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scottish justice matters



HEALTH AND (IN)JUSTICE

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Featuring: Health Inequalities • Older Prisoners
Mental Health • Drug Misuse • Neuroscience

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Take Five

Scottish Justice Matters asks our politicians to respond to questions about crime and justice. We asked:

Children born into the areas of Scotland with the worst health, housing, employment and other inequalities are also likely to experience higher rates of crime and victimisation, particularly associated with alcohol and drug abuse. What would your top priorities be in tackling this inequality?

**Kenny MacAskill MSP,
Scottish National Party**



ENSURING every Scottish child has the chance to live a life of potential - not of crime - is fundamental to our criminal justice system.

Our 'whole systems approach' creates a tailored, speedy response to young people who offend, freeing up resources to focus on more challenging individuals. Since

2010/2011 more than £5million has been spent on enabling local authorities, police and the third sector to deliver this. Recorded crime stands at a 39 year low while detected crime by children and young people has decreased by 52 per cent between 2008-2009 and 2012-2013. Since 2006/2007 offence referrals to the children's reporter have also fallen by 78%.

Central to this achievement is providing young people with appealing alternatives. Since 2007, Cashback for Communities has provided 1.25 million activities and opportunities for children and young people. These were all funded from proceeds confiscated from the very criminals who seek to perpetuate the cycle of crime and misery in communities.

Education is also crucial to ensuring children make the right choice. The 'No Knives Better Lives' initiative has seen a 60% reduction in the carrying of offensive weapons since 2007.

We recognise that drugs and alcohol are all too often catalysts for criminal behaviour. The Scottish Government funded 'Choices for Life' initiative and Know The Score website provide drugs and alcohol education for schoolchildren, including about potentially dangerous new 'legal highs.' This is contributing to declining drug use among young people.

The Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill, recently introduced, contains provisions to give police powers to disrupt illegal drinking dens where adults supply alcohol to young people.

All these measures are keeping young people out of the criminal justice system and giving them better choices and chances, no matter where they come from.

**Alison McInnes MSP,
Liberal Democrats**



WE KNOW that many of the causes of offending can be traced back to events that occur early in life, even pre-birth. Often offenders were once to some degree a victim, if not of crime then of difficult circumstances.

Growing up in an unstable environment, for example amid poverty, abuse, parental criminality and addiction, substantially increases a child's vulnerability to a similarly calamitous end.

Inter-generational health and social inequalities are intrinsically linked to poor educational attainment and criminality. Aged seven, children in poverty are already two years behind their peers and may never catch up.

Scottish Liberal Democrats are therefore committed to giving children the best start in life in order to create the fairer society we all want to see.

That is why our top priority during the 2014-2015 budget negotiations was early years education.

Following our campaign, the Scottish Government agreed to extend free childcare provision. 8,400 extra two-year-olds from the poorest backgrounds will now toddle through the doors of nurseries across Scotland in September, increasing to 15,000 (27% of two-year-olds) next year.

Removing impediments to learning through extending free childcare is one of the most effective ways to address the disadvantages some of our most vulnerable children and young people face. Hence we propose to target the 40% of two-year-olds from the poorest backgrounds.

Scotland's former Chief Medical Officer, Sir Harry Burns, has highlighted how developing parents' life skills and educating them on how best to support their families is equally important.

And for those who grow up in care, we need action to address the national shame that a quarter of those in prison come from this background, despite their comprising only 2% of the population.

We need an early intervention revolution. Lasting solutions require a spend-to-save approach, targeted where inequalities start.

**Graeme Pearson MSP,
Scottish Labour**



THIS CHALLENGE

demands a set of responses to be effective. Early intervention to deliver education; breakfast clubs in primary and secondary schools; vocation

skills training is essential, leading to the opportunity for employment. Employment for the parents too will have a significant impact on the quality of life and a positive approach to living. Add to this a creative policing plan focused on issues affecting communities such as low level antisocial behaviour, alcohol and drug abuse and bullying, would go a long way to enhancing the personal security of young people particularly.

