



## **REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES IN PRISON INQUIRY**

Thank you for inviting SACRO to comment on the above. We have considered the issues raised in your letter of 10 March 2004 and wish to make the following points.

### **Short prison sentences**

The use of very short prison sentences of less than six months, does not provide an effective opportunity for rehabilitation. The wider use of community based disposals, focussed on the principles of restorative justice, and incorporating reparative tasks where appropriate, would be a better rehabilitation strategy.

SACRO, however, remains concerned that the services and programmes needed for effective community based disposals, are not available throughout Scotland in an equitable manner. This can result in sentencers in some courts, feeling they have no alternative to a custodial sentence. Expansion of this provision is essential if sentencers are to be persuaded to make greater use of such alternatives to custody.

There may need to be restrictions put on the use of very short prison sentences but with safeguards to avoid them being replaced with longer custodial sentences.

### **Custodial remand**

About 20% of the daily prison population comprises remand prisoners. A thematic report of HMCIP showed that less than half of those remanded in custody subsequently receive a custodial sentence. The expansion of bail supervision schemes, to give a significantly greater capacity to work with, say, half of the c15,000 annual remand reception cases, would provide a more positive environment in which to address offending behaviour, without compromising community safety.

### **Throughcare**

Effective throughcare can significantly reduce re-offending rates by easing the transition from prison to society by providing seamless support in the period following release. The provision of this support in centres within prisons, allowing voluntary and statutory providers prior to release to plan work with offenders, has been found to be an effective model which is being replicated across the prison establishment. Despite proposed increases in funding, capacity still needs to be increased significantly, to allow all prisoners to obtain the voluntary assistance they need to reduce re-offending.

We would also encourage the Committee to look at the initiative of the 218 Centre in Glasgow which provides a range of services targeted on women offenders, with the aim of addressing offending behaviour and helping reintegration into the community. This model is likely to be equally appropriate for male offenders.

## **Single agency**

It is important to ensure that resources are not diverted away from community based initiatives to setting up and running a single agency which will not have any effect on many of the issues in the Reducing Re-offending consultation. Rather, increased multi-agency working, as modelled in work with high risk offenders, ensuring the good local links essential to service delivery must be facilitated. Merely merging prisons and local authority social work will do nothing to involve the very wide range of agencies that need to take responsibility for reducing re-offending and may lead to a breakdown in the essential local links between agencies.