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Prison is not the right answer to every question of penal reform

Written by Alan Robertson on 15 April 2016 in Comment

University of Stirling criminologist Dr Hannah Graham responds to the Conservatives' proposal to send those who breach the terms of their community sentences to prison for 24 or 48 hours



Prison is not the right answer to every question of penal reform. Are these plans for US-style 'flash incarceration' the best way to boost the credibility of community penalties as ethical and effective alternatives to prison in Scotland? I am not convinced.

There's ample evidence to show that people desist and leave crime behind for reasons other than a rapid threat of imprisonment. Core features of American uses of swift and certain approaches are offender supervision, addictions treatment and opportunities for rehabilitation.

In their manifesto, the [Scottish Conservatives' plan](#) ^[1] accentuates retributive 'flash incarceration' and neglects mention of key ingredients to support long-term positive change.

Scottish Conservative justice spokeswoman Margaret Mitchell's comments suggest their 'swift and certain' sanctions plan is not costed, not consulted with the Scottish Prison Service, and not consistent with laws which, for good reasons, prevent weekend release from prison. More careful contextualisation and consultation is needed.

Scotland currently has the option of adding electronic monitoring tagging and curfews if someone breaches a Community Payback Order. Proportionate uses of electronic monitoring and supervision are less costly and tend to have less collateral consequences than short uses of custody.

Dr Hannah Graham is a lecturer in criminology (criminologist) at the University of Stirling. She was responding to 'Scottish Tories: Lock up those who breach community sentences for 24 hours at a time' ^[1]

Tags

[Justice](#) ^[2]