

Building relationships between prisons and local government

*papers from a conference held in
Middlesbrough on 9 July 2003*



**The Restorative
Prison Project**

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The prison in the community

Professor Andrew Coyle CMG is the Director of the International Centre for Prison Studies in the School of Law at King's College London. He was previously a Governor first in the Scottish Prison Service and then in the Prison Service of England and Wales. He has written and lectured extensively on criminal justice matters and works with prison administrations around the world, often on behalf of inter-governmental organisations such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

Introduction

The papers in this publication are based on presentations made at a conference held in Middlesbrough on 9 July 2003 as part of the Restorative Prison Project.

The aim of the conference was to discuss how best to go about building solid relationships between local government and prisons. It set out to:

- Consider the benefits and practical implications of bringing local authorities and prisons closer together.
- Explore how local authorities can contribute to the effective resettlement of ex-prisoners and thus reduce crime and disorder in their communities.
- Examine successful practice and in particular the work that has been done in Middlesbrough to involve the nearby prisons in contributing to their community.

The hundred or so people who attended the conference were drawn from local authorities, central government, the Prison and Probation Services and from a cross-section of voluntary organisations working with offenders.

The Restorative Prison Project

This project began in 2000 and is funded by the Northern Rock Foundation. It has two main objectives. The first is to generate debate about the purpose of imprisonment and prisons. The second is to encourage practical changes in the way prisons are run.

The project starts from the premise that a sentence of imprisonment should be imposed only when there is no other reasonable alternative. It should, in the words of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, be a sentence of last resort:

Deprivation of liberty should be regarded as a sanction or measure of last resort and should therefore be provided for only where the seriousness of the offence would make any other sanction or measure clearly inadequate.¹

Having emphasised this fact, it is important also to stress that prison should not be a place of despair and negativity, nor merely a place of punishment and retribution. Instead, it must somehow in addition seek to be a place of restoration and reformation. In the prison context the concept of restoration can have many aspects. Traditionally, it is applied to the individual who is in prison, who should be given the opportunity to restore the balance in his or her life through a variety of experiences, including personal development, education and work skills. Increasingly there is a recognition that restoration is much more than an individual matter. It may well include a restoration of the links between the persons who are in prison and their families, the wider

1 Council of Europe. *Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (99) 22 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States Concerning Prison Overcrowding and Prison Population Inflation*. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 September 1999.

communities from which they come and to which they will return, and perhaps also with those who have suffered as a result of crime.

It was these concepts which gave birth to the Restorative Prison Project. The project defined the features of restoration in the prison context under four headings or 'pillars'. These are:

- Creating a new structural relationship between the prison and the surrounding community.
- Providing opportunities for prisoners to work for the benefit of others
- Raising awareness among prisoners about the sufferings of victims of crime
- Developing a new basis for resolving conflicts in prisons

The practical activities of the project have been focussed on three pilot prisons in the north east of England, Holme House, Deerbolt Young Offenders Institution and Kirklevington Grange resettlement prison. From the first moment we approached the Prison Service about this project it has responded positively at all levels, from the Director General to the Area Manager, from the governors of the three prisons to all their staff, and importantly the prisoners as well.

Albert Park

Shortly after the project began Middlesbrough Council was awarded a substantial grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund for the refurbishment of Albert Park, a large run-down Victorian park in the centre of town. This led to a partnership between Middlesbrough Council and the three prisons, which are in its locality. This partnership produced benefits for all those concerned.² It provided opportunities for prisoners in the three prisons to be involved in work that was for the direct benefit of the community. Prisoners from Holme House refurbished metal railings for the park and produced furniture and fittings for the visitor centre and the roller-hockey rink. Young offenders from Deerbolt made reproduction clinker boats and trailers for the park's lake and fittings for the visitor centre. Prisoners from Kirklevington Grange undertook community service placements in the park, doing such work as landscaping, painting the park railings and working on the artwork exhibition at the visitor centre. In doing this work some of them learned new skills and they knew that they were doing work from which the people in the community were going to benefit.

Middlesbrough Council also learned a great deal from the partnership. In many respects prisons are secret institutions. Their high walls are built not only to keep prisoners in but also to keep the public out. One consequence of this is that the majority of the general population has very little concept of the reality of prison. A number of the Middlesbrough Council officials who became involved in the prisons as a

2 See University of Teesside. *An Evaluative Study of the Albert Park Project, Middlesbrough*. July 2003. Unpublished.

result of the project expressed surprise at the amount of talent that the prisoners had and the complex nature of the work that they were able to deliver under the supervision of their instructors.

There was also a gradual realisation that the majority of the prisoners were local men, who had come from and would return to the Teesside area. When they completed their sentences many of them would require somewhere to live, would be looking for employment and would require other forms of support. A great deal of effort would be needed to ensure that they did not return to the lifestyles which had led them to prison in the first place. Given the responsibilities which local authorities now have for developing strategies for reducing crime and disorder, it was also in the Council's interest to do so. Fortunately, the department in Middlesbrough Council which was responsible for Albert Park was the Department of Regeneration, Housing and Culture and it began to develop an innovative scheme to deal with the accommodation and employment needs of prisoners returning to Middlesbrough. This is described in more detail in Paul Rabbitts' contribution to this report.

Saltwell Park

In April 2002 officers from Middlesbrough Council made a presentation to the Urban Parks Forum (now known as GreenSpace) at a meeting arranged by the Institute of Leisure and Amenities Management. One hundred and thirty delegates heard about the Albert Park refurbishment and expressed particular interest in the fact that prisoners were undertaking work for the benefit of their communities.

As a direct result, Gateshead Council approached the ICPS Restorative Prison Project about the possibility of involving the prisons in its area in the planned restoration of Saltwell Park, another 'peoples' park', which had just received a grant of £9 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Partnerships have now been set up with the majority of the prisons in the locality, which have become involved in a variety of activities. In addition, Durham prison is involved in non-confidential database work on Gateshead Council archives.

Local authorities

As we move towards the end of the Restorative Prison Project we have begun to focus on some specific issues which we hope might lead to significant change in respect of restorative activities in prisons. It has become increasingly clear that one of the most important of these is the need to create relationships between local authorities and their neighbouring prisons in order to develop strategies to assist prisoners on their return to the community.

