

Dealing with crime

I reproduce below the Lord Chancellor's letter to MPs setting out his new proposals, as I think they are good.

I am writing to inform you that the Government has laid before Parliament a White Paper entitled '*A Smarter Approach to Sentencing*'.

This paper sets out the Government's proposals to deliver on manifesto commitments to **crack down on crime and protect the public by ensuring dangerous criminals are kept in prison for longer.**

Our current sentencing and release framework is failing to give victims and the wider public the confidence they should have in our criminal justice system. Too often the time offenders spend in prison does not match the severity of the crime, with some of the most serious criminals being released after serving only half their sentence.

At the heart of this paper are reforms to the sentencing and release framework in England and Wales, which will see certain sexual and violent offenders serve longer jail time, while new measures aim to tackle the underlying causes of criminal behaviour and improve the rehabilitation and supervision of offenders in the community.

Keeping dangerous criminals in prison for longer

Our white paper sets out plans to **make whole life orders the starting point for child killers**, as well as allowing judges the discretion to hand out this maximum punishment to 18-20-year olds in exceptional cases (where, currently, only those aged 21 and over may receive a whole life order). We are **ending the halfway release of offenders** sentenced to between four and seven years in prison for serious crimes such as rape, manslaughter and GBH with intent. Instead they will have to spend two-thirds of their time behind bars, like those serving determinate sentences of more than seven years already do following the legislation we brought in earlier this year. We will also introduce a new power to **prevent automatic release for offenders who pose a terrorist threat or are a danger to the public** and are serving standard determinate sentences. We will also legislate to increase the time discretionary life sentence prisoners and certain sex offenders must serve in prison before they can be considered for release by the Parole Board.

Tougher community sentences which tackle the underlying causes of crime

The white paper includes plans to make community sentences stricter, better monitored and more targeted at cutting reoffending by tackling issues associated with criminality. **More vulnerable offenders who do not pose a risk to public safety will be diverted into treatment programmes to recover from these serious issues, such as mental health, alcohol or drug addiction programmes.** This will help them lead crime free lives, ultimately helping drive down reoffending rates alongside strengthened supervision to ensure

compliance.

Community sentences will be made tougher by **doubling the amount of time offenders can be subject to curfew restrictions** to two years for more serious criminals. Courts and **probation staff will be given more flexibility to use those curfews to support rehabilitation**. For example, by having lesser restrictions Monday to Friday to keep offenders in work, but stricter curfews of up to 20 hours a day on weekends. The robust measures aim to provide strong but rehabilitative punishment in the community.

GPS tagging for burglars

Meanwhile, for the first time, **GPS electronic location monitoring will be used to track burglars**, robbers and thieves when they are released from prison. Reoffending rates among these offenders is amongst the highest across all offence types, with individuals convicted of theft who reoffend doing so on average five times over their lifetime. The technology will allow probation to monitor an offender's whereabouts and where appropriate share this data with the police to support them investigating and prosecuting these crimes.

The move builds on Government's plans to **make greater use of electronic tags to cut crime**, following the rollout of GPS monitoring over the last twelve months and plans to begin using so-called 'sobriety tags' to tackle alcohol-related offending.

Reducing Re-offending

There is more that we, across Government, need to do to address reoffending. Reoffending weakens public confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to deal with offenders. It also has a significant financial cost, not only to the criminal justice system, but to wider society. **This paper introduces cross-government work underway to develop ambitious plans to reduce reoffending, focusing on employment, accommodation, and substance misuse**. An important first step is supporting ex-offenders striving to turn their lives around through work by **reducing the time in which they are required to disclose certain convictions for non-sensitive roles**.

Alongside this, work is underway to boost education in prisons. Ministers will deliver on the manifesto commitment to **develop a Prisoner Education Service, focused on work-based training and skills**. It will build on recent reforms that have already enabled Governors to commission education services that meets the needs of their prison populations and local economies. The ability to improve prisoners' functional, vocational and life-skills is key to support wider rehabilitation and reduce reoffending on release.

Next steps

The Government will bring forward legislation next year to deliver on the proposals set out in this paper.

You can view the White Paper at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-smarter-approach-to-sentencing>.