

Justice Committee

Commission on Women Offenders

Correspondence from the Convener to Howard League Scotland on the Commission on Women Offenders' recommendations

At its meeting on 3 June, the Justice Committee agreed to write to you seeking your views on a number of issues relating to implementation of the Commission on Women Offenders' recommendations.

The Commission's report recommends that Cornton Vale should be replaced with a smaller specialist prison for those women offenders serving a statutory defined long-term sentence and those who present a significant risk to the public. It states that the new national prison for women offenders should include:

- meaningful and consistent work with sufficient premises to allow that work to take place and enable all women prisoners to build skills for release and improve self-esteem and mental health;
- a medical centre with adequate space for group work and individual appointments to address physical and mental health problems;
- a separate unit for young women;
- a purpose built mother and baby unit, and
- a family-friendly visitor centre with an outside play area for children (Part 7).

It also recommends that:

- most women prisoners on remand or serving short-term sentences are held in local prisons to improve liaison with local communities and reintegration once their sentence is complete (Part 7);
- Community Justice Centres (one stop shops based on the 218 Service, Willow Project and Women's Centres in England) are established for women offenders to enable them to access a consistent range of services to reduce reoffending and bring about behavioural change (Part 3), and
- supported accommodation should be more widely available for women offenders to increase the likelihood of a woman successfully completing an order or complying with bail conditions (Part 3).

The Committee notes that HMP Inverclyde is being designed to accommodate a higher capacity of women (350) than at Cornton Vale (309). We also note that the recommendations relating to the creation of Community Justice Centres based on the 218 Service may not be fully implemented.

We therefore seek your views on this apparent shift in approach away from the recommendations set out by the Commission and detailed above.

The Committee would welcome a response to these issues by Wednesday 18 June.

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Convener, Justice Committee
4 June 2014