Those of us who have worked in and around prisons for many years have always been aware that if we are serious about helping prisoners to become law abiding citizens and to contribute to their communities we need to help them to gain access to three main things: accommodation, employment and a social support network. All the

activities that take place inside prisons should be geared towards achieving these aims. The Prison Service itself recognised this recently when it changed the name of the Directorate of Regimes to the Directorate of Resettlement. This is the part of the Prison Service that oversees all the activities in which prisoners are involved inside prisons. The new title was more than a mere name change. It was an acknowledgement that the best contribution which the Prison Service could make to the government's objective of reducing the number of released prisoners who go on to re-offend is by helping them to settle back into their communities.

There is an immediate disjuncture in all of this in that the Prison Service is a national organisation whereas accommodation, employment and social services are provided largely through local government. The Prison Service is doing its best to deal with the need to have a stronger local structure by linking some of its area offices to the Government Offices of the Regions. However, this is no substitute for direct involvement of the local authorities. Such involvement would not be altruistic on the part of local authorities. Men and women who are in prison have an identity other than being prisoners. All of them will have come from a community and over 90,000 of them each year return to a community, very often to the one that they have left. As citizens, they have the right to be given the support that they need to resettle.

A communitarian aspect

There is also a more communitarian aspect to the involvement of local authorities in this work. One of the most important tasks of a local authority today is to ensure that its community is safe and that people feel secure as they go about their daily business. The government recognised this in the Crime & Disorder Act 1998, which placed an emphasis on partnership working to improve community safety. The Act obliges each local authority to *"formulate and implement...a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder in the area"* within its boundaries. There is a growing recognition that community safety is not likely to be enhanced by excluding increasing numbers of people from mainstream society in the mistaken hope that this will make life better for the rest of us. Instead, community safety is more likely to be improved if there is an inclusive approach which finds a place for all and which encourages everyone to believe that they have something to contribute to society. Individuals who feel included in a community will be less liable to offend against that community than those who already feel excluded from it. This means that there is a strong incentive for all local authorities to include prisons, prisoners and prison staff in their local crime reduction strategies. Even those local authorities which do not have a prison within their boundaries should be aware that they will have released prisoners returning to their areas. For them, establishing links with prisons may be more complex, but it will be no less necessary. Such involvement has the potential to lead to a reduction in the fear of crime, to improved opportunities for prisoners to reintegrate into society and to greater understanding within local authorities of the failures that may have led to a proportion of their citizens ending up in prison in the first place.

Conclusion

The presentations made at the Middlesbrough conference which follow in this report demonstrate that a number of policy makers and politicians have already taken on board these principles. Sir Jeremy Beecham confirmed that the Local Government Association needed no convincing that local authorities had to engage directly with the prison and probation services in their areas and he also suggested that there might be grounds for considering a more regional structure for these services. In her presentation Genie Turton confirmed that central government was committed to an improvement of service delivery at a local level and emphasised the importance of housing for ex-offenders. Speaking on behalf of Martin Narey, Alan Richer mentioned his determination to improve joint working between prisons and local authorities and gave several examples of where this was already happening. Ray Mallon, Mayor of Middlesbrough, spoke from the perspective of a local politician who was determined not to go soft on crime but was at the same time committed to breaking “the dismal cycle of re-offending and retribution”.

There are already a significant number of models of good practice in this field. Given where the conference took place, we heard a lot about the Albert Park project. Paul Rabbitts from Middlesbrough Council explained how he had begun to plan the refurbishment of the park as a straightforward technical piece of work. It had quickly developed into a symbol for the regeneration of the community, involving old people and young people, meeting ethnic needs and crossing different agencies. He saw the involvement of the local prisons as central to the project. This part of the work, which began with questions about what the prisoners could contribute at a practical level, went on to open up much wider issues, such as the need for the council to provide housing for prisoners on release. There were also descriptions of work being done in other parts of the country, including the Midlands, the North West and the North East, by statutory and voluntary organisations.

One of the failures of the criminal justice system to date has been its inability to create structures which encourage offenders to pay something back to society and which encourage the public to see that the individual who is sentenced by the court is much more than a criminal. It has also generally failed to create strategies that allow offenders to develop their potential as human beings and as citizens in a way that will help them to reintegrate into their communities.

There is an increasing recognition that perhaps the criminal justice system is not the best location for developing such models. Instead there has to be direct involvement of other departments in central government and of the whole spectrum of local government resources, working alongside voluntary organisations. The Restorative Prison Project is a contribution to this work.

Prisons: Whose responsibility?

Sir Jeremy Beecham became the first chairman of the newly formed Local Government Association (LGA) in 1997 and has been a Newcastle city councillor since 1967. He chaired the Social Services committee from 1975 to 1977 and was leader of the council from 1977 to 1994. In 1991, Sir Jeremy was elected chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. He has been President of the British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA) since 1995 and served as a member of the President of the Board of Trade's Working Party on Competitiveness. He is president of Age Concern, Newcastle and vice-president of Tyne and Wear Community Foundation and Newcastle CVS.

Introduction

There is not in the public mind an automatic association between the Prison Service and local government, although, unhappily, one or two people in local government have become uncomfortably acquainted with the custodial services. And yet as this conference demonstrates what happens in our prisons and to our prisoners impinges on, and can be significantly influenced by, the responsibilities of local government.

At a time when our prisons are bulging at the seams and when the fear of crime, however irrationally, seems to be continually on the rise, the organisers of this conference are to be congratulated on their initiative. It is particularly appropriate that the event should take place in Middlesbrough where the Mayor will no doubt explain in some detail how the local authority has worked in an imaginative partnership with the Prison Service on schemes which involve prisoners in constructive work in the community, enhancing their own skills and self respect and adding value to the community itself.

The context

We need first, however, to examine the context. The UK prison population has increased by over 50 percent in a little over a decade, now ranking as one of the highest per capita in the developed world and this is against a background of falling rather than rising crime. Contrary to the popular perception, fed by the tabloid press and sometimes pandered to by politicians, we are not in this society soft on crime. On the contrary the evidence is we have too many people in jail for too long for society's good.

Of course there are criminals who do need to be taken out of society, some of them for a very long time. And of course this is not incompatible with treating them humanely, seeking to reform them, or requiring them to undertake activities of a restorative kind. But prison needs to be seen more as a last resort on the spectrum of response to criminal and anti-social behaviour, and custody used in conjunction with positive programmes to change people's behaviour and discourage re-offending.

One needs therefore to start with an understanding of the prison population.

The prison population

It is significant that about a one sixth of the prison population is aged between 15 and 21, with about 40 percent serving between one and four years, 40 percent serving over four years and a further nine percent serving life sentences. Reports of the Social Exclusion Unit and other bodies indicate that 22 percent of the prison population comes from the black and ethnic minority communities, a disturbingly high figure which cannot be unrelated to the problems of educational social and economic disadvantage faced by their communities, and which perhaps also raises questions about inherent bias in the criminal justice system.

