



Supporting Families and Friends of Prisoners

Action
For
Families
Enduring
Criminal
Trauma



AFFECT NEWS

Sharing news and support for families

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Notes from the Chair

Dear Ones,

Change seems to be the prevailing feature of this summer. Not only in this country, but around the World. Troublesome events occurring frequently, many due to climate change, eg floods, fires, and increased numbers of people becoming refugees. Also, conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza continue. An unprecedented number of elections are being held, and we of course have had our own General Election, resulting in a significant change in Government and personnel. A new Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, a new-and first female- Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, and, particularly relevant to AFFECT, a new Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper.

From AFFECT's perspective, regarding the state of our prisons, change was long overdue. I was particularly heartened to learn of the appointment of James Timpson as the person responsible for prisons, parole and probation. James, and his family, have long had an interest in the rehabilitation of offenders, actively recruiting ex-offenders to work in their chain of shops.

On the new government's first day, a press conference was held at which there were three questions from the Press about the state of UK prisons. I was surprised at this level on media attention. Reference was made to Charlie Taylor's (Chief Inspector) describing some prisons as "the worst ever seen," and his writing to the then Home Secretary, James Cleverly, saying that urgent action was essential to address the immediate crisis, to include an Early Release Programme. He did not receive a reply.

You will appreciate that the state of our prisons is not a popular societal issue, nor a vote-winner. An Early Release Programme encourages those with little knowledge of the subject to go baying to the populist press and social media, Supporters and users of AFFECT are rightly concerned about the welfare of their loved ones in prison, and believe that evidence, NOT emotion, should direct decision-making on these matters. To keep one person in prison costs taxpayers £49,000 per year. If only that were spent instead on mental health, youth services, and preventative programmes to keep people **out** of prison, what a lot of heartache, and public expenditure, would have been avoided.

A recent newspaper article called *The Knock* quoted a prisoner's relative;

"I'll never forget the knock, that moment when the police officers turned up and your world collapses. It was 6.20am when the doorbell rang, and then everything changes."

The article went on to outline the process of arrest, court case, sentencing, prison visiting, and release. It described the social isolation and loneliness of family members, the impact on **all** the family of the crime, but also the life-enhancing help and support that a charity gave.

Many of us reading these words will be able to identify with this trauma, and might have found much-needed support from AFFECT and our incredible band of Telephone Support Workers. We continue to provide our essential service with the help of an active Trust Board, and Lottery funding. This helps provide the professional skills of a Supervisor (Kathy) and the administrative skills of our Manager (Shannel.) If you can help in any way, please let me know. Of course, with change can come hope, and perhaps even eventually, acceptance.

Plus ça change,
Love,
Carol

'They can't wait any longer': Families campaign for action on 'injustice' of IPP sentences

Clara White is one of many thousands of families who continue to be affected by the Imprisonment for public protection sentence (IPP). Her brother Thomas White has spent nearly 12 years after stealing a mobile phone said the new Government now bore responsibility for fixing sentences of imprisonment for public protection (IPP), which have been denounced as a form of psychological torture.

Ms White, who has long advocated for the remaining IPP prisoners to be re-sentenced, told Sky News the new government must "urgently address the fact that nearly 3,000 people remain in jail under the sentence - despite the fact it was abolished more than a decade ago".

Her actions follow as a number of campaigner's and human rights lawyers wrote to Shabana Mahmood, the new Justice Secretary. In the letter, the campaigners expressed "serious concerns about the ongoing scandal of IPP sentences" and the "intolerable position in which successive governments have placed prison and probation staff who manage those still serving these sentences, both in custody and in the community". The campaigners claimed that re-sentencing and potentially releasing the remaining IPP prisoners could make a "tangible, politically palatable, contribution to addressing the urgent population pressures facing the prison system" - including overcrowding. (Sky News)

Britain's Prisons at Breaking Point

Prison overcrowding has emerged as one of the most pressing issues confronting the new government.

New proposals coming into effect in September would release prisoners serving a 'determinate' sentence between 40% and 43% of the way through their sentence. Prisoners who have committed sex, violence or terrorism crimes would be excluded from the scheme, as would any offenders who need a parole board decision to be released. This plan would replace the current 10 - week early release scheme. In May the prison population was at 87,505 with an official usable capacity of 88,895.

Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood said: "The capacity crisis will not disappear immediately – these measures take time to take effect. But when they do, they will give us the time we need to address the prisons crisis, not just today but for years to come."

A senior prisons source said they were "very worried" about an expected increase in prisoners after the August bank holiday, warning that, with just 700 adult male prison places left in England and Wales, the estate was "very vulnerable to shocks".

The official added: "That can be big, high-profile shocks, like the 2011 civil disorder or a prison riot, or it could actually be much more mundane things like an outbreak of bedbugs that would require us to close a wing and fumigate it for two or three weeks."

The Early Release scheme introduced by the previous government is still running, while up to 200 police cells have been made available under Operation Safeguard to hold prisoners temporarily. Further contingencies are on standby if the crisis worsens.

