



**Make Justice Work**

Third Floor

26a Ganton Street

London

W1F 7QZ

Phone: **020 3538 8365**

[www.makejusticework.org.uk](http://www.makejusticework.org.uk)

[info@makejusticework.org.uk](mailto:info@makejusticework.org.uk)

25<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Lord Justice Leveson  
The Leveson Inquiry  
Royal Courts of Justice  
Strand  
London  
WC 2A 2LL

Dear Lord Justice Leveson,

### **Submission to the Leveson Inquiry: Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press**

Make Justice Work is a campