give a short summary of my beliefs, particularly after hearing Prof Coyle, David Strang and Colin McConnell speak at the recent Association of Visiting Committees (AVC) AGM at Stirling.

1. I am glad to see that the minister proposes to include most of Prof Coyle’s recommendations. I feel it is important that if there is a desire to maintain a large proportion of the existing Prison Visitors, there must be clear separation of their and any paid Monitors duties. I feel that few would want to continue if they are just unpaid minions being instructed by the paid monitors.

2. I think it is important to have regular meetings of the Volunteer monitors to both give them a chance to air common problems, to share experiences and meet the Governor. There should also be the equivalent of the AVC to do the same thing on a national basis.

3. I still do not see the reason for Paid Monitors as one of the main advantages of a team of volunteers is there is not likely to be any clash of personalities which could certainly happen with a single person. They would also be seen as part of the establishment by the prisoners. They will also add to costs unnecessarily when the whole country is trying to cut down waste and save money.

Overall I think that the situation should continue much as it is now but with the following improvements:-

- change of name from Visiting Committees to Monitors;
- improve training to ensure that it is the same throughout Scotland;
- pay a small number of people to take over the administrative duties of Councils.

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