The Social Exclusion Unit makes it clear that prisoners are 13 times as likely to have been in care as a child and ten times as likely to have been a regular truant as the rest of the population. They are 13 times as likely to have been unemployed and 6 times as likely to have been a young father. Typically they are much more likely to have poor basic literacy and numeracy skills and a very large proportion are involved in crime to feed a drugs habit. It is no surprise therefore that there is a high rate of re-offending.

In 1997, 58 percent of prisoners were convicted of another crime within two years of release and 36 percent returned to prison.

For young offenders the position is worse. Seventy-two percent of 18-20 year olds were reconvicted within two years, 47 percent receiving another prison sentence. The prisoners with the highest re-offending rates are those aged over 21 sentenced to less than 12 months and who, most significantly, are not required to be supervised by probation or any other agency on release.

A not noticeably liberal former Tory Home Secretary, David Waddington, remarked many years ago that prison was an expensive way of making people worse. Such has been so far the general experience. And whilst prison overcrowding continues at the current level, it may be difficult to change this outcome radically. But change it must, or the cycle of offending and damage to the community will continue.

And here Local Government can play a part.

The role of local government

While people are in custody local authorities can help equip them with life skills and prepare them for release. So for example, Kent County Council's Adult Education Service provides literacy classes in six prisons in which about 70 percent of the inmates lack the basic literacy skills. Councils will need to work, too, with the prison medical service, often seen as the Cinderella of the Health Service, and with those Primary Care Trusts, which are experimenting with the health care of prisoners.

Similarly Drug Action Teams involving local authorities are becoming involved in working with prisoners.

Crucially local authorities have a specific responsibility for the welfare and protection of young people but this of course is made more difficult when they are placed outside their home area. Both the home authority and the authority where the young person is in custody have a joint responsibility to ensure protection.

Experience has also shown that re-offending can be reduced by helping prisoners not only with drug problems but housing and employment. So for example the Tower Project in Blackpool has seen a 30 percent reduction in re-offending with prisoners who engaged in a contract, under which they receive support on benefits, housing, education and training. In Doncaster the Bridge Project between the Council, landlords and employers promotes customised handling of these issues and for example ensures

that housing benefit claims are kept up for short term lets or tenancies terminated in long tenancies so that rent arrears do not accrue. The Council's homelessness officers help with benefit claims and re-housing on release and council and prison staff sort out deposits on privately rented houses.

In Manchester the local authority and probation services work closely with serious offenders to provide housing backed up with close supervision to guard against re-offending and linkage with appropriate support agencies. In HMP Drake Hall a housing advice centre run by a serving prisoner liaises with housing providers all over the country and half are helped by the centre to find permanent accommodation on release. A particularly interesting example took place in this region in the context of the Meadowell Estate in North Tyneside where it will be recalled that serious rioting took place in the early 1990's. A number of those who were subsequently imprisoned were kept in touch with the regeneration of the area via the local authority housing department in an effort to ensure that on release and return to the area they would become part of the change and not an obstacle to it.

The responsibilities of local authorities

There is therefore a clear case for local authorities to engage with the custodial services not least because prison and re-offending impose costs on local government itself. For example, children may have to be taken into care; disrupted family relationships can lead to behavioural problems and ultimately to offending. So if we can assist in placing people in work and cut re-offending by between a third and a half, or if we can help people into stable accommodation reducing the risk of re-offending by a fifth, there are significant potential savings to be made.

These are not peripheral issues. They are part of the responsibility of councils to reduce crime and disorder through the multi agency approach set out in the Crime & Disorder Act. Councils therefore need to assess the needs of those from their communities who are in custody and who are likely to return and to plan for that return. This might involve nominated contacts in the local authority and, where the offender is held outside the area, contact between prisoner and prison staff and the local authority. Use of the internet, sharing information between the custodial, probation and local authority services and other relevant agencies such as the Benefits Agency or the Learning and Skills Council would also be necessary. Councils might wish to consider their own recruitment and employment policies to facilitate employment opportunities for returning offenders. And as Middlesbrough demonstrates, councils can work with prisons in their own areas to help re-habilitate people during their time in custody with work experience and practical programmes of community improvement.

Youth custody might be devolved

Perhaps there is also a case in the context of emerging regional structures to look again at how the custodial services are managed, particularly in relation to young people. Given that so much of what happens in preparing offenders for release, and after they resume life in the community, depends on a local multi agency approach, might there not be a case for youth custody at least to be the responsibility of regional assemblies and chambers?

In any event we clearly need a more systematic approach based on our responsibilities for reducing crime and disorder to cure these problems. Today's event is perhaps the first step towards disseminating good practice and raising within local government the awareness of the potential for a practical and substantial, rather than merely a populist, contribution to promoting community cohesion and enhancing community safety.

Working together to reduce re-offending

Genie Turton CB is the Director General at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for homelessness, housing, planning policy and the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). She is also the ODPM Board member for Diversity. Her previous experience includes responsibility for establishing London's new government (1997-2000), running the Conservative Government's programme for improving public services, and developing the City Challenge programme and Single Regeneration Budget. She also developed and established Whitehall's Government Office network. She has worked in the Cabinet Office, the Department of Transport, Department of the Environment, and served as Principal Private Secretary to successive Secretaries of State for Transport.

Introduction

I have enjoyed hearing about the Albert Park project today and am extremely impressed by the commitment of the front-line workers who have thought up and so successfully implemented it. The leading role played by the prison and particularly workshop staff and the Middlesbrough parks development officers is admirable, and the many awards they have won are well deserved.

This is precisely the kind of project the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister supports and believes is the way to help achieve genuinely sustainable and inclusive communities with everyone in the community making a worthwhile contribution.

A project such as this one shows that prisons harbour considerable talent that can benefit the whole community, both in the prisoners themselves and in the dedicated staff who work day in day out to ensure the smooth running of the estates, often against the odds. It also helps to show the broader public the genuine contributions prisoners can make to society and this in turn can help prisoners feel they have not been totally rejected.

So it has value in allowing prisoners to make amends to the community for the wrong they have done. It has value for prisoners' relationships with their families, when their families can see the good they can do. But above all, it has value in showing the whole community that prisoners are members of the community too and that it is worth making the effort to help them resettle there when they return from prison.

Social Exclusion Unit report

Last year, the Social Exclusion Unit published its report *Reducing Re-Offending By Ex-Prisoners*. Its findings make shocking reading.