The causes of the crisis:

- An explosion in prison numbers over the past 14 years due to longer sentences, coupled with a decade of funding cuts has resulted in a dilapidated prison estate, along with little ability to create new spaces.
- Single cells are being used to accommodate two, or even three inmates, increasing the 'pressure-cooker' atmosphere.
- With the proportion of inmates to (often under-trained) prison guards soaring, the safety and wellbeing of prisoners is regularly compromised. Parc prison in Wales has seen 10 deaths in three months.

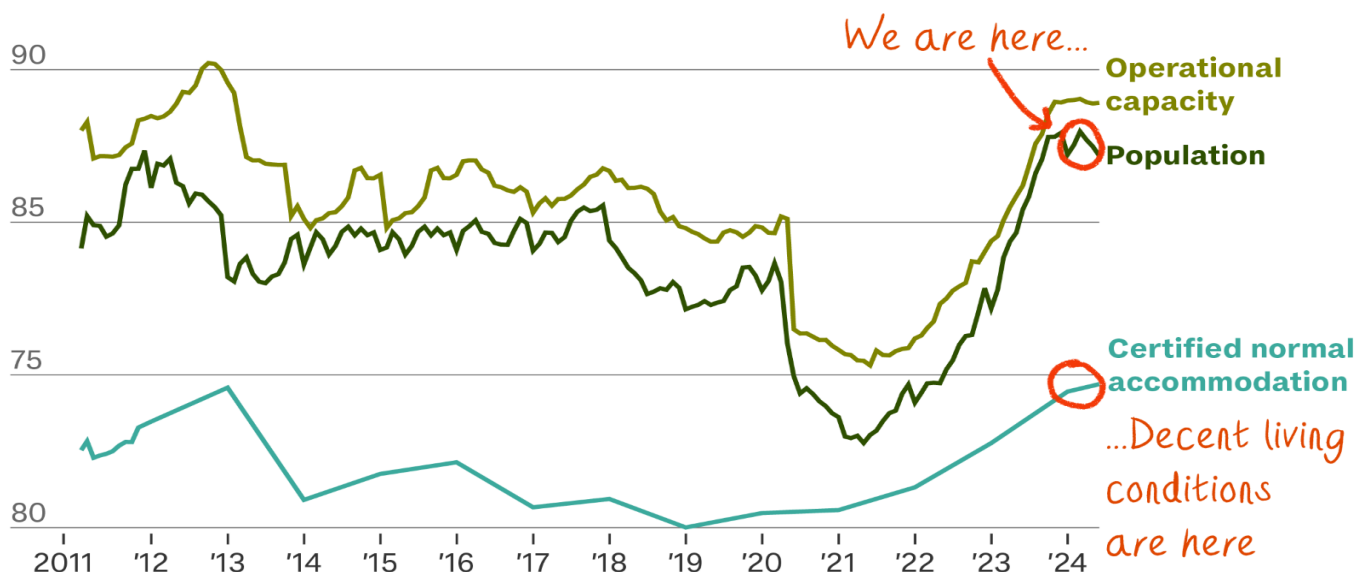
"The prison population is like a bath overflow," said Charlie Taylor, the chief inspector of prisons. Unexpected drops in capacity – such as Dartmouth Prison having to suddenly shut cells due to the detection of radon gas – are why prison managers "rightly try to maintain a buffer, which is heavily eroded now."

It's bad. The Prison Governors' Association warned that if the incoming government did not address the lack of space within a matter of weeks, "it will put the public at risk." The association recommended that all prisoners – violent and non-violent – should be routinely released after serving 40 per cent of their sentence. This drastic measure would be safer, it said, than having nowhere left to incarcerate newly convicted serious offenders.

It's getting worse. The Ministry of Justice has projected an increase in the number of inmates from the current 87,000 to nearly 106,000 by 2028. If the Institute of Government's projection of 97,000 places by the same date is accurate, then 9,000 convicted criminals will have no cell to go to. ¹

Prison population, England and Wales

95 thousand



Sources: Ministry of Justice

Urgent notifications. Charlie Taylor, the Chief Inspector of Prisons has [issued](#) a record number of urgent warnings over the past year to the Justice Secretary and Chancellor over the state of prisons, including:

- **HMP Wandsworth** was found to be “crumbling, overcrowded, vermin-infested” as inexperienced staff struggled to manage the 1,500+ inmates.
- **HMP Bristol** – reported as one of the most unsafe prisons in the country. 46 per cent of prisoners said it was easy to get drugs in the prison.
- **HMP Bedford** – reported to have the highest rate of violence against staff in the adult male prison estate. Taylor described the conditions as “some of the worst he has seen” and a “damning indictment of the state of prisons”.
- **HMP Woodhill** – severe staff shortages mean men are locked inside their cells for more than 21 hours a day, with 853 incidents of self-harm were recorded in the year to November 2023.

Action points. The Government must now decide on measures to manage the prison population; increase inmates’ ability to engage in purposeful activity which can reduce violence and improve reoffending rates; and address drug use, which has escalated some prisons through drone deliveries and staff corruption.

