

Why justice matters

Richard Garside introduces the three year strategic initiative from the Centre

The starting point of 'Justice Matters' is simple: the criminal justice system is far too big; far too costly; far too intrusive. Far from being a means of delivering social justice, it is the cause of much social injustice. The large footprint in society occupied by the combined criminal justice institutions is profoundly socially harmful.

The criminal justice process inflicts unnecessary suffering on many thousands of suspects, defendants and convictees every year. This suffering is experienced very differently depending on your position in society: for instance whether you are young or old, black or white, male or female, rich or poor.

The collateral damage of the criminal justice process is also profound. A criminal record is a life sentence for many: an ongoing obstacle to participation in work and the wider community. Families and communities whose loved ones are arrested, prosecuted, imprisoned and supervised experience deep and lasting loss. Collateral damage is also found in the stress experienced by many victims of crime, whose traumas and distress are often left unresolved, and in the dissatisfaction of witnesses, whose experience of the criminal justice process can be so negative.

The criminal justice system also crowds out other, more innovative, just and effective policy and practice solutions to the problems our society faces. It is good at

punishing certain individuals and groups. It fails to prevent social problems from arising, or to resolve those that occur.

The Justice Matters initiative does not deny the importance of attempts to reform the criminal justice system. We also recognise that respect for human rights and the rule of law are fundamental features of a healthy society that is responsive to human dignity and needs. The initiative is in favour of a much smaller criminal justice system and the development of an alternative set of justice policies and practices that are a proportionate response to the harms that people experience.

Our aim for Justice Matters is to create the broadest possible collaboration of individuals and organisations committed to downsizing fundamentally the criminal justice system in the United Kingdom.

This is not about enhancing the capacity of criminal justice agencies to address the needs of those convicted of offences. Nor is it about further reforming what already exists. It is about rethinking the entire configuration of policy and practice (for instance in housing, education, health, social security and employment) so that many current criminal justice responses are not required *at all*.

Justice Matters has a threefold focus: *downsize, build, transform*.

For more information on Justice Matters, and to sign up to the project updates, check out: www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/justice-matters ■

Downsize	Build	Transform
<p>We are developing ideas to downsize fundamentally the criminal justice systems in the United Kingdom.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>We are interested in exploring an across the board reduction in the social footprint occupied by the criminal justice system.</p> <p>This means fewer arrests; fewer prosecutions; fewer prisoners; fewer probationers.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>It also means fewer criminal justice workers, whether police officers, judges and magistrates, prison and probation officers or others.</p>	<p>We are exploring options to build policy and practice alternatives to criminal justice.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>This is not about enhancing the capacity of criminal justice agencies to address the needs of those convicted of offences.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>It is about rethinking the configuration of policy and practice – for instance in housing, education, health, social security and employment – so that many current criminal justice responses are not required at all.</p>	<p>We are developing an evidenced agenda to transform policy and reduce reliance on criminal justice.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>This means a sustained change in the way that problems currently managed by criminal justice are dealt with.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The long-term goal is a much smaller criminal justice system that treats all subject to it with dignity and respect and a comprehensive set of services and interventions that respond to human need and promote well-being.</p>

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