

Briefing for Stage 3 debate of the Community Justice (Scotland) Bill

Thursday 11 February 2016

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. We campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

Shelter Scotland supports the broad aim of this Community Justice (Scotland) Bill to create a new model of community justice that will deliver better outcomes for offenders and reduce re-offending.

Housing and other essential services

During the stage 2 scrutiny process amendments were put forward to ensure essential services such as housing are on the face of this bill, in the National Strategy and the National Performance Framework were agreed to. We believe these changes to the bill will significantly improve the outcomes for ex-prisoners and help reduce reoffending. In particular having a stable and suitable home underpins all the other interventions and support an ex-prisoner will require. Access to health services, employment and welfare benefits can all be compromised if a prisoner is not supported to find a stable home on release from prison.

“People who haven’t got a house and are isolated, when they’re going to leave [prison] they say, like, ‘I’ll do a crime and be back next week’. In this day and age it shouldn’t be like that.” – Shelter Scotland service user

Amendments 15 and 18 in the name of Paul Wheelhouse

Shelter Scotland is therefore supportive of the amendments 15 and 18 Paul Wheelhouse MSP has submitted at stage 3 to amend sections 13 and 18 of the bill. This will mean that the list of general services in section 1A, page 3, of the bill will also be included in the National Strategy and the National Performance Framework section of the bill. This is to be welcomed – a holistic and joined up approach to supporting prisoners by ensuring that essential services must be provided both within prison and on release is vital to reduce re-offending. This will bring benefit to both the person who has been released and to the community.

Inclusion of the Voluntary Sector

Amendments were put forward at Stage 2 to ensure that voluntary sector organisations are given a stronger participative role at strategic level, through contributing to the National Strategy and National Performance Framework, as well as contributing to the local community justice planning process. **We are supportive of these changes and welcome the recognition of the important role the voluntary sector plays in providing essential services to prisoners and ex-prisoners.**

Guidance

We would however also welcome the development of **clear guidance** to help both statutory and voluntary sector partners develop clear pathways for engagement at both a local and national level.

Reporting

It would be very useful to have a robust reporting strategy in place so we can fully understand how the voluntary sector is involved in for example the community justice planning process.

We therefore support amendments 30 and 31 in the name of Margaret McDougall - Community justice outcomes improvement plan : participation statement which would place a duty on the Community Justice Partners to prepare a statement setting out the action they took when:

- a) Considering which community bodies are likely to be able to contribute to the preparation of the plan for the area under section 17,
- (b) Making all reasonable efforts to secure the participation of such bodies in the preparation of the plan, and, where such a body wishes to participate in the preparation of the plan to any extent,
- (c) Taking such steps as are reasonable to enable it to do so to that extent.
- (d) Providing advice, guidance or assistance to the community justice partners for the area of a local authority in relation to community justice outcomes improvement planning and reporting,

For further information please contact Debbie King, Public Affairs and Campaigns Officer
0344 515 2447 debbie_king@shelter.org.uk