

Parenting UK response to Breaking the Cycle: effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders

March 2011

In December the Ministry of Justice launched a consultation (Green Paper) called 'Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders'. This asked people what they thought of our proposals to change the ways we punish, sentence and reform offenders to reduce reoffending.

The consultation opened on 7 December 2010 and closed on 4 March 2011. You can see the document here <http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-040311.htm>

This consultation response has been coordinated by Parenting UK's Communications Team. For more information please contact info@parentinguk.org

Responses to specific consultation questions

Question 58: *What more can be done to support family relationships in order to reduce reoffending and prevent intergenerational crimes?*

Parenting UK welcomes the acknowledgement of the importance of strong family relationships in the rehabilitation of offenders, and in reducing reoffending and preventing intergenerational crime. However, offenders' families often have substantial needs themselves and these must also be addressed to help them maintain relationships with and provide support to offenders, and prevent intergenerational offending. Current criminal justice policy and procedures often actively undermine family relationships and services for offenders and their families are often lacking or not joined-up. The importance of strong family relationships in crime prevention means that the support needs of offenders and their families need to be included when calculating the costs of crime to inform policy making and commissioning. Policy development and strategic coordination are required to create procedures and working practices which think about the whole family and are not just reliant on the good work of individuals.

We welcome a reduction in the numbers of offenders serving prison sentences and more use of community sentences, which would allow more offenders to maintain family relationships.

We welcome the introduction of a full working week in prisons, which could give prisoners the ability to support themselves and their families and maintain a sense of personal and familial responsibility, as well as help with the costs of maintaining family relationships by paying for things such as phone calls and stamps.

We welcome the commitment to maintain properly resourced YOTs, which include family support, parenting support and parenting orders. The youth offending service is designed to recognise the complexity of family life and to support parents. In contrast, the adult criminal justice system operates largely without recognising that the family exists.

We welcome using outcomes focused standards and performance management that recognises rehabilitation and the importance of strong family relationships so that criminal justice agencies have to ensure that they do as little damage to families as possible.

In addition, we would welcome a policy approach which considers the long term effects of early intervention. The recent Poverty and Early Intervention reviews both reiterate the important role of parenting in the early years of a child's life. Strong attachment, empathy, attunement and authoritative parenting in a child's first three years are a significant determinant in reducing the chance of the child undertaking criminal behaviour later in life. Investment now in parenting support for families of offenders can break the cycle of intergenerational crime.

Parenting UK call for:

- More research and consultation on the support needs of offenders and their families and how strong family relationships can best be encouraged, including partnership work with offenders, offenders' families and those who work with them.
- Guidance to policy makers to ensure criminal justice policies and procedures minimise harm to family welfare and make maintaining family ties a priority.
- Guidance to criminal justice and family welfare commissioners on the importance of partnership working in the improvement of family welfare and the reduction of reoffending.
- Development of measures of outcomes that enable more evaluation of services for offenders and their families, including cross-cutting multi-agency services.
- Training of criminal justice staff to include awareness of the importance of family relationships to successful rehabilitation, and how families of prisoners are affected.
- Training available for all children's and adults services to raise awareness of the issues facing offenders families.
- Recognition for the large and small third sector organizations that work with prisoners and their families so that they are properly consulted and

considered and procedures are in place in the criminal justice system to underpin the work they do.

- Continuity of small grant funding for specialist voluntary providers of services for offenders and their families.
- Information and support available to offenders and their families at all courts.
- Use of Family Impact Statements at sentencing, and involvement of families in the judicial process, including sentence planning.
- Reduction of IPP sentences which increase uncertainty for offenders and their families.
- Simple statutory process to check the welfare of children and vulnerable adults whose carers are imprisoned.
- Make family welfare a core part of Integrated Offender Management.
- Make prison visiting easier to navigate and provide more family friendly accommodation.
- Make prisoners means of staying in contact, such as phone calls and stamps, more accessible and affordable.
- Provide help with the costs of visiting for family members on a low income.
- Provide Family Support Workers working through visitors centres and community based offenders and family support groups.
- Provide drug, alcohol and mental health services which support the whole family.
- Provide help with finding secure stable accommodation, if offenders cannot live with their families, to make it easier for offenders to maintain family ties.
- Maintain anonymity of offenders families, except to criminal justice agencies, and local services, if families decide to disclose their details.
- Destigmatise offenders families to make it easier for them to access the support they need. Normalise discussions of the issues they face and make open offers of help through local services, such schools and children's centres.