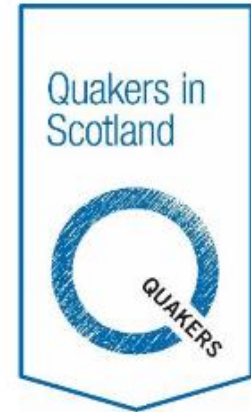


## Quakers in Scotland Community Justice Working Group – Manifesto Priorities 2026 on crime / community justice issues



Scotland stands at a critical juncture in criminal justice policy. Our current approach is characterised by massive prison investments and punitive frameworks. This approach is both fiscally irresponsible and socially counterproductive, undermining public safety and individual potential. There are proven alternatives that would reduce both the costs of the current prison estate, and reduce recidivism, breaking the cycle of re-offending with all the damage that it causes to society and to individuals.

The costs involved are massive:

- HMP Glasgow will house 1,800 prisoners at a cost of nearly £1 billion to construct
- HMP Highland will house 200 prisoners at a cost of £282 million to construct
- Each person in prison costs on average £47,000 per year
- The wage bill for prison staff is nearly £500 million per year

The construction costs of the new prisons continue to escalate since first announced. Both are already years behind schedule, and timescales may slip further. What is particularly concerning here are the projects and services in the community that will be cut or lost to fund these new prisons. In exchange, we find minimal rehabilitation, high recidivism, and continued social marginalisation. **Parliamentarians and the public must be reminded of the severe social cost to an excessively punitive approach, focusing on over-investment in prisons.**

What needs to happen? As Quakers, we aim for rehabilitative policies on criminal and community justice, and for penal reform. Sadly, progressive policies have been waning in political significance over the past forty years. Society remains punitive, but could with effort and time become more inclusive and rehabilitative. England and Wales, and Scotland, separately or together, remain embarrassingly at the top of the European imprisonment league tables. **Restorative justice has diminished in popularity in recent years, but remains a key way of helping those who were victims of crime, as well as those who caused the harm.**

Due to the size of the prison estate and resource cuts, rehabilitative aspirations seem elusive. To be effective at rehabilitation, prisons should have a 'constructive regime', focusing on rehabilitation, education, and skills development to prepare inmates for release and reduce recidivism, aiming for a more positive and productive prison environment. Constructive regimes cost money, which starts with a well-trained and supported workforce. The current total annual bill of nearly half a billion pounds per year currently buys chaotic conditions and low staff morale. Even in newly built prisons, whatever their rehabilitative aspirations, further resource cuts will make constructive prison regimes difficult to sustain and hamper the recruitment of new officers. Inadequate mental health provision leads vulnerable prisoners to take their own lives. **We hope your party will continue to insist upon constructive regimes and better mental health services; and at the same time point out that the larger the prison estate grows, the harder it becomes to staff and resource well.**

There are people who commit heinous crimes and who pose a danger to society, for whom prison is very necessary. Scotland's Barlinnie Special Unit showed that small therapeutic communities are preferable to solitary confinement when dealing with such violent and disruptive prisoners. **The time is ripe to look again at such arrangements, given that use of solitary confinement is on the increase. At the same time, it must be said that the public do not need the level of public protection accorded the "dangerous few". The overuse of imprisonment attaches an unnecessary stigma to imprisoned people and their families, particularly their children.**

By comparison to the cost of prison services, Scotland spends a tiny £148 million a year to provide community alternatives to prison, which are vital in reducing the need for such a large prison estate. International evaluative evidence shows persistently lower reconviction rates for well-resourced community supervision programmes (29%) than for short custodial sentences (52%), with comparable offenders. **We hope your party will support and champion Scottish criminal justice social work as the base from which new community provision is built. As importantly, Scotland's independent judiciary should be encouraged to be more supportive of non-custodial measures. They remain key to reducing the prison population.**

The community is where the struggle to reduce crime and to reduce reoffending must begin. Research in 2005 (intermittently updated), using the home addresses of all the people in Scottish prisons on one day, showed that they came predominantly from the poorest postcodes in the country<sup>i</sup>; after imprisonment they return to those same deprived communities with no change effected. Children in these communities need support from the start of life: so many suffer trauma and multiple ACES. Together agencies and their workers need to continue to explore experimental ways of reducing drug fuelled crimes and deaths – such as the recently introduced Safer Drug Consumption Facilities. **Periodically in Scotland the concept of "Justice Reinvestment" arises. Former Scottish prison governor Andrew Coyle is one of its main international champions. We recommend that your party gives renewed attention to this.**

Initiatives such as the Violence Reduction Unit took an enlightened, imaginative public health approach which has not yet been developed nationally by Community Justice Scotland. While we do not want to minimise interdisciplinary successes so far, there is clearly more to be done, especially in respect of violence against women and girls. **Might your party be supportive of participatory Citizens Assemblies on the inter-related questions of both violent crime and the use of imprisonment, to begin countering media-driven debates about the need for more punishment, and to better inform penal policymaking?**

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<sup>i</sup> Social Exclusion and Imprisonment in Scotland – A Report by Roger Houchin, Glasgow Caledonian University 2005