



Standing Committee for Youth Justice

Vernon Coaker MP and Maria Eagle MP

Minister of State for Schools and Learners and Minister of State , Ministry of Justice

Thursday 10 December 2009

Dear Ministers,

Re: Funding of social workers in Young Offenders Institutions

As Chair of the Standing Committee for Youth Justice (SCYJ), which represents the leading children's charities and penal reform groups in the United Kingdom as well as many other influential organisations in the youth justice arena, I would like to register our ongoing concern at the lack of resolution on the important issue of the funding of social workers employed in Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs). To our knowledge, there are now only 10 such social workers, from an original 25 posts.

Following John Drew's comments on this topic at the Youth Justice Board (YJB) Convention in Southport earlier this month, we presume that there is still no commitment to fund these important posts. Young people in YOIs are of course an extremely vulnerable population, many of whom will have been in contact with children's services before their imprisonment, and who are likely to have ongoing vulnerabilities of concern to their home and host local authority. You will be aware of the strong association amongst children and young people between past experience of being a victim of abuse and ending up in custody, as highlighted in the YJB's 2008

publication *A Literature Review into Children Abused and/or Neglected Prior Custody*.

In addition to identifying and acting upon evidence of past abuse, social workers in YOIs also have a very important role in safeguarding within the YOI itself, for example in ensuring that child protection considerations are properly taken into account in practices such as segregation, restraint, etc. Indeed, the establishment of these social worker posts was a response to the judgment in *Munby* which found that the Children Act 1989 did apply to young offenders' institutions and that there were significant shortcomings in safeguarding arrangements for children in custody. Further, young people released from YOIs are likely to need the support of their home/host local authority in resettlement into the community and social workers in YOIs can facilitate this.

Clearly, the small salary costs saved by failing to continue to fund these posts will have substantial human costs for children and young people, and for wider society; considerable expense is also likely to be generated through failure to identify and deal with vulnerabilities while a child or young person is in custody.

We therefore urge you either to commit to long term funding for these vital posts or to reach a binding settlement with local authorities to ensure that they are funded now and in the long term. May we suggest, as a way forward, that the total DCFS childrens' services budget should be 'top sliced' to yield the required funding – as suggested in the 2003 report by the Youth Justice Board, the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Local Government Association, *The Application of the Children Act (1989) to Children in Young Offender Institutions*. We would be very happy to meet with you to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Ireland
Chair, Standing Committee for Youth Justice

Cc: Frances Done (Chair, Youth Justice Board)
John Drew (Chief Executive, Youth Justice Board)

Kim Bromley-Derry (Chair, Association of Directors of Children's Services)

Social workers currently employed at YOIs

The **Standing Committee for Youth Justice (SCYJ)** is a membership body which:

- Provides a forum for organisations, primarily in the non-statutory sector, working to promote the welfare of children who become engaged in the youth justice system; and
- Advocates a child-focussed youth justice system that promotes the integration of such children into society and thus serves the best interests of the children themselves and the community at large.

Its members are: Action for Children, Association of YOT Managers, Barnardo's, The Children's Society, Children's Rights Alliance for England, Council for Disabled Children, The Howard League for Penal Reform, Just for Kids Law, JUSTICE, Nacro, National Youth Agency (NYA), National Association for Youth Justice (NAYJ), NCB, NSPCC, The Prince's Trust, Prison Reform Trust, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, Secure Accommodation Network, SOVA, TACT and VOICE.

The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views of all member organisations