

## > Legislation

The *Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill* is currently going through our Parliament. It has three main provisions – firstly, it introduces the new Community Justice Authorities which will be responsible for the planning, co-ordination and performance monitoring of criminal justice social work services. Secondly, it has a requirement that there be inter-agency co-operation for the risk assessment and risk management of sex offenders. Thirdly, it introduces Home Detention Curfews which will allow for the early release of prisoners subject to electronic monitoring. Sacro has submitted oral and written submission to the Justice Committee which scrutinised the Bill. It now goes through further scrutiny and further debate but is expected to come in to our law before the end of this year. If you want to know more about this or track the progress of the Bill through Parliament the weblink is [www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/bills/billsinprogress/offenders.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/bills/billsinprogress/offenders.htm).

## > Scottish Executive Consultations

Two years ago, Sacro campaigned to ensure that new **homelessness legislation** designed to provide people with more security of tenure, did not hinder us from providing supported accommodation for offenders which is essentially temporary in nature. This resulted in a particular section in the Bill and the Executive is now drawing up guidance on how this should be implemented. Supported accommodation services and Sacro's Criminal Justice Advisor submitted detailed comments which we hope will be taken into account when the guidance is finally issued.

Sacro has also responded to the Executive consultation on **the new community justice authorities**. We have made particular recommendations on how these should work, particularly about the role of the voluntary sector and how to make sure that there are meaningful partnerships between us, the local authorities and the community justice authorities.

The Sentencing Commission has very recently issued a consultation document on arrangement for **the early release of offenders**. This will be circulated throughout Sacro and we will be putting in a response for 30 September.

## > Reports

The Sentencing Commission for Scotland in April published a report on the **use of bail and remand**. Sacro contributed to the consultation exercise carried out in preparation for the report and makes considerable mention of bail supervision and suggests that bail supervision be expanded after more research had been carried out. The Bail Functional Group will be looking at the implications of the findings of the report for Sacro. The website reference is [www.scottishsentencingcommission.gov.uk/publications.asp](http://www.scottishsentencingcommission.gov.uk/publications.asp).

The Scottish Executive has published its proposals for **the reform of summary justice**. This is all about speeding up the court process, finding more alternatives to prosecution, and deciding to keep the district courts but to take them away from the local authorities and merge them with a unified court system along with the sheriff courts. Both the full document and a summary leaflet can be accessed from the Summary Justice Reform homepage at [www.scotland.gov.uk/about/JD/CP/00019008/homepage.aspx](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/about/JD/CP/00019008/homepage.aspx).

We have received a copy of another Scottish Executive publication entitled *Special Measures for Vulnerable Adult and Child Witnesses – A Guidance Pack*. This explains the *Vulnerable Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2004* and is about all the measures that can be taken to protect child witnesses and other witnesses when they are having to go to court to provide evidence. These provisions include the use of a screen, a live television link, a supporter, and the use of a prior statement as evidence in chief. If anyone wants to see this pack it is available from the Criminal Justice Advisor.

## > Sex Offenders

As usual, this subject gets a lot of attention from the Scottish Executive. A concordat was recently signed by all the criminal justice agencies in Scotland agreeing a **protocol for information sharing about sex offenders**. This was the outcome of a one-year long deliberation by a working group chaired by the Solicitor General on which Donald Dickie represented the voluntary sector. The concordat should ensure, over time, much more systematic information sharing to protect communities. The *Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill*, referred to above puts into law some of the recommendations of the working group.

A late addition to the *Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill* is the Minister of Justice's proposal to change the arrangements for the release of short-term prisoners sentenced to between six months and four years so that sex offenders are released on license instead of unconditionally at half sentence. This is argued by some to contravene human rights legislation and also to pre-empt the findings of the Sentencing Commission on early release. Sacro has put to the Executive an alternative way through this debate. We have suggested that the existing extended sentence provisions could be amended to include this category of offender. This would mean that sex offenders on summary procedure could be subject to extended sentence following a full risk assessment.

## > **Sacro Developments**

The biggest single development currently underway is the setting up of a Community Links Centre in Edinburgh. Sacro East will be working in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council to deliver a voluntary assistance and addictions service to prisoners discharged from Edinburgh, Polmont and Cornton Vale. It is planned that this service, a major and innovative development, should be underway by mid-September.

On a much smaller scale but equally innovative, is another Edinburgh development. The council and the Drugs Action Team have funded a pilot service designed to help drug using street sex workers to access services which could help them to find a route out of prostitution.

Sacro in Ayrshire is a partner with the local authorities in piloting a bail and electronic monitoring service. This began in April and our staff assess potential bailees for suitability for electronic monitoring following a referral from the court. This service is closely linked with Ayrshire's existing bail supervision service.

## > **Advice and Consultancy**

Over the past few months we have helped a number of other organisations seeking to make a contribution in criminal justice work. These include the Church of Scotland which hopes to help ex-prisoners in certain high priority areas, agencies working with ex-servicemen, and Families Outside.

If you would like to know more about any of the above subjects please do not hesitate to contact Donald Dickie. Likewise, if you have some interesting information to share with colleagues please contact Donald to help with its circulation.

**Donald Dickie**  
**Criminal Justice Advisor**  
**4 July 2005**