“Ultimately it’s about building more, or reducing numbers – that’s the decision the government has to take,” said Taylor. At lower densities, “it’s much easier to run a successful prison.”

- The Government has already confirmed it will retain the Early Release scheme, where prisoners nearing the end of their sentence can be released up to 70 days early.
- A new proposal to release low-risk female inmates – almost all of them – could free up entire prisons.
- James Timpson, the new Prisons Minister, has said previously that only a third of prisoners should be in jail. Given the vulnerability of many prisoners, the lack of rehabilitation available inside and high re-offending rates on release, the new government may take radical action to address the demand side of the crisis.

Thoughts for the day:

- ☞ Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start.
- ☞ You must be the change you wish to see in the world.
- ☞ The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

AFFECT needs you. Could you become a Telephone Support Worker?

You spoke, and we listened to your feedback about recruiting more TSW with personal experience of the Criminal Justice System. We are looking for friendly volunteers to offer free, confidential and non-judgemental support to families with a loved one in prison. Training provided.

If you are interested, please email affectcharity@outlook.com

A Cousin's poem

"Confused, Betrayed. Afraid"

Four years ago, I was a normal 15 year old boy

Full of fun and full of joy

Then one day the phone goes ring

"Mum what is it, what's happening?"

Tears are streaming, moments of sadness

I wasn't sure if I could cope with this madness

I wasn't quite sure if I had heard her

It's your cousin, he committed murder

Well, there is barely no time to cope with the confusion

Knock, KNOCK, goes the door! It's the police

What are they here for

Sorry to bother you miss we're here to protect your family's head

It's your nephew he wants all your family DEAD

Well, the police move in and we move out

I wish someone would tell me what this is all about!

Then suddenly "Britain's most wanted man"

IT'S MY COUSIN

So, my brother and I are watching telly on the hotel beds

Under police protection, "it has to be" they said!

The media making no attempt to show any affection

It's my cousin like we need protection

I feel excited and confused

Who do I tell, what if I get abused?

I look back now and realise the consequences

Of the relatives of people who've committed serious offences.

Calls for child-friendly prison visits

The international organisation Children of Prisoners Europe (CPE) have published a report recommending how prisons visits can be made more child – friendly. CPE interviewed 48 children across 10 countries and identified the key areas which could make a significant difference, not only to visits but also to improving family bonds.

It emphasised that many children have experienced the trauma of seeing a parent arrested at home, which has a severe impact on them, and that the separation is extremely stressful. As a result, to combat these factors it recommended that visits should be a positive encounter. However, from the minute they arrive, children are searched by prison officers who are unaware of the special needs of young people, which can be overwhelming, especially for those who have witnessed their parent's arrest.

Children interviewed asked for the following changes;

- ☞ They found parting at the end of the visit difficult and was heartbreaking to see their parent being taken back to their cell
- ☞ they would like to leave the visiting hall before their parent.
- ☞ To make the visit feel more like they are at home, they would like to see their parent dressed in normal clothing.
- ☞ They would like to spend time together outside and to be able to engage in physical activities with other parents and children.
- ☞ Additionally, they would like increase telephone contact to stay connected.

Visits are challenging for children to navigate as some cases meant children are not allowed physical contact with their parent. Other problems some of the children highlighted included being afraid of the drug dogs. Whilst other children did not understand how prison officers explained the rules and felt excited to see the dogs. None of the proposed changes would involve any additional costs to the prisons.

192,000 children have a parent incarcerated

The Government has published its first estimate of the number of children with a parent in prison – showing that there are 192,000 in England and Wales each year.

Campaigners for prison families have long protested that there is no official count or record for children under the age of 18 whose parent is in prison. To obtain an estimation, Ministry of Justice officials analysed prison records and tax data to calculate that 78% of the 140,000 persons who spent time in prison in 2021/22 have children under the age of 18. To calculate the final amount, they considered the number of children in a typical family. With around 14 million under-18s in England and Wales, it means around one in 75 loses a parent to prison each year.

MOJ statisticians stress that the figure is only an estimate, and the true total remains uncertain. They stated in a report presenting their findings: “Children with a parent in prison are considered to be a hidden population, with data on these children held in multiple places across a number of government services. This report takes steps to bring this data together and to identify the scale of parental imprisonment, building collective understanding of the estimated number of children with a parent in prison.

HMPPS data used to produce these statistics relies largely on self-disclosure, so some information may be missing or incorrect. The estimate of children with a parent in prison relies on an extrapolation from the number of prisoners with children, because this data source provides information focussed on the prisoner rather than their children.

(Inside Times)

Thank you for helping me to read

Ian B, HMP Bure

It's refreshing to share Ian's accomplishment of gaining the confidence to read and supporting others. The book club at HMP Bure is called Bookworms Club and is giving prisoners the confidence and tools with reading. Mr B nervously joined the book club. As he became more confident, he decided to start a book club on Resident 7, which is running successfully. He would like to thank the librarians who run the library at Bure, for their work and support. A thank you to Prison Reading Groups for supplying the books and the prisoner officers on Resident 7 for allowing to use a quiet room for the book club sessions. (Inside Times)

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