It found that re-offending rates in this country are extremely high and account for around one million crimes committed each year. Almost 60 percent of ex-prisoners are re-convicted within two years and for young offenders the rate is higher still.

The costs of re-offending are enormous. The immediate monetary cost is at least £11 billion but the cost to communities, victims and families is incalculable.

All of you here today know that prisoners and ex-prisoners constitute many of the most socially excluded groups in society. They face, arguably, the widest and most intractable sets of social problems in any combination – low basic skills, drug and alcohol addiction, mental and physical health problems, family breakdown and institutionalisation, unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

Half of all prisoners have a history of running away from home. Almost a third spent time as children in care. More than half do not have a single qualification. Sixty-five percent have numeracy levels below those of an average eleven-year-old and over 80 percent have worse writing skills. Moreover, seven in ten prisoners will have been in receipt of benefits immediately before imprisonment.

It is therefore, perhaps, not wholly surprising that of all prisoners over two-thirds do not have a job in the period leading up to their imprisonment.

Government strategy

Each of these factors in themselves can, and in combination do, contribute to offending behaviour. No one factor can therefore be considered in isolation.

An holistic approach is required and the government is working on a national rehabilitation strategy, which will pull together departments from across government to create an integrated approach to offender rehabilitation at central, regional and local levels.

The strategy will provide a framework for service providers to deliver in a number of crucial areas at the level of the individual offender. A coordinated response between relevant agencies and organisations – such as all elements of the criminal justice system, local authorities, job centre and welfare services, voluntary services – will create new and pull together existing programmes and initiatives, directing them to meet the often complex needs of offenders and ex-offenders.

An action plan setting out cross-governmental priorities and time scales for the national rehabilitation strategy is due to be published in October 2003.

As part of this process, and in my role as director general responsible for homelessness and housing in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, I will be working alongside the Home Office and Prison Service on a comprehensive accommodation strategy to address the enormous problem of successfully re-housing prisoners on release.

To illustrate the extent of the problem, one in three prisoners will not have had permanent accommodation immediately prior to imprisonment, with many of these sleeping rough in this period. Around one in three lose their housing whilst in prison and a similar number leave prison with nowhere to stay.

Accommodation, however, forms the basis of successful rehabilitation. As many as three times more ex-prisoners with an address on release move into employment than those without. Without stable accommodation it is virtually impossible for an ex-prisoner to concentrate on other aspects of rehabilitation – such as employment, physical and mental well-being and social relations – or for them to access certain community services.

For instance, if a prisoner has run up rent arrears whilst inside and has therefore lost his home, he may have nowhere to go on release. Think how much harder it must be without a home:

- to claim benefits
- to register with a general practitioner
- to engage with the labour market and find a job
- to continue with work started in prison to address a whole range of problems: educational programmes, support with substance abuse, programmes that address offending behaviour and so on.

It is clear that we must take action to ensure that ex-prisoners get the support they need to help them obtain and sustain appropriate housing.

A major strand of this work is the need to improve a number of areas of rehabilitation. For example, improving the induction, on-going and pre-release processes to ensure prisoners get the support and advice they need to get their lives in order on entry into prison, maintain it as best they can whilst inside and are as prepared as they can be when released back into the community.

Another need is to build partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies. Taking steps that sound relatively simple: closing down or transferring benefit claims, making sure landlords are aware of their tenants change of circumstance, ensuring prisoners' possessions are kept somewhere safe.

More than 40 prisons now operate some form of housing advice service. These are funded by a range of sources – some by individual prisons' baseline budgets, some by the custody to work budget, some by charitable trusts. Local authorities are also increasingly working pro-actively with prisons on housing issues. For instance:

- Blackburn City Council has a housing officer in HMP Preston to help re-house prisoners returning to its area.
- Leicester City Council is investing in accommodation specifically to house discharged prisoners.
- the local authorities in the south west region are co-operating in a joint rehabilitation strategy with a number of other agencies.
- local authorities in the south east are actively working with HMP Canterbury to rehabilitate short term and persistent offenders.
- Solihull Council has entered into a persistent offenders scheme with HMP Blakenhurst.

National coverage does, however, still remain very patchy.

There are other areas we need to look at to ensure that prisoners who don't manage to maintain a home can access the help they need to get back into accommodation. Already in place are:

- Amendments to the Homelessness Act have made ex-prisoners a priority for housing if they are able to demonstrate additional vulnerability.
- And the ODPM's Supporting People programme has identified ex-prisoners as one of a number of vulnerable groups who can be helped. A particularly important aspect of this programme is that it will see greater joint working with the probation service, which is co-funding it.

Central government can help. It is committed to doing all it can to work with local authorities to help prisons to plan and access housing provision more effectively. As part of this commitment, several government offices throughout the country now have staff on secondment from the prison service to take this work forward.

However, there is still more we at the centre can do. We need to support greatly improved communication between prisons and the organisations and agencies involved in re-housing ex-prisoners. If more tenancies are to be saved, improvements need to be made in assessing a prisoner's housing situation and needs immediately on entering prison. All agencies need to be better prepared to receive the ex-prisoner into the community on release. These are just some of the aspects that my colleagues and I will be considering as part of a comprehensive accommodation strategy.

Local delivery

So we know that central government has to act to improve the present situation. We know that a lot is already underway. But we also know that nothing can be achieved without local service delivery. Local authorities are key players in this. They can play an essential role in linking prisons to the community, in resettling prisoners when they leave prison, and in providing the services ex-prisoners will need to use if they are to improve their chances of successful rehabilitation. These include housing and housing benefit, education services, health services, social services, the Supporting People programme and Neighbourhood Renewal programmes.

Increasing numbers of local authorities do now engage with the prisons in their areas. They are beginning to understand that they have common purpose and targets. However, every local authority – whether it has a prison or not – has to cope with released prisoners settling in their areas, more often than not with a wide range of problems that demand attention from local agencies.

Although the pressures on the prison service make it hard to ensure prisoners are always held close to home, it is clear that the more locally prisoners serve their sentence, the better it is. The more that local links are retained, the more scope there is for resettlement to be organised before the prisoner leaves prison and the more chance there is for prisoners to make their contribution to their own community – as the Albert Park project has shown they can do.

Conclusion

I hope this brief overview of the work we in the housing directorate of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be doing to help support the government's overall rehabilitation strategy has given you a feel for the real determination within government to get to the heart of these problems. Re-offending harms us all. It harms the victims of crime. It blights our communities. And it prevents the offenders themselves from fulfilling their potential and playing a full role in their community. Tackling re-offending means tackling the wide-ranging and complex problems prisoners can face on their release. This means working in partnership both at the heart of government and at a local level, and ensuring strong and effective links between the two.

