

04 December 2008

Ref: am/prsn-fat/041208

## **Is prison becoming a more dangerous place to be?**

With the last few months seeing further deaths in custody and the publication of a new report highlighting the dangers of imprisoning those suffering from enduring mental health problems, is severe overcrowding making our prisons unsafe for staff and prisoners alike?

In a report issued this morning by Dr. Andrew McLellan, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, he highlights the detrimental effects of imprisonment for people with serious mental health problems. Raising fresh concerns over the harm caused by prison overcrowding, the report highlights the “real harm” of incarcerating mental health patients and the impact that this is having on our already overstretched prison resources. Of the statistics provided in the report one of the most shocking is that “over four in every hundred prisoners in Scotland was found to have a severe and enduring mental health problem”. Although the most common illnesses are identified as schizophrenia and bi-polar affective disorder, the number of additional prisoners with less severe forms of mental illness is likely to be much higher”. In a severely overcrowded facility this can have a devastating effect as prisoners falling into this category “can cause problems for staff and for other prisoners. They are resource intensive; can cause disruption; and lead to a charged atmosphere. The problems are exacerbated by overcrowding”. Dr. McLellan emphasises that the “appropriate place to address this is in a hospital”.

With Scotland’s increasing prison population rate now higher than that of England and Wales, overcrowding must be addressed or it will continue to place prisoners and staff at serious risk.

## About Sacro

Sacro is a national community justice voluntary organisation working across Scotland to make communities safer by reducing conflict and offending. Sacro operates in the community in partnership with others who share its values. It works with communities, those in conflict, victims and offenders. It does this in four key ways:

- > By being a leading provider of direct, innovative services in community mediation, restorative justice, criminal justice and schools work;
- > Through consultancy and training services, which equip Sacro and other organisations to deliver best practice and extend the impact of Sacro's specialist expertise across Scotland;
- > Through research which monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of Sacro's services and keeps it abreast of research in the field;
- > By seeking to influence policy and legislation, on the basis of research evidence, so that: the use of restorative justice and of constructive conflict resolution are extended; and the use of imprisonment is restricted to those who have committed serious crimes or are a danger to the public.

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