

COMMISSION ON ENGLISH PRISONS TODAY



2 July 2009

News release

Cut prison numbers and reinvest money in communities says the Commission on English Prisons Today

A landmark report into the prison system has been published today (Thursday 2 July). The product of a two-year long inquiry commissioned by the Howard League for Penal Reform, the final report of the Commission on English Prisons Today takes a radical look at the purposes and limits of a penal system and how it should sit alongside other social policies.

Do Better Do Less: The report of the Commission on English Prisons Today advocates a new approach of penal moderation and fundamental reform, including:

- A significant reduction in the prison population and the closure of establishments
- Investment in the localities that currently produce prisoners to reduce crime
- The replacement of short prison sentences with community-based responses
- The dismantling of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), including the break up of the centrally managed prison service
- With local authorities as lead partners, the Commission suggests local strategic partnerships should be formed that bring together representatives from the criminal justice, health and education sectors, with local prison and probation budgets fully devolved and made available for justice reinvestment initiatives

President of the Commission, Cherie Booth QC, said: "The Commission on English Prisons Today has undertaken a comprehensive consultation process, held seminars and made visits to investigate good practice and new ideas in Europe and the United States of America over the past two years.

"This final report should be a road-map for long term and fundamental reform. The Commission proposes that justice is more local. Crucially, more widespread use of

the Howard League for Penal Reform

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effective community sentences would both allow us to reduce the use of prison and allow for reinvestment of resources into local communities to cut offending.”

The Commission’s Chair, Professor David Wilson, said: “Since early in the 1990s, England and Wales has been set on a course towards becoming a jurisdiction which punishes excessively, harshly and with little attention paid to the relationship between legislation and the impact on prison numbers.

“The result is a crisis of overcrowding which threatens to bring the penal system to its knees. We now jail more of our population than almost any other country in western Europe, despite the fact that there is no evidence to say we are any more crime-prone than our neighbouring countries.

“To counter this crisis of penal excess, the Commission advocates radical and transformational change, starting with a clear acknowledgement that criminal justice is a blunt tool which cannot in itself provide lasting solutions to the problem of crime.

“The current criminal justice system not only wastes money but it is overly centralised and driven by misleading and often meaningless targets. We advocate the breaking up of the National Offender Management Service and its replacement with an agenda rooted in localism and in engaging with communities to seek meaningful outcomes.

“Less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison should be an achievable future. Our report sets out a vision for how we get there.”

Further information

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Andrew Neilson 020 7249 7373

The Commission launch is taking place from 10am at Gray's Inn, 8 South Square, WC1R 5ET.

The Commission’s members are:

Cherie Booth QC (President)
Oscar Campbell

Baroness Jean Corston

Professor Andrew Coyle CMG

Frances Crook

Barrister; Crown Court Recorder
Graphic designer at the Howard League for Penal Reform, former prisoner
Labour Peer and former MP, author of report on vulnerable women in penal system
Professor of Prison Studies, King’s College, London; former prison governor; founding Director of International Centre for Prison Studies
Director, The Howard League for Penal Reform

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Dr Carolyn Hoyle	Reader in Criminology, Centre for Criminology, Fellow, Green College, University of Oxford
Professor Ian Loader	Professor of Criminology; Director of Centre for Criminology, Oxford University; Fellow, All Souls
Kevin McGrath	Managing Director, F & C Reit Asset Management
Paul Myners (until October 2008)	Former Chair, Guardian Media Group, Land Securities, Low Pay Commission and Board of Trustees of Tate, former Chair Marks & Spencer (retired from Commission when he was elevated to the House of Lords to become a government minister)
Stephen Nathan	Journalist and researcher, specialising in privatisation
Eddie Nestor	BBC Radio London
Professor Sir Duncan Nichol CBE (until June 2008)	Former Chair of the Parole Board; former Chief Executive of the NHS (retired from the Commission when he took the post of Chair of the Court Services Board)
Dame Helen Reeves	Consultant on victim and witness issues and former Chief Executive, Victim Support
Professor Andrew Rutherford	Emeritus Professor of Law and Criminal Policy, member of the Parole Board and former prison governor
Clare Tickell	Chief Executive, Action for Children
Sue Wade	Chair, The Howard League for Penal Reform; consultant to criminal justice agencies; former deputy chief probation officer, Hampshire
Professor Martin Wasik	Professor of Law, Keele University; Crown Court Recorder; former Chair, Sentencing Advisory Panel
Dick Whitfield	Trustee, the Howard League for Penal Reform; former chief probation officer, Kent; former Independent Member of the Parole Board
Professor David Wilson (Chair)	Professor of Criminology, Birmingham City University; Vice Chair, The Howard League for Penal Reform; former prison governor
Ruth Wyner	Psychotherapist and Group Analyst; former prisoner

Do Less Do Better: The report of the Commission on English Prisons Today is available, priced £15.00, via www.howardleague.org Pdf copies for journalists are available on request.