Justice Committee

Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2014-15

Written submission from Sacro

Introduction

1. The Justice Committee has agreed to focus its scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2014-15 on: (a) policing; (b) prisons and alternatives to custody, including women offenders; and (c) the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service budget, including its commitment in the Equality Statement on the Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2014-15 to implement a revised protocol for processing domestic abuse cases. This paper sets out Sacro’s evidence to the Committee for its hearing on 30 October 2013.

Prisons and alternatives to custody

2. The prison population in Scotland has increased significantly over the last ten years. It currently stands at 8,178 and is projected to rise to 9,500 by 2020-21. This expanding population places a considerable financial pressure on limited public funds. The Scottish Government is allocating £364.5m to the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) in 2013-14 and this will grow to £398.2m in 2015-16. Some of these funds are rightly targeted at making necessary improvement to the estate, especially in light of the Commission on Women Offenders’ recommendations, and on activities that support partnership working to reduce reoffending.

3. Sacro understands that there will always be a need for prisons. Those individuals who commit serious crimes and who pose a significant risk to the public should expect to spend time in custody. However, recorded crime is at its lowest level since 1974. Non-sexual crimes of violence are at a 38 year low. Firearms offences have fallen to a 34 year low too. And one year reconviction frequency rates are at their lowest point since 1997-98. Yet the prison population continues to rise, fuelled in part by those receiving periods of remand custody, growing numbers being convicted of serious crimes and increased sentence lengths.

4. The Scottish Government has taken a welcomed holistic and systemic approach to tackling offending and the social and personal problems it creates. However, Sacro would question whether the balance of the financial allocation to SPS in comparison to community based justice services is correct. Sacro considers that much more could be done upstream – to prevent individuals becoming immersed in criminal activity and entering the penal system – and downstream – to assist them in resettling into their communities after a custodial sentence and leading a law abiding life.

5. Two examples illustrate the point. Sacro operates Bail and Arrest Referral services in a number of areas across Scotland, notably Lanarkshire and south west Scotland. These services work with offenders at the initial point in the formal court

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process. On one level, Sacro staff help these individuals fulfil their legal responsibilities associated with bail. But importantly they also assist the individuals in recognising the nature of the difficulties they face, the impact their behaviour is having on themselves and loved ones, and they also support the individuals in finding ways to resolve their problems. These services are successful and would save the public purse money, but they are not consistently delivered in other parts of Scotland.

6. At the other end of the criminal justice continuum, Sacro is commissioned to provide voluntary throughcare services in Glasgow and Edinburgh. These services assist those individuals who are leaving prison and who are not subject to statutory supervision by local authority staff, to resettle successfully in their communities. Sacro staff engage with the individual prior to their release from custody. They help them identify the problems and behaviours that have led them to offend. Sacro staff work to help the individual prepare for their release and make contact with important community based support services (such as those providing addiction counselling and treatment). Sacro staff also support the individual after release, at the critical transition time.

7. The Scottish Government has provided a good deal of policy direction and financial investment to throughcare over recent years. However, many short term prisoners still leave custody without any assistance from external bodies. There were over 15,000 receptions into custody (sentenced prisoners) in 2011-12. In the same period, only 2428 individuals received voluntary throughcare. Many of these individuals end up repeating the cycle of problematic behaviour that eventually leads them back through the revolving door to custody: drug/alcohol abuse; homelessness, social isolation etc. all play their part. Sacro considers that there is scope to consider investing further in this area to reduce the costs in the longer term to the public purse.

Women offenders and persistent offenders

8. The Draft Budget indicates the Scottish Government’s intention to implement the recommendations from the Commission on Women Offenders and to address the problem of repeat offenders. Sacro welcomes this approach. The Scottish Government has identified a Change Fund of £7.5m (for the period 2012-13 to 2014-15) for this purpose. Sacro is leading a Public Social Partnership (PSP) of voluntary sector organisations and public bodies in providing a national Women’s Mentoring Service, which targets those women who are either (1) short term prisoners not subject to statutory supervision or (2) on community based supervision and at risk of custody. The Wise Group, another voluntary sector group, is leading another national PSP on prolific offenders aged between 16 - 25 years. Sacro is a key delivery partner in this PSP too.

9. Sacro has played a full part in the discussions within Community Justice Authorities around the development of Women’s centres (notably in Lothian and Borders and Glasgow). Sacro staff are also part of the Willow Service in Edinburgh, which was recognised an example of good practice. Providing bespoke services to

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4 The Robertson Trust allocated a further £2m and SPS £500k to the government’s Change Fund making the total £10m.
women and young people involved in offending is important and Sacro is confident that these projects will be successful. However long term funding is still uncertain and Sacro considers this an area which needs to be addressed.

**Strategic Commissioning**

10. The future restructuring of community justice is of significant interest to Sacro, including the impact that these changes may bring to the ways in which the financial allocation is dispersed to local authorities and the third sector. Short term funding has had a negative impact on Sacro’s ability to deliver consistent services and to develop pilot projects into established programmes. Bringing funding commitments in line with the life of most strategic plans (normally three years) would have a beneficial effect on service users and on outcome measurement. Consideration should also be given to the national commissioning of certain justice services, in order to “invest to save”. For example, Sacro has an intensive support package service which addresses the risks and needs of those offenders who pose significant risks to public safety.

11. Sacro considers that an enhanced approach to strategic commissioning is needed to address the issues raised above, where all partners, including the third sector:
   - agree outcomes and priorities
   - understand, forecast and review need
   - assess the factors which effect market supply and demand
   - appraise all the options and take a longer term view of how best to achieve the required outcomes
   - balance out the proportion of preventative, early intervention and intensive services needed, and
   - utilise transparent and robust financial and resource management processes.

12. Community Justice Authorities have helped establish and bolster strategic partnerships but Sacro considers that more work is needed on the strategic commissioning agenda. Such a whole systems model will help develop practice and lead to targeted and effective spend.

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Chief Executive
15 October 2013