I am responding on behalf of my party and myself as the Plaid Cymru regional AM for South Wales West. I felt it my duty to respond to this consultation given that the Ministry of Justice has, in March of 2017, announced proposals for a new 1600 capacity ‘titan’ style or ‘super’ prison, in my region in Baglan near Port Talbot. I also respond in my capacity as Shadow Communities Secretary for Plaid Cymru. We believe that the question of the effective organisation of prisons and the appropriate and fair treatment of prisoners is often over-looked, despite the important implications such questions and decisions can have for wider society.

I’ll be focusing my contribution to this inquiry around the following themes.

- The requirement for another prison in Wales.
- Cross border prisoners
- Provision in Wales for female offenders.
- Welsh Language provision

**The requirement for another prison in Wales**

Plaid Cymru contests the position of the Ministry of Justice that there is need for another prison in Wales. As noted in figures released last year, Wales will have an over-capacity of prison places once Wrexham’s HMP Berwyn (Europe’s largest prison) is operational. On 22nd March 2017, figures released by Cardiff University’s Wales Governance Centre showed that Wales, if the proposal for a new prison in Port Talbot was to go ahead, would have a surplus of 2387 places in its prison estate, compared to the total number of Welsh prisoners across England and Wales. They further found that if HMP Cardiff was to close, as has been suggested could happen by some such as Cardiff City Council, Wales would still have a surplus of around 1600 prison places. ¹ ²

Once HMP Berwyn is fully operational, there will be 5,731 places in Wales compared to 4,787 Welsh prisoners (March 2017). Given those figures, it is clear that there is no ‘necessity’ for another 1600 capacity prison in south Wales.

To garner a fuller picture of the necessity of another, large prison, I wrote to the then Prisons Minister, Sam Gyimah MP, at several points through 2017, seeking clarity over whether HMP Cardiff and/or HMP Swansea would close as part of wider secure estate reorganisation plans in south Wales. However, I was told that no decisions had been made. In a letter to the Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns MP, dated 5th December 2017, Minister Sam Gyimah MP stated that there “were not enough Category C prison places in South Wales” but did not provide any further detail. Furthermore, in relation to HMP’s Cardiff and Swansea, he stated that the two prisons were “reception” prisons, whereas the proposed new prison at Port Talbot would be for “resettlement” and that he anticipated “little functional overlap” between the sites. **This correspondence can be produced on request.**

These positions strike us as unclear, at best, and do not provide a solid enough rationale for a prison of the size and scope of the one proposed for Port Talbot, which would clearly add to the capacity of the Welsh prison estate, rather than replace existing sites. There has been a consistent lack of detail from the UK Government, as to why south Wales should be chosen for a new prison.

Plaid Cymru is concerned that the proposal for a new prison in Port Talbot, on land owned by the Welsh Government, is in part, a compensation for a failure to deliver significant economic progress in the region and the cancellation of major proposed projects such as the Swansea Tidal Lagoon and electrification of the South Wales Mainline to Swansea. There is anxiety in the local area and surrounding region on this question. We do not believe that a prison is a valid or plausible form of economic investment.

**Cross border prisoners**

The Welsh Governance Centre (see above) has demonstrated that with the building of a new prison in south Wales, the number of prison places in Wales compared to the number of Welsh prisoners across England Wales would rise to produce a surplus of 2387.

Plaid Cymru believes that those incarcerated have a better chance at long term rehabilitation and lower recidivism, when placed nearer to family support networks. The UK Government published a review in August of 2017 from Lord Farmer³ which confirmed this view. The review described family relationships as “the golden thread” to rehabilitation and noted that offenders who received visits from family members were almost 40% less likely to re-offend.

However, figures from March 2017 showed that there were almost two thousand prisoners giving a Welsh address, serving their sentences in England. (See BBC link above).

Furthermore, despite the recommendations of the Farmer review, the number of prisoners giving an English address being held in a Welsh prisons rose 76% between March 2017 and December. ⁴ ⁵

We believe that if the UK Government is to fully take on board the recommendations of the Farmer Review, then it should focus on the transfer of prisoners between England and Wales, as far as is practical. We would further note that the proposals for a new prison in south Wales will not improve offenders access to family, as it seems that given the current capacity in the Welsh estate, most inmates at any new prison in south Wales would come from England, unless the MoJ committed to wide scale transfer of prisoners between England and Wales.

Plaid Cymru wishes to highlight that with the increasing amount of separate Welsh legislation and a clearer separation developing between Welsh and English jurisdiction in many areas, that a separate Welsh legal and criminal system will become inevitable and, in our view, preferable. This would make it even more important to have Welsh prisoners and English prisoners remaining, as far as is possible, within their respective countries.

**Female and young offenders**

Plaid Cymru believes that the effect of incarceration on Women is particularly damaging for families and society. There is clear evidence which demonstrates that the negative impact of incarceration

---


on women is hugely significant, particularly in relation to families and any children female offenders may have. We therefore believe that women should only be incarcerated in where absolutely necessary and that prison should be reserved for crimes which are of a violent and repeat nature and that a careful examination of any mitigating circumstances should be undertaken by the CPS and judges, before a custodial sentence is sought or given. This is already the case to an extent, however, we would re-iterate that more needs to be done to take seriously the severe societal, family and personal consequences of placing women into prison.

That being said, we would support a dedicated, small, prison or secure centres for female prisoners in Wales, to ensure access to family support networks as we accept that there will be occasions where a custodial sentence is appropriate and justified.

The barriers placed on the future success of young people due to incarceration are enormous. We know from extensive evidence in the United States that imprisoning young offenders, in most cases, only ensures future re-offending and often turns young people, particularly young men, into more hardened criminals. We believe that only in the most extreme circumstances should young people face a custodial sentence and that evidence shows that community based sentencing and rehabilitation are far more effective both for the individual and society as a whole.

**Welsh language provision.**

According to the MoJ, translation services are ‘available’ at all prisons in England and Wales. However, Plaid Cymru has consistently seen that the supply of translation services is not prioritised or adequate. For example, in response to a Written Question in July 2016, it was revealed that there would be no requirement for any Welsh speaking staff at HMP Berwyn and no data on the number of bilingual staff held by the UK Government.6

Prisoners who’s first or preferred language is Welsh, should not be placed into a situation where there is little to no chance of day to day communication in their own language. There is far less chance of this being the case if Welsh speaking prisoners are sent to a prison in Wales. If someone is given a custodial sentence of several years, or perhaps even longer, it’s conceivable that that person would have no opportunity to speak Welsh for considerable periods of time.

I’d like to thank the Chair and the Welsh Affairs Select Committee for conducting this inquiry.

*February 2018*

---