

# Coalition Government Prison Policy Announcements

Date

30<sup>th</sup> June 2010

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## Introduction:

As of May 2010, the prison population stood at 85,201 and continues to rise rapidly. Justice has long been an area of inter-party wrangling with accusations of being 'soft on crime' easily thrown.

Ken Clarke has today made his first major speech as Justice Secretary, outlining plans for reducing prison places and an increasing emphasis on prisoner rehabilitation.

This paper analyses Clarke's policy announcements and their impact on service providers within the criminal justice system.

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## Government Proposals:

The speech laid out plans to tackle the exponential growth of the prison population and change the 'revolving door' culture of the justice system, whereby prisoners are simply warehoused for periods of time and then go on to reoffend. This was acknowledged as a particular problem for those serving short sentences, for which there is a 60% reoffending rate, according to the National Audit Office.

This approach is considered necessary by the government in the wake of public spending cuts.

Clarke was quick to establish that the dual purposes of punishment and rehabilitation would remain central to offender management, with a "rehabilitation revolution" designed to reduce recidivism and min/max sentencing bringing clarity to time spent in incarceration.

A review of sentencing will soon be launched, and is expected to result in a reduction in the number of custodial sentences, with community based punishment playing a greater role for criminals who would usually be sentenced to less than 12 months in jail.

The government intend to deliver reforms to rehabilitation through greater use of the private and voluntary sectors, which will be paid on the basis of results, as a means of producing cost savings and better outcomes across the justice sector.

## Analysis:

This opening of the market will create opportunity for private providers, however, payment-by-results will increase competition and enforce a sector-wide raise in standards, with increased pressure to deliver better outcomes within tighter budgets.

Government thinking on the detail of payment-by-results contracts remains vague, with little certainty over how results can be defined, or indeed, when payment should be made. It will be

essential for providers to participate in policy conversations that will determine expectations for delivery.

A potential diversion of criminals from prison represents a departure from the “Prisons with a Purpose” agenda that dominated the Conservative’s pre-election thinking, which clearly stated the need for expanding prison places in line with extending rehabilitation programmes so as to ensure the capacity within the prison system to offer effective rehabilitation. Prison providers may face a challenging task of delivering better outcomes for prisoners with little or no increase in capacity or resource.

Despite this, the new approach does leave greater room for private sector innovation in out of prison security and community based rehabilitation programmes and there is an increasing role for the private sector in criminal justice service delivery under the new government.

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**Contact:**

For more information, please contact Gemma Parry, Senior Account Executive on: 020 7227 1640 or at: [gemma@westminsteradvisers.co.uk](mailto:gemma@westminsteradvisers.co.uk).