But most of all it requires the co-operation and dedication of local people and prisoners themselves in taking forward projects like the one we have heard about today. It is projects like these that build the foundations of the inclusive, sustainable communities we all want.

The Prison Service view

Alan Richer is the Governor of HMP Kirklevington Grange, a resettlement prison for adult men, in Cleveland. The regime of the prison is designed to assist men to take responsibility for their own future and to enable them to lead offending free lives on release. It is one of the three pilot prisons taking part in the Restorative Prison Project.

Introduction

From time to time the Prison Service looks at the core competencies of prison governors: can we manage prisoners, can we manage staff, industrial relations, unexpected media demands or emergency operational demands. Governors need to prepare for the unexpected. To my list of unexpected things to prepare for I now include standing in at short notice for the Commissioner of Correctional Services. I have known Martin for over 20 years and have long known of his special commitment to his home area here in the North East. I will try to convey a Prison Service perspective on Martin's behalf.

I want to cover five main areas in this short speech. I want to look briefly at:

- The Government's restorative justice strategy
- Reparation and restorative justice
- Reparation and restorative justice in the youth justice system
- Rehabilitation and working in partnership
- The local picture in the North East

The Government's restorative justice strategy

This will be published on 22 July, as a consultation document, covering both restorative justice processes, which bring victims and offenders into contact, and a strategic approach to reparation by offenders to the community.

Key elements of this approach include:

- Increasing the amount and the effectiveness of reparation that takes place, linking in with the Prison Service's plans to assess its prison industries and the Probation Service's target to issue guidance on Enhanced Community Punishment (ECP) later this year. The ECP, whilst retaining its focus on reparation, will also promote its rehabilitative potential.
- Increasing its visibility to the community. As part of the ECP, the Probation Service is developing a national scheme for badging the work of community punishment schemes, and looking at ways to raise awareness of less visible work. The Probation Service will also set up a working group on the visibility of reparation.
- Increasing community and victims' involvement in deciding what reparation is done. We aim to achieve this by building on existing arrangements such as the local probation areas, which already work closely with local Crime and Disorder Partnerships to identify community safety projects that offenders can work on.

We will also build on existing good practice, including the Restorative Prison Project, which has brought together three prisons and the local authority parks department to refurbish Albert Park. We want to increase the links with local authorities in deciding how and where reparation takes place.

The Government's strategy on restorative justice includes:

- Building in high quality restorative justice at all stages of the Criminal Justice System by:
 - putting police restorative justice on a statutory basis, as part of the new conditional caution introduced in the Criminal Justice Bill.
 - using the Criminal Justice Bill to make reparation a purpose of sentencing, and to make clear that reparative activities as part of sentencing can include victim-offender contact.
- Developing our understanding of where restorative justice works best and how it could be fully integrated with the criminal justice system (CJS) in the longer term, by:
 - further research
 - looking at key issues about fitting restorative justice into the CJS.

Reparation and restorative justice

What is reparative work?

It can be many things including graffiti removal, litter collection, environmental restoration projects, canal clearance, restoration of footpaths, painting and decorating community facilities. At my own prison this morning I have sent 70 men to work on a variety of community based/reparation projects.

What are the benefits of reparation for offenders?

- Provide the opportunity to make amends to the victim and/or community and learn new skills to help them rebuild their lives
- Help rehabilitate them and so reduce re-offending. Recent evidence has shown that the lowest reconviction rate for a (non-custodial) court disposal for juvenile males was the new reparation order, with a rate of 51.2 percent.
- Make the offenders take responsibility for their actions

What do victims and the community gain?

- An increased satisfaction level as they see the offender paying for their crime and that something meaningful is resulting from the process.
- Visible reparation helps to show that the offender is making amends and can increase public confidence in the CJS.
- Engenders civic responsibility as the community is often consulted on the focus of reparation. Local organisations often suggest possible placements and projects for offenders.

I would like to say something about the development of reparation. This has been a long established feature of community sentences. Around 68,000 offenders were sentenced to community punishment in 2001, undertaking around six million hours of unpaid work.

Prisons are involved in a wide variety of reparative work, often involving partnerships with organisations such as the Inside Out Trust. Much more can be done.

Reparation is closely linked to restorative justice. Both allow offenders to take responsibility for the harm they have caused and put it right. Both can bring visible benefits to victims and other ordinary citizens, and be seen to be responsive to their needs. In practice, restorative justice can often lead to the offender making reparation to their victim, or to the wider community.

One of the key aims of the Restorative Prison Project is to develop new and more reconciliatory ways of dealing with disputes and conflicts. This fits in closely with the Government's restorative justice strategy.

Reparation and restorative justice in the youth justice system

The Youth Justice Board has pioneered a restorative justice approach in the reformed youth justice system.

From 1998 onwards, restorative justice has been widely introduced in the youth justice system bringing victims' concerns more centre stage

Restorative justice is recommended for use in final warnings, and represents the underlying principle for Referral Orders. These are orders where first time convicted young offenders and their parents meet with community volunteer panel members to discuss the offence and its consequences and agree a contract for reparation and rehabilitation. Victims are invited to attend the panel or may have their views represented. Contracts are reviewed and cases can be referred back to court. Referral orders currently form about 30 percent of all youth court orders.

The Board has a corporate target to increase victim satisfaction year on year. The Board has set youth offending teams the target to ensure that by 2004 70 percent of victims consulted or participating in restorative processes are satisfied. In 2002, the figure reached was 68.8 percent.

During 2002, over 50 percent of youth justice disposals included restorative processes or reparation. The Board's policy is to increase the quality and quantity of restorative justice interventions in the youth justice system.

The Board is also involved in developing the use of restorative justice in schools to reduce offending, bullying, exclusion and create safer school environments.

The Board funds pilot Restorative Justice in Schools projects in nine youth offending team areas. The Safer Schools Partnerships involve placing police officers in 100 selected schools; the officers and school staff are trained in restorative justice.

Rehabilitation and working in partnership

Local Authorities control a number of services that are key to rehabilitation: housing and housing benefit; the whole range of Social Services; and Neighbourhood Renewal strategies. Many local authorities have a prison in their area; all have released prisoners returning to their area. They therefore have an interest in whether the housing, employment and other resettlement needs of released prisoners are met.

There has not been a strong history of joint working or understanding between prisons and the local authorities within which they sit. This is changing. A number of local authorities and prisons are beginning to understand that they have common purpose and targets. Especially as we know prisoners are much less likely to reoffend if they get and keep a job on release, and if they have stable accommodation.

