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The logo for The Centre for Social Justice, featuring the text "THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE" in white, uppercase letters on a dark red background.

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Scrap £1.3 billion Titan prison building programme and invest in smaller prisons, says new report

Government plans to build three giant “Titan” prisons, each housing 2,500 inmates, should be scrapped and replaced by a programme of smaller community-based institutions, according to a major new report from the think-tank set up by the former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith.

The report cites a wealth of evidence from experts, including official prisons inspectors and the Prison Reform Trust, demonstrating that prisons on the scale of Titans, due to be operational in five years time, are far more likely to be unsafe and to require the use of force to control prisoners than smaller prisons closer to their homes.

A key theme of the report is a call for far greater efforts to rehabilitate prisoners and to reduce intractable reoffending rates. As part of a big shake-up of the prison services, it says that part of the money saved from scrapping the Titan programme should be invested in community prisons with better education and training facilities and a capacity of no more than 600 inmates.

The report also recommends that prison and probation officers should be rewarded for cutting intractable reoffending rates.

The Centre for Social Justice report warns that the current system is scarred by appalling levels of reoffending, which are costing the taxpayer at least £12 billion a

year. Up to three quarters of young offenders – and two thirds of other prisoners – are convicted of a new offence within two years of leaving jail.

Part of the money saved from cutting reoffending would be used to reward successful prison governors, officers and probation officers – and part would be invested in new centres designed to get prisoners off drugs and alcohol and into jobs.

The 273-page report *Locked up Potential* has been produced by an 11-strong working group chaired by the former Conservative Cabinet Minister Jonathan Aitken. It recommends a radical new strategy to localise, incentivise and reform the prison system with a detailed agenda for "joined up rehabilitation" on both sides of the prison wall. Highlights of the more than 70 recommendations in the report include:

- The abolition of NOMS (National Offender Management Service)
- Its replacement by a local network of Community Prison and Rehabilitation Trusts (CPRTs) modelled on local NHS Trusts.
- * Two new community prisons for London and the creation of a national network of supervised half-way houses to be known as Community Supervised Homes for Offenders accommodating recently released prisoners or low risk prisoners nearing the end of their sentences.
- Cash incentives to prison and probation officers who deliver reduced reoffending rates in local CPRT areas.
- Overhauling the present system of drug and alcoholism treatments for offenders. Compulsory testing of all arrivals in prison. Stricter anti-smuggling measures. Selected prisoners to be given continuous but lower cost rehabilitation in Community Supervised Homes for Offenders (CSHOs).
- Certain categories of prisoners such as elderly, disabled, mentally disturbed, and women offenders to be selected to serve part of their sentences in the new network of Community Supervised Homes for Offenders (CSHOs).
- A national drive to bring thousands more volunteers into working with prisoners and released prisoners for their mentoring, literacy training, preparation for employment, housing and job finding on release.
- To fulfil the goal of joined up rehabilitation at community level, three major new pieces of Parliamentary legislation are proposed.
 - A Community Prison and Rehabilitation Act
 - A Second Chance Act (a reform of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974)
 - A Restorative Justice Act

Mr Duncan Smith said: "Rehabilitation of offenders should be our top priority since so much of crime is committed by people recently released from jail. The monolithic and absurdly expensive wasteful NOMS system has proved to be a complete failure and should be replaced by a devolved system working with the local community and charities to help ex-prisoners re-enter the mainstream of society and rebuild their lives. Rewarding staff who break the reoffending cycle is a practical way of prioritising help for prisoners and reducing crime."

The CSJ report backs the break-up of the centralised and bureaucratic £5 billion-a-year National Offender Management Service (NOMS) with responsibility for prison

management being devolved to a new wave of community prison and rehabilitation trusts (CPRTs) modelled on local NHS trusts.

It concludes that NOMS, a “vortex of confusion and disappointment within the criminal justice system”, has failed to deliver start to finish offender management and wasted far too much public money.

The CPRTs would run community prisons and “joined up” rehabilitation programmes for released prisoners across a clear geographical area with the responsibility of providing sufficient custodial places for the local courts.

The report estimates that if reoffending rates were cut by only 10 per cent that would release £1.2 billion for incentive payments and creating new services for helping offenders beat their addictions, find a job and stay out of trouble.

The report cites official figures showing that Britain has over 80,000 prisoners and the second highest imprisonment rate of all Western European countries at 149 prisoners per 100,000 population.

This is still markedly lower than the 762 per 100,000 in the USA and the 613 per 100,000 in Russia. The UK rate is projected to rise to 177 per 100,000 as the Government’s prison building programme is concluded.

These figures have to be set alongside the 10 million crimes recorded by the latest British Crime Survey – twice the level of crimes recorded by the police.

It also highlights the costs of imprisonment and reoffending to the taxpayer. It estimates that reoffending is costing £12 billion – and this is on top of the money spent on inmates while in prison, currently £39,000 a year, not including extra costs such as education and health care.

The report also points out that only 7 per cent of convicted offenders are given an immediate custodial sentence. Turnover in prisons is high. Of the 65,000 adult prisoners released from jail in 2007 the average sentence served was just 3 months.

In a foreword to the report, Mr Aitken says that the total cost for running the prison service and reoffending amounts to around £18 billion.

“Could this huge sum be spent more wisely and with less waste and failure? Of course it could...Our jails have become conveyor belts carrying the same repeat offenders in and out of custody over and over again.”

“Moreover, in the current economic recession, which like all recessions will inevitably lead to more crime, more prisoners and more overcrowding in our jails, the problems...are certain to get worse...”

“Until we create a joined up system which connects what happens to men and women in prison with a continuous effort at community level to continue their rehabilitation after their release from prison, there will be no substantial reduction in reoffending.”

“I have not gone soft on crime because of being in prison. With more direct knowledge than most people, I am well aware that many of the 83,000 inmates locked up in our jails need to be there to in order to fulfil two important objectives of imprisonment – the protection of the public and the punishment of law-breakers.”

“But I also know that the third purpose of prison, the rehabilitation of prisoners, has slipped way too far down the criminal justice system’s national priorities...”

“A reduction in re-offending is so much in the public interest that it deserves to be tackled with a new strategic agenda of plans and policies.”

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank established, by Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2004, to seek effective solutions to the poverty that blight parts of Britain.

In July 2007 the group published Breakthrough Britain. Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown. The paper presented over 190 policy proposals aimed at ending the growing social divide in Britain and to reduce the £102bn financial cost of social breakdown.