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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Install prison body scanners to stem drugs tide, says CSJ

- 31 per cent of prisoners say it is “easy” to get hold of drugs in prison
- Corrupt prison staff smuggling drugs into prison is a “serious problem” according to security officials
- Seizures of the ‘legal high’, ‘Spice’, have increased around 30-fold in four years
- Prison searching is ineffective – searches found fewer than 100 visitors with drugs on them last year

All 118 prisons in England and Wales should be equipped with body scanners to curb the endemic problem of prison drug smuggling, according to a new report from a leading, independent think-tank.

Drug use in prisons is rife, according to the Centre for Social Justice’s report, with just under one in three (31 per cent) prisoners saying it is “easy” to get hold of drugs.

Many prisoners also take drugs for the first time in prison. For instance, of those prisoners who have used heroin, one in five say that they started taking the drug inside.

The CSJ’s report, *Drugs in Prison*, recommends that each prison should immediately install body scanners to stop drugs being smuggled into prisons. The X-ray scanners can detect if people are smuggling drugs under clothing or inside body cavities.

They have been described as a “game changer” in the US where they are now commonly used. One American law enforcement officer told the CSJ: “We

wouldn't even think about running the jail without one now – it is very useful at keeping drugs and weapons out of prison.”

The CSJ – who spoke to over 120 prison experts and prisoners for the review – found that it is easy for prisoners, visitors and corrupt officers to bring drugs into prison and that it has been like this for decades.

Searches are proving ineffective at identifying smuggling – last year searches identified fewer than 100 visitors trying to bring drugs into prison.

Edward Boyd, Deputy Policy Director of the CSJ and editor of the report, said: “Prisons are awash with drugs. This is leading to greater addiction, and more crime.

“Prisons need to turn people’s lives around, not entrench addictions. They urgently need to install body scanners to catch those smuggling drugs and offer rehab that works.

“Politicians have promised to rid prisons of drugs for decades, yet little has changed. As a result, thousands of people are becoming victims of preventable crimes every year.”

The CSJ found that last year, less than a third of prisoners with an opiate addiction were being detoxed (rather than simply maintained) – an all time low. The CSJ recommends that prisoners should have full access to abstinence-based treatment.

The report also finds that use of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) – often referred to as ‘legal highs’ – has skyrocketed in prisons, yet prisoners are not yet tested for the substances.

Seizures of the main NPS, ‘Spice’, have risen from just 15 in 2010, to 430 in just the first seven months of 2014.

Spice has been linked with violence in prison and even deaths in custody by prison officials the CSJ spoke to.

The CSJ recommends that prisons immediately act on the MOJ’s law change which allows prisoners to be tested for NPS. The CSJ also recommends that it should be illegal to bring any NPS into prisons – there is currently no penalty for many NPS.

The CSJ recommends that smoking should be banned in prisons, to ensure that prison guards and other prisoners are not exposed to 'Spice' through passive smoking.

The report also finds that:

- 'Drug-free Wings' – one of the Coalition Government's landmark justice reforms – are being used by some prisons as a dumping ground to alleviate other prison problems, such as overcrowding and violence
- The costs of failing to tackle this problem are high – heroin and crack cocaine users are responsible for 45 per cent of acquisitive crime in England and Wales (excluding fraud), which costs £4.7 billion every year
- The drug sanction regime – which has not been transformed for decades – is so slow that prisoners on short-sentences can take drugs with impunity, knowing they will likely have left prison before any sanction is handed down

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think tank established in 2004 to put social justice at the heart of British politics. In 2013 the CSJ was awarded UK Social Policy Think Tank of the Year 2013 at Prospect magazine's Think Tank Awards.

In 2007 the CSJ published its landmark report, Breakthrough Britain. This publication, which set out 190 evidence-based policy recommendations to tackle poverty in Britain, transformed the social policy and political landscape and was awarded Publication of the Year by Prospect Magazine in 2008.

Since Breakthrough Britain the CSJ has published over 40 reports which have shaped government policy and influenced opposition parties. These have included the seminal papers Dying to Belong and Dynamic Benefits, which has led the Coalition Government's welfare reforms.

Further to this, the CSJ manages an Alliance of around 350 of the most effective grass roots, poverty-fighting organisations. The CSJ is able to draw upon the expertise and experience of Alliance charities for research work and media inquiries. Journalists wishing to conduct grass-roots research into social problems can be put in touch with front-line charity directors and staff.