

PSAP News Issue 30 2019

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Here are some current issues in criminal justice, Human Rights, prisons and social problems. Follow the links for fuller information.

1 Sentences up to 12months could be scrapped Justice Secretary, David Gauke, and Prisons Minister, Rory Stewart, are considering preventing courts imposing prison sentences of less than 6 months for other than violent or sexual offences. The Justice Secretary has announced he wishes to replace all prison sentences up to 12 months. Scotland is already moving in this direction. It is estimated that almost half of those who entered prison in 2017 served short sentences. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46847162>

2 Norway decriminalises drugs The Storting, Norway's parliament, has instructed its government to decriminalise drug possession and use, the first Scandinavian country to do so. Drug treatment orders under control of courts became available nationally in 2016 while more serious drug offences such as supply will remain subject to fines and imprisonment. The declared aim is to transfer responsibility for drug policy from the justice system to the health system. The UK government has been pressed to do the same by many, including the Unitarians. See

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/18/norway-decriminalised-drugs-uk-chose-legalisation-policy>

3 Recalls to prison surge after Probation reforms The Prison Reform Trust has found that recall to prison of women has increased by 131% in the last year while recall for men has increased by 21%. Frances Crook of the Howard League has said: "This is just one more example of the disastrous reforms imposed by Chris Grayling. We need legislation urgently to sweep away the recalls framework, to bring back safety and justice to prisons and to individuals." Chris Grayling MP when Justice Secretary in 2015 introduced privatisation of most of the Probation service. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prison-probation-reform-has-increased-reform-recalls-women-chris-grayling-jail-overcrowding-stewart-ministry-justice-a8732486.html>

4 More phones in cells of prisoners – David Gauke, the Justice Minister, has announced further funding to install phones in prison cells. The aim is to cut violence in the long queues of prisoners waiting to use telephones. It has been long established that reoffending is reduced by stronger family ties. – See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/dec/28/prisons-with-in-cell-phones-to-rise-to-50-under-10m-expansion>

5 Housing for Asylum-Seekers “damp, dirty and vermin-infested” – A report by inspectors has found almost 75% of the properties provided by the Government's

three contractors to asylum-seekers fail to reach a basic hygiene standard. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46282158> and the 28% of local authorities which provide homes to asylum-seekers feel they are not supported properly by the Government and have “lost confidence”. See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/dec/17/local-authorities-could-stop-housing-asylum-seekers-mps-warn>

6 Abolition of Legal Aid in family cases leads to injustice – Judges and lawyers have complained about the effects of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 which scrapped legal aid in family law cases despite the legal complexities. In 2011, about 50% of applicants and respondents in divorce and cases involving children were represented. In 2017, it had fallen to 20%. An exception when legal aid might be granted is when an applicant alleges domestic violence which encourages such allegations but often leaves the other party unrepresented. See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/legal-aid-parents-child-custody-representation-family-courts-a8757051.html>

7 UK Prisons hold more lifers than Germany, France and Italy combined - The Prison Reform Trust has analysed Council of Europe data for 2016 and found the use of indeterminate prison sentences by the UK exceeds most of Europe. Only Turkey has comparable figures. The UK continues to hold almost 3000 prisoners with “indefinite” sentences prisoners despite the prohibition by the Supreme Court. See <https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/national/17286919.uk-has-highest-life-sentence-prison-population-in-europe/>

8 Closure of the Calais Jungle in 2016 leaves children still in danger – There are about 1300 unaccompanied children in the Jungle around Calais notwithstanding many have relatives in the UK. When French and British government ministers agreed that the Jungle should be destroyed in 2016, the British agreed to admit such children to the UK. Despite the attempts of many to cross the Channel, if a child can overcome the administrative hurdle of applying, the wait can be many years. See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/calais-jungle-child-refugees-home-office-camp-danger-channel-crossing-migrants-france-a8743091.html>

9 Drug-testing labs at Festivals and in town Centres – Durham University chemists have been providing drug-testing to festival-goers at a local music festival for some years. They have found at least 20% of the drugs tested are not what was expected. Durham has joined Bristol in providing drug-testing in its city centre. See <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/revealed-plaster-brown-sugar-being-15528238>

10 New CPS Head undertakes to ensure better disclosure of evidence to defence – After the collapse of several high profile rape prosecutions, the new head of the Crown Prosecution Service, Max Hill QC, wishes to improve the balance between the duty to provide better evidence to defence solicitors and the protection of complainants' private lives. See <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/revealed-plaster-brown-sugar-being-15528238>

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Social responsibility is religion in action