I would like to make special mention of housing because it is in this area that there are currently gaps that we need to fill and the prison and probation services are keen to make working in partnership a priority in this area.

The Prison Service has a vital partnership with Jobcentre Plus, which demonstrates this partnership approach. It includes:

- **Freshstart:** the investment by Jobcentre Plus of £1 million a year to strengthen its links with prisons and ensure that all released prisoners who need one have a New Jobseekers Interview at their local Jobcentre arranged to help them return to the labour market. In 2002-03, more than 14,173 released prisoners made use of this help and the outcomes are encouraging.
- **Progress 2 Work:** a £40 million investment by Jobcentre Plus over three years to help those with a history of drug misuse into the labour market. Ex-prisoners are a key focus of this. Jobcentre Plus surgeries are being established to provide benefits and employment advice.
- **The Prison Service Custody to Work:** also involves targeted work with employers at national, regional and local level – making the business case for considering the employment of ex-prisoners, with the help of the CBI and others. Many prisons are now actively developing relationships with employers – including local authorities in this capacity.

We need to export examples of best practice to other areas. A key vehicle for this will be through the development of regional strategies. A number of areas, including the South West, North West and Yorkshire and Humberside, are already well-advanced with this, and have pulled in the contributions of a number of key local/regional agencies.

The regional level is very relevant to the local agenda because it is the axis between national policy and local implementation. It is through regional strategy that national priorities are translated into action on a local level. For example, the Regional

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies demonstrated how, at a regional level, bodies can address a wide range of national issues and negotiate action plans, which remain locally focussed.

There is no data to suggest that high levels of need among prisoners are a regionally specific phenomenon. Need is high nation-wide. Consequently, it is essential that if needs are to be met at a local level across the UK, rather than in one or two areas, there should be a regional framework which aids development of new service configuration. This will guide areas in how to replicate examples of good practice which meet local needs within given resources.

At a regional level, agencies are well placed to highlight gaps in service provision and identify where those gaps can be closed through improved joint working.

Regional bodies are also able to negotiate agreements successfully between each other, providing a framework within which individual agencies can work. Without this, agencies would have to negotiate multiple individual agreements that are likely to lead to highly variable results and duplicated effort. This enables working to be co-ordinated between a number of agencies.

With increasing numbers of prisoners being moved whilst on sentence, regional strategies ensure that multiple prisons are involved in the same Rehabilitation Strategy. This enables the strategy to capture higher numbers of prisoners who come from the same area and to cope in cases where prisoners are moved multiple times during sentence.

Our regional agenda is being taken forward as part of the on-going work to develop a national rehabilitation strategy. It is intended that the Commissioner for Correctional Services will publish an Action Plan in the autumn which will set out the time scale for implementing these strategies nation-wide.

Let me say something about resources. The Government has provided an additional £14.5 million a year from April 2003 for the Prison Service Custody to Work initiative. This is geared towards increasing the number of prisoners getting jobs or education or training places after release, and the number with stable accommodation. The extra resources have been allocated to Area and Operational Managers, and are being invested by them in their Resettlement or Custody to Work Strategy. These Strategies should increasingly reflect discussion and involvement with local authorities.

The new services being developed with this money include more accredited skills training in sectors with feasible job opportunities for released prisoners (such as, construction, catering, industrial cleaning, warehousing and transport); jobsearch training and support; through-the-gate job placement; and housing advice and support services. Good practice in these areas is summarised in the Custody to Work Practice Framework. My own establishment has been able to reach out more directly into the community and find training placements.

The Prison Service had a target for 2002-2003 that 28,200 prisoners should get an employment, training or education place after release. A target of 31,500 has been set for 2003-04. This represents a 5,000 increase over two years.

The local picture in the North East

The work begun through the Restorative Prison Project will continue over the next five years at Saltwell Park. Prisoners are involved in repairing and making park furniture, archiving planting information (which may lead to further work from the National Trust), and propagating plants.

Partnership with the Inside Out Trust on reparative projects currently involves about 150 prisoners working on a variety of things such as:

- Braille, alternative format, and large print books, as well as tactile books for ClearVision
- Hearing aid, wheelchair and bicycle repair
- Wooden furniture for local schools and parks, some especially designed for users with disabilities

The Government Office for the Region (Communities Directorate) brings together a Regional Resettlement Forum chaired by the Crime Reduction Director, with representatives from Prison and Probation Services, Housing, Health, European Social Fund, One North East, the Drug Prevention and Advisory Service, and employment. This helps improve inter-agency communications and provides focus for the work to make communities safer by successfully resettling offenders. Representatives are able to make things happen on a regional level. Current projects include the development of an intranet resource to provide advice on employment, training, childcare, and housing.

The Prison Service North East Area has just launched a website to help other agencies, employers and community-based workers find out a little more about prisons in the region and the work they are doing. The website address is www.prisonsnortheast.com. Please look up HMP Kirkclevington Grange.

Decent accommodation and a job are clearly the best aids to resettlement. In partnership with the Inside Out Trust, Holme House recently held an Employment Fair. Thirty local employers came along. Most expressed an interest in following up their visit, three spontaneously offered help with the prison's Job Club, and one (Safeway manager) offered an ex-prisoner who was one of the speakers a job on the spot – a small example but a powerful one.

Why we should give prisoners a chance

The conference was opened by the Mayor of Middlesbrough, Ray Mallon. He became Middlesbrough's first directly elected Mayor in May 2002. Previously he was Chief Superintendent of Police for Middlesbrough. He joined the police force as a teenager and in 1994 was appointed Deputy chief Inspector in Hartlepool. He is a weekly feature writer for a North East regional newspaper. Shortly after the conference, he wrote the following piece for the *Northern Echo*.

*This article is reproduced here by kind permission of Ray Mallon and *The Northern Echo* newspaper, where it first appeared 17 July 2003.

Why we should give prisoners a chance

**OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND
– THE TRADITIONAL BRITISH
APPROACH TO PRISONS**

It may surprise some people, but I never got much satisfaction from seeing anyone jailed. For me, it was the least rewarding part of the job. I know, of course, that locking someone up is sometimes the only way to reform them and protect their fellow citizens. I also know it is a hugely expensive and frequently ineffective way of dealing with offenders. Within two years, more than half the people sent to jail re-offend. For 18 to 20 year-olds the figure is nearer 75 percent. The cost, £11bn a year.

Ray Mallon

That's why we have valuable lessons to learn from a conference held in Middlesbrough this week. Organised by the Council and the International Centre for Prison Studies based at Kings College, London, it focused on prisons as a resource for their local communities.

