

The Centre for Social Justice
9 Westminster Palace Gardens
Artillery Row
London SW1P 1RL

Telephone 020 7340 9650
Website www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk

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Centre for Social Justice calls for radical shake-up of Britain's broken criminal justice and addiction treatment systems

Plans for a radical overhaul of Britain's multi-billion pound failing criminal justice system are published today (Monday July 12) by one of the country's most influential think-tanks.

A new report, which also calls for root and branch reform of our fatalistic addiction treatment system, highlights a catalogue of failure in key areas such as policing, prisons, drug and alcohol addiction and courts and sentencing.

And it says that with the country mired in debt, Britain cannot afford a situation where crime by ex-prisoners alone costs society at least £11 billion a year and where the bill to taxpayers for public order and safety has risen by nearly 50 per cent in real terms over the last decade.

Only 4 per cent Britain's 200,000 drug addicts emerge drug-free from treatment, public confidence in the criminal justice system is low, almost half of all offenders beginning community sentences are reconvicted within two years, and reoffending rates among ex-prisoners are as high as 60 per cent.

Big changes designed to give the police greater powers and responsibilities and to sweep away central Whitehall targets in favour of local management of much of the criminal justice system are proposed in the report, *Green Paper on Criminal Justice and Addiction*, from the Centre for Social Justice, the independent centre-right think-tank.

In a foreword to the report, Gavin Poole, the new executive director of the CSJ, says:

"For too long our police have been handcuffed by targets, bureaucracy and Whitehall prescription. Our judicial system is increasingly disconnected from the communities it should serve and a lack of transparency in sentencing has fuelled public distrust.

"Hard-working probation officers – undermined by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) experiment – are forced to tick boxes and manage unworkably large caseloads.

“Toothless community sentences too often leave sentencers with no option but prison. Many prisons are now simply purposeless and overcrowded warehouses, devoid of rehabilitation.”

Key recommendations include:

- * Scrapping the National Treatment Agency for drug addicts and replacing it with an Addiction Recovery Board charged with getting addicts off drugs and alcohol through, for instance, greater use of pioneering recovery communities..
- * A zero-tolerance approach by the police to anti-social behaviour with every officer given the freedom to exercise common-sense and discretion and intervene immediately to nip in the bud loutish behaviour.
- * Electing new crime and justice commissioners to bring control of local policing back into local hands.
- * Abolishing the expensive, bureaucratic and remote National Offender Management System (NOMS) and replacing it with local trusts working closely with communities and elected police commissioners.
- * A renewed assault on drug and alcohol use in prison to include tougher enforcement through the greater use of sniffer dogs and drug testing and rehousing inmates in secure community rehabilitation centres.
- * A second chance Act to enable and assist people with a criminal record to find stable employment.

The report also steps into the debate over short sentences triggered by Justice Secretary Ken Clarke.

It backs Mr Clarke’s stance, saying that sentences of less than two months (meaning four weeks in practice) should be abolished as a primary response to crime because they do nothing for rehabilitation of offenders, cause administrative chaos, and have a dubious deterrent effect.

Instead, such sentences should be commuted to community orders reformed to ensure that they constitute punishment.

Mr Poole adds: “This paper presents an achievable vision that places full recovery at the heart of the drug and alcohol treatment system, and rehabilitation at the heart of the criminal justice system.

“It calls for a bold but necessary restructuring of the justice system – through elected Crime and Justice Commissioners – to hand leadership, power and accountability back to local communities.

“Its implementation would put police officers back on the streets and enable them to use the brave instincts that first inspired them.

“It would introduce transparency in sentencing and deliver more effective justice.

“It would transform our prisons from institutions of containment to instruments of change. It would break the reoffending cycle and make our communities safer.

“And it would deal with the addiction and substance abuse ruining lives and fuelling so much of this criminal activity.”

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.

For copies of the report Green Paper on Criminal Justice and Addiction, visit

www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk.

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 blights parts of Britain. Iain Duncan Smith MP resigned as Chairman of the Centre on his appointment as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in May 2010.

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.

Subsequent reports have put forward proposals for reform of the police, prisons, social housing, the asylum system and family law. Other reports have dealt with street gangs and early intervention to help families with young children.