

Candidate 3 evidence

The government need to do more to reduce overcrowding in prisons in Scotland

Introduction

In 2024 500 prisoners were released early from Scottish prisons due to overcrowding which could cause people to think they can get away with crime. Also Scotland's prison population as of 2024 was around 8300 which is quite high for a small country like Scotland. Also Scotland has around 140 prisoners per 100,000 population. Also Scotland currently has around 17 actively used prisons which on average hold around 445 prisoners. Scotland has invested around £145 million into the crime sector between 2024-25 to try and reduce crime figures. Also it costs around £40,000 per year to hold one prisoner in Scotland showing that overcrowding is also costing the government and taxpayers money. Taken all of this into account shows that Scotland needs to do more to reduce overcrowding in prisons.

Recommendation 1

My first recommendation is to build more prisons in Scotland. This is because the Scottish government has already made plans to construct a new prison in Inverness that will cost around £175 million when completed. Also Hmp Barlinnie is Scotland's largest prison that has a capacity of around 800 but holds around 1400 prisoners 600 over capacity. Also from my survey around three fourths of the people that were asked if more prisons should be built in Scotland said yes. However my survey only took into account 13 people's opinions which is not a reliable sample size. Building more prisons in Scotland will help to reduce overcrowding as more prison space will be available and could also include better rehabilitation programs for prisoners meaning reoffending rates fall. However building more prisons may only be beneficial in the short term as prisons will likely take prisoners from overcrowded prisons meaning that no new free space is actually available.

Recommendation 2 introduce more community based sentencing

My second recommendation is to introduce more community based sentencing. For example Scotland handed out around 14,000 community payback orders between 2022-23. Examples of community based sentencing are community payback orders, fiscal disposal orders and electronic tagging. Also electronic tagging only costs around £2000 per year rather than the £40,000 for a prison sentence. Also a large percent of community payback orders are rarely completed meaning that offenders still end up going to prison. Community based sentencing will help to reduce overcrowding as it keeps offending out of prison causing prison numbers to fall and is also cheaper than prison meaning that the Scottish government can invest more into the police to reduce crime rates further. However it can be argued that community based sentencing can be seen as a light punishment to crime and could cause offenders to reoffend as they feel they can get away with crime.

Recommendation 3 introduce a mandatory prison sentence of 2 years

My third recommendation is to introduce mandatory prison sentences of 2 years in Scotland. For example in Scotland between 2023-24 55% of adults serving under 12 months in prison went on to reoffend showing that short term prison sentences are ineffective. Also short term prison sentences can cause less serious criminals to mix with hardened criminals which could allow them to discuss committing crimes on the outside further raising reoffending rates. Introducing a mandatory prison sentence of 2 years would help to reduce overcrowding as short term prison sentences make up the bulk of prison sentences and would stop low level offenders mixing with hardened criminals potentially reducing reoffending rates.

Evaluation of sources

Source a is the most useful source as it comes from Gov.Scot which makes the source more reliable as they likely have accurate prison statistics as they have experts and insiders giving them the information. Also the source is from the 16th of May 2024 making the source more reliable as the information is up to date making the statistics more accurate. Also source I is the least reliable as it doesn't have a date on it meaning that the information could be outdated. Also source I doesn't have an author on it making the source less reliable as it could be tampered with by multiple sources and could also be written by someone with bias.

Conclusion

In evaluation in the question of should the Scottish government do more to reduce overcrowding in Scottish prisons my recommendation is that they introduce a mandatory prison sentence of 2 years as it would help to stop low level criminals mixing with hardened criminals which could help to reduce overcrowding. Also introducing a mandatory sentence of 2 years could help to reduce high overcrowding as a bulk of the prison population would be released meaning that overcrowding likely be guaranteed to be reduced. Reasons why I didn't choose to build more prisons was because it would likely only fix the issue short term and it also expensive to hold people in prisons so if more prisons are built not as much funds would go towards actually reducing crime. Reasons why I didn't choose to recommend introducing more community based sentencing is because it can be seen as a light punishment from offenders and can cause crime levels to rise as lighter punishments are being handed out also lots of community based punishments aren't fulfilled like community payback hours or paying back fines.

Source A <https://www.gov.scot/news/tackling-unprecedented-prison-population/>
Published 16 may 2024

Source B <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c6pp2r473ejo>
Published 26 june 2024 by megan bonar

Source C survey
Do you think more prisons need to be built in scotland
Yes 76.9% 10 people
No 23.1% 3 people

Source D
<https://www.scotpho.org.uk/population-groups/prisoners/data/prison-populatio>

Source E
<https://news.stv.tv/scotland/scotlands-overcrowded-prisons-a-disaster-as-population-soars-to-highest-since-2020>

Source F
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-08-30/3546>

Source G
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/proven-reoffending-statistics-january-to-march-2022/proven-reoffending-statistics-january-to-march-2022>

Source H
<https://www.sps.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/data-research-and-evidence>

Source I
<https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/united-kingdom-scotland>