This is a difficult subject. The words "Support your local jail" don't exactly trip off the tongue. But we have to accept one stark fact. The vast majority of men – and women – in that prison close to us won't be there for ever. One day they'll be walking the same streets as us, perhaps living next door to us. We have to live with this fact, and with them.

In Middlesbrough last year, with the help of the Centre and the Northern Rock Foundation, we began a restorative justice project. It involved offenders in local prisons working to restore Albert Park, making furniture for the café, decorations for the

visitor centre and for events, restoring railings and making boats. They are putting something back.

"I've helped improve something my family will use for years." The words of one of the prisoners taking part. Words, which seem to be those of someone who wants to make his peace with the community he has wronged. Think of how much misery we can avoid, how much expense we can spare if we instil that attitude in all prison leavers.

This year in Middlesbrough we increased the number of restorative projects. The South Tees Youth Offending Team has projects going with young people who have had their first brush with the legal system. They've been set to clean up open spaces. Hopefully, this will divert them from crime and give them the sense they've put something back into the community.

I know how deeply people in this region feel about crime, how the activities of a small minority have eaten away at neighbourhoods, sapping their vitality and self-confidence. I know that at times it seems that there are large numbers of people in our community who are irredeemable.

We must never go soft on crime; but we must break the dismal cycle of re-offending and retribution on which the current system seems to be based. Instead we need one in which the imperatives of deterrence and punishment are balanced by elements which allow for the diversion and rehabilitation of offenders.

Giving offenders the chance to make reparation to individual victims or the wider community should be the first clause in a fresh contract between them and society. At the moment I feel that we are throwing away the key to reducing crime – in more ways than one.

Albert Park: A symbolic partnership

Paul Rabbitts is the Landscape and Countryside Manager for Middlesbrough Council. He has been a key player in developing the Albert Park regeneration partnerships.

Regeneration

In 1996, the National Lottery announced, through the Heritage Lottery Fund, the allocation of £50 million towards the regeneration of Historic Urban Parks nationwide. To date, they have allocated over £300 million with the promise of an equivalent amount over the next five years. Albert Park was the worthy recipient of £3.3 million of lottery money and just under £1 million from Middlesbrough Council's own resources.

However, when we first started this project, we anticipated a simple straight forward restoration of a run down defunct park; planting trees, resurfacing footpaths, draining the lake, new buildings and play areas, all simple stuff for an ordinary landscape architect like myself. It has however become much more than that.

I recently launched, in Albert Park, a stained glass project that had involved many sections of the local community, from pensioners in the adjacent residential home to the local Asian population through to Sure Start. It has become clear with this project that it is not just about physical restoration but community and partnerships. The restoration has developed unique multi-agency working and partnerships to a level never seen before. The Restorative Prison Project and the Albert Park initiative have been at the centre of an incredible partnership, with the community central to the whole, and including, importantly, the prison community as a major part of it.

For years housing, regeneration, social issues and education have been central to the political agenda of local authorities. This has been the case in Middlesbrough for many years. Now, however, through the Community Strategy, and the Local Strategic Partnership, our aims are simple:

- Making Middlesbrough safer
- Creating jobs and skilful people
- Investing in our neighbourhoods
- Improving urban living
- Improving health and care

So what is the connection between a simple park restoration, local prisons and their prisoners, and the five key aims I have just mentioned?

A few facts and figures

Holme House prison in Stockton houses 1000 prisoners at any one time, with a turnover of between 7000 and 8000 prisoners per year. Seventy percent of them are from Teesside. Most are in prison for less than 12 months and most will return to Teesside and the streets of Middlesbrough.

Middlesbrough is ranked as the second most deprived district in England when the metropolitan and London boroughs are removed.

Middlesbrough has the second worst drugs problem in the country and in December 1997, heroin was cheaper on the streets of Teesside than anywhere else in the UK.

The average cost to a victim of crime in this country is £400. In Middlesbrough in 1997, there were 57 crimes committed on average each day and the total cost to the victims was estimated at £22,800 per day.

The revolving door

Crime, and the fear of crime, is paramount to the quality of life in Middlesbrough. We have an elected Mayor who is driving this agenda, making the streets of Middlesbrough safer. But we have a huge turnover of prisoners in and out of our local prisons who are returning to our community, a community that the local authority is responsible for. Yet there are few if any links between local authority managers and the Prison Service. We have a revolving door syndrome that never ceases to revolve. It is important that partnerships are formed with local prisons and their community and this must include the local authority. How many Local Strategic Partnerships have a member of the Prison Service sitting on it? Yet they will have representatives from the local health service, university or police.

At the recent Local Prisons conference in Wakefield, it was made clear that the biggest single issue facing prisoners on their release is not the lack of a job, but lack of housing. Where are they to go on release? This is an issue for the local authority. If they have nowhere to go, they usually end up on the streets, in hostels. They may be unable to secure benefits or a job and if they have had a drug problem, the spiral of decline starts all over again and the chances of them reoffending increases – the revolving door again.

Accommodation for prisoners

As a consequence of the Albert Park restoration project, Middlesbrough Council's Director responsible for housing and park issues met a representative from the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) at a pre-conference dinner. The issue of accommodation for prisoners came up. As a result of this, Middlesbrough Council now has a planned release from prison scheme with a partnership with the housing department, the local prison, NACRO and the Probation Service which plans for prisoners released into the community. It is for prisoners with a Middlesbrough connection. Their needs are assessed, taking into account support networks, area of previous crimes and housing needs. The end result is that a suitable property is identified. A supported behaviour contract is drawn up with the ex-prisoner, which all the agencies and the former prisoner sign up to. Employment details are then sent to the @rwork Recruitment Agency for possible job vacancies. One major part of the contract is that the ex-prisoners must remain in contact with partner agencies. Utilities are connected for them and furniture packs arranged too. On the day of

release, the former prisoner then knows where he is going. Housing staff are instructed to arrange joint interviews and visits to try to sustain the tenancy. We are one of a few, if not the only local authority which actually has this kind of partnership arrangement with its local prison.

Conclusion

The Albert Park regeneration initiative has barely scratched the surface of the potential of prisons / local authority partnerships. As a result of this project, it has now expanded to the £9 million restoration of Saltwell Park in Gateshead, and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council in the West Midlands are also looking seriously at their own opportunities. GreenSpace, formerly the Urban Parks Forum, now have a database for local prisons who can be put in touch with local authorities, planning park restoration schemes.

