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Corporate Plan Output: Information and advice for Council	

The purpose of this report is to advise Councillors of “Getting Children Out of Adult Prisons”, a Discussion Document on the Future Management of Serious Young Offenders in Custody (henceforth referred to as the discussion document).

This report seeks endorsement for a submission based on the issues identified below.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Corrections has produced a discussion document “Getting Kids Out of Adult Prisons” which examines the future custodial management of serious young offenders.

This report is a preliminary exploration of the appropriateness of proposals in the discussion document. Finally, this report suggests a process for developing a comprehensive submission. It is suggested that further work should be completed prior to the preparation of a final submission.

“Getting Kids Out of Adult Prisons” Summary

The discussion document attempts to identify the most appropriate arrangements for the secure custody of serious young offenders. It focuses on serious young offenders; less than 20 years of age, remanded in custody or sentenced to imprisonment or Corrective Training.

- The discussion document recommends six specialist regional youth units and one specialist youth prison in Auckland. It is proposed that a youth unit will be built in Canterbury by 2001.
- It suggests that a structured programme focusing on addressing re-offending is pivotal to the success of the units.
- It also argues that inclusion of families in the programme components would increase family cohesiveness.

KEY POINTS

Overall the discussion document is very comprehensive. There are some issues about which the Council may wish to make more detailed comment. These are summarised below, and discussed in more detail in the attached paper.

Context and prevention

The discussion document provides short-term solutions in response to the immediate needs. It does not acknowledge that there is a need for long-term solutions which address the underlying problems that cause youth offending.

Providing new forms of imprisonment and sentencing without addressing the structural problems that generate youth crime is unlikely to solve the problems of community safety. Preventive strategies including community regeneration, and education, employment and recreational programmes need to operate and be financially supported in tandem with the criminal justice system.

Suicides

The discussion document identifies that suicide and self-harm is of particular concern. There appears to be an assumption within the discussion document that Youth Units will be able to remove some of the stress factors. The document does not identify particular strategies for dealing with suicide prevention.

Private Management of Prisons

International evidence suggests privatisation of prisons has a negative impact on prisoners (Russell 1997, Lotke 1998, Miller 1997, DiUlio 1988).

Age Banding/ Assessing Vulnerability

There is some validity in age banding, however, there is a need to take into account other components of the offender, including physical capabilities and intellectual functioning. Chronological age may not always be a good determinant.

Rehabilitation Programmes

Prison and Corrective Training have a poor record: neither has been seen to lower recidivism. Some studies have found recidivism among young offenders actually increases with each insitutionalisation (Miller 1989). Prisons appear to be criminogenic.

Quality and intense treatment options for young people in custody need to be developed and implemented. It appears that if treatment options are too narrow the likelihood of success is diminished (Miller 1989, Fagan and Hartsonte 1987).

Implemented as a package

To achieve the desired results all the components recommended in the discussion document will need to be implemented, including regionally-based youth units and rehabilitation programmes.

COUNCIL SUBMISSION

I suggest that other key agencies should be consulted to assist in the refinement of the submission. By consulting other parties the Council will have a better perspective of community and expert opinion about the proposals contained in the discussion document. Some groups have indicated they may wish to endorse the Council paper rather than prepare a separate submission.

It is suggested that the Committee consider approving in principle the content of the submission as set out in the attachment, with the final submission to be approved by the Committee chair to meet the due date of 4 December 1998.

Recommendation: That the draft submission be approved in principle, with any amendments made in consultation with the Chairperson of the Community Services Committee, and be forwarded to the Department of Corrections by 4 December 1998, subject to ratification at the monthly Council meeting of 10 December 1998.

(A copy of the final submission is attached.)