In that context a substance abuse strategy needs to go beyond reducing risk and supporting harm reduction. The strategy must be aimed at encouraging abstinence by humane policies seeking to address the underlying problems faced by those who abuse alcohol primarily and also drugs. Prisoners should be offered encouragement to access substance abuse courses, whilst the prison authorities should record prisoner success in dealing with their addictions. Reductions in the patients on long term medication such as methadone should be a target.

In addition, I would like to see a prisoner's previous commitment to positive outcomes become a part of the reports received at court on any subsequent hearing and an absence of such a commitment taken account of at sentencing. Such a process would set a healthy respect for opportunities that are offered.

There will be some who are so embroiled in substance abuse all attempts to deliver abstinence may fail. We would need to accept such outcomes. The problem with the current approaches lies in the sheer cost to the public of maintaining people in their addictions without any apparent improvement at a time when there is insufficient funding for all services. We cannot and should not tolerate such an approach in future given current evidence to show that drugs deaths remain high and Scotland's experience of alcohol and drug abuse is deplorable in spite of this Government's strategies.

**Margaret Mitchell MSP,
Scottish Conservatives**



THIS IS a complex issue with no easy "one size fits all" solution but rather, as with most inequality issues, it requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

Decision makers responsible for the provision of housing, health, education, policing and social work need to cooperate and engage in "problem solving" type discussions. Adopting this kind of holistic approach has a track record of success.

Despite this, and regardless of the potential preventative spend, the effort required and the upfront expense involved means this approach is not adopted often enough. This represents a wasted opportunity to improve young lives.

Community and school campus police have achieved some remarkable success in building positive relationships with children at risk of offending and can provide a father figure type presence, once trust has been established, where these children can seek guidance and advice.

Sadly under Police Scotland these posts are increasingly under threat with the emphasis moving away from community engagement to achieving targets.

More health visitor provision helps identify problems early to give children the best possible start in life, and educating children generally about the dangers and often horrific consequences of drug and alcohol abuse through the experiences of ex-addicts, is known to be effective.

Finally parental support is a key factor in helping children from whatever background they come from, to realise their potential, to grow into responsible adults and to try to avoid life's pitfalls. Much more assistance should be available to parents struggling to do the hugely important parental role to the best of their ability. When things do get out of hand, a positive intervention in the form of parenting orders, which require parents to attend counselling or parenting classes, should be used.

**Patrick Harvie MSP,
Scottish Green Party**



FOR THREE DECADES after the Second World War the gap between rich and poor was narrowed as a result of deliberate

economic policies. Then came neoliberal economics, a wave of privatisation, deregulation, massive cuts to corporate taxes, and an ever bigger share of national wealth was hoarded by the rich minority. The politicians leading this change made empty promises that wealth would "trickle down" and everyone would benefit. It was never true.

Even now, after the catastrophic failure of this economic system, most politicians are trying to get back to business as usual instead of seeking a better way. Many cannot see beyond the ideology that free markets know best, the welfare state is bad for people, and inequality is just a law of nature. When obscenely high salaries keep on rising, the pathetic defence is that employers need to attract "the best people". Since when did best mean greediest?

The evidence is clearer than ever from around the world that simply growing an economy, generating higher GDP, does not achieve a better society. The wealthiest are able to grab the lion's share of the economic proceeds of growth, while ensuring that the social and environmental costs of generating it fall on others. Inequality makes us less healthy, less safe, less sustainable and less happy.

There are a host of specific policies which can close the inequality gap, from maximum wage ratios to public and community ownership of assets. We need truly progressive tax on income and wealth, and a welfare state designed to meet people's needs instead of bullying them into low paid jobs.

But underpinning all of this is the need to measure what matters, knocking GDP growth off its pedestal and making human wellbeing our top economic priority.