Local authority/prison links in action: Some case studies

Prison Partnership Project: Birmingham City Pride and HMP Birmingham

*Lystra Hagley, Prison Partnership Development Manager,
The City Pride Project Birmingham*

Birmingham City Pride is a voluntary strategic local partnership, which was set up in 1994. One of its five projects aims to improve the image and performance of Birmingham's local prison, HMP Birmingham.

Birmingham prison is a Victorian local prison for adult male prisoners. It has a capacity of 930, which will rise to 1400 in October 2003. Half of the prisoners held there are remand prisoners (who are awaiting trial or have not yet been sentenced) and nearly two-thirds of the prisoners come from the Birmingham area. Twenty percent are of Black Caribbean origin, 14 percent are Asian and nearly one in ten is a foreign national.

City Pride and Birmingham prison have established a partnership with four objectives:

- To help the prison develop links with external agencies.
- To enhance the prisoners' employment opportunities.
- To increase community involvement.
- To improve the image of the prison.

So far the partnership has identified five gaps in services which they aim to tackle. These are:

- Resettlement; especially employment on release.
- Activities for prisoners.
- Work with minority groups.
- Services for those with an alcohol problem.
- Discrimination against ex-prisoners.

The current strategy of the partnership is:

To help prisoners to find employment a business focus group has been set up which includes representatives from Rover, the BBC and the Chamber of Commerce.

A number of groups concerned with alcohol misuse came into the prison to run a roundtable on dealing with alcohol problems.

A charity fundraising sleep-in held at the prison in September attracted 76 people and raised over £30,000 for local children's charities. Fifty percent of these participants have signed up to a continued involvement with the prison in some way.

To structure community involvement with the prison, 'Friends of Birmingham Prison' will be launched in October this year. One of the group's first projects is to fit out a care suite to be used by prison Listeners (who are trained by the Samaritans) to reduce the incidence of self-harm and suicide in custody.

It has also secured the employment of two ex-prisoners from Birmingham prison and is monitoring this process as a case project study to encourage other local employers to employ ex-offenders.

The Inside Out Trust: Prisons helping local schools

Lynette Wilde, Regional Coordinator, North East, Inside Out Trust

I would like to highlight the work of a very local prison. HMP Holme House is a category B prison and has about a thousand prisoners, most of whom will be released back into this local community. I want to tell you about work they are doing for the special needs areas in education.

The first beneficiary is Priory Woods School in Ormesby. This school caters for children aged 4 to 19 with severe learning and physical difficulties. 'A special place for learning' is in their logo – and it most certainly is that. It is one of the largest schools of its type in the country. It is well funded, well equipped and has a wonderfully dedicated team of teachers, classroom assistants and support staff. But to prepare and make the special learning aids and alternative format means time away from the children. They are now beneficiaries of the work of the Inside Out Trust and have been linked to HMP Holme House and its Alternative Formats Workshop. The prisoners there are transcribing textbooks into large print and Widgits (a system of communication using picture-symbols) and are helping to design and make other teaching aids. They have produced over 2000 words, which in total is more than 20,000 Widgit cards. The school has also been linked with the textile workshop at HMYOI Deerbolt. The young prisoners there have made aprons, bibs and story book sacks in special sizes, along with other items needed to enable some of these children to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

The second beneficiary is Darlington's Heathfield Primary School, which occupies a pleasant, spacious site with buildings for infant and junior aged children. Since priority in the budget is given to the curriculum and general running costs of the school, the

school cannot afford to purchase items of furniture to brighten up the library and a special needs learning area. After being identified as a worthy beneficiary and receiving a 'wish list' from them, HMP Holme House happily agreed to produce the goods. They have made a number of special sized and brightly coloured bookcases and computer pods which the children and staff are delighted with.

The third is Tollesby School in Middlesbrough. This school caters for children aged between 11 and 16 who have learning/emotional and behavioural problems. It has limited resources available for making the school entrance and playgrounds welcoming, cheerful and pleasant. The school has now been linked to two new dedicated Inside Out Trust woodcraft workshops, one in HMYOI Castington and the other in HMP Acklington. The school has recently taken delivery of specially designed picnic tables with wheelchair access, garden seats for the teenage area and made-to-measure planters which will make the entrance to the school more welcoming. HMYOI Deerbolt has already made some brightly coloured bean bags for the Relaxation Therapy areas.

One of the reasons I have mentioned Tollesby School is to illustrate that prisons throughout the whole of the North East region can and do help all communities wherever they are placed.

The North West area resettlement strategy

Jon Parkin, HM Prison Service representative and Barbara Bate, North West National Probation Service representative, Government Office for the North West

North West prisons hold over 11,000 people at any one time, of whom around 800 are women. Seventeen thousand prisoners are released from North West prisons each year and 11,000 of them will have served less than six months in prison.

The Resettlement Strategy identifies ten key areas in which agencies will assess risk and need, provide interventions and programmes to reduce the likelihood of further offences being committed and enable offenders to reintegrate into the community. These are:

- **Employment:** Enabling offenders to enter employment, training or education and establish legitimate earning capacity and self-support.
- **Housing:** Ensuring that when offenders leave prison, they go to suitable housing.
- **Learning and skills:** Enabling offenders to develop skills, learning and accreditation to apply to everyday living and to provide evidence to assist in getting work.
- **Life skills and offending behaviour:** Development of problem-solving abilities, strategies for managing difficult emotions and dealing with peers.

- **Family and social support:** Enabling ex-prisoners to maintain and develop relationships with family and community to provide support, encouragement, guidance and commitment to re-integration and rehabilitation.
- **Drug and alcohol misuse:** Enabling ex-prisoners to change their behaviour with regard to drugs and alcohol.
- **Health:** Ensuring that primary health needs are met, mental health issues are fully assessed and enabling ex-prisoners to establish healthy lifestyles that contribute to employment and learning.
- **Finance:** Ensuring that offenders are capable of managing money and have reduced motivation to gain property and finance by illegal means.
- **Victims and Community:** Ensuring that communities are properly protected from offenders that pose a high risk of causing harm. Ensuring that where possible, offenders have the opportunity to demonstrate reparation through restorative work.
- **Case management:** Ensuring that information is collected accurately and communicated effectively between and within agencies.

A group will be set up for each of these areas to bring together the partners whose contribution is needed. The lead agencies for ensuring ex-prisoners are suitably housed will be local authorities. Local authorities will also be represented on eight of the other groups. The strategy will become operational in the autumn of 2003.

The International Centre for Prison Studies

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Through its work the Centre has set out

- to develop a body of knowledge, based on international covenants and instruments, about the principles on which the use of imprisonment should be based, which can be used as a sound basis for policies on prison issues.
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