Introduction

1. Sacro delivers a diverse range of services both to people in prison and those being released from prison therefore, their experience while in custody can have a significant influence on successful re-integration on release. Sacro operates from a value base which requires staff to treat all individuals with dignity and respect irrespective of their circumstances or the nature of their offending.

Are proposed changes a positive step

2. The draft order presents a more consistent, modern and efficient approach to the inspection and monitoring of prisons, by setting in statute the role and requirements of prison monitors and lay monitors, under the auspices of the chief inspector of prisons. More detailed practice guidance on the distinction between the two differing roles of prison and lay monitors may be beneficial. However, it is a positive development that both will be working to common standards. This should assist monitors but also ensure a consistent professional approach is taken to prison monitoring, irrespective of which institution is being visited or the location of the prison. While on the one hand the abolition of Visiting Committees may seem like a negative step, it is being replaced by a more consistent process, which stipulates the nature of the operational requirements which monitors should follow. This seems like a positive way forward in achieving successful outcomes for those persons incarcerated in prison. It is a common sense approach to integrate prison inspection alongside prison monitoring as there is both a distinction but clear connection between the two functions.

3. Perhaps some thought needs to be given as to what arrangements will require to be put in place should a situation arise whereby a lay monitor is investigating a prisoner’s complaint which relates to a prison monitor?

4. There is little detail about how the monitors may have a role in assisting with the monitoring of the conditions in which prisoners are transported, but perhaps practice guidance could be focused on this area also.

Proposed structure of monitoring becoming part of the Chief inspector’s functions is welcomed

5. There will require to be objective scrutiny over this arrangement whereby the Chief Inspectors functions includes monitoring as well as inspection. The role of the lay monitor should provide reassurance with regard to preserving the credibility and independence of the monitoring function, separate from the inspection function. It is not clear what the reporting/management structure might be for lay monitors, other than they must follow instructions from the Chief inspector. Do they report to prison monitors or directly to the Chief Inspector?
The roles of prison monitors and lay monitors are required and if so whether the roles are appropriately drawn

6. A key role for lay monitors is dealing with prisoner complaints and should complement the role of prison monitors. It is appropriate that the functions are different since one role is paid and the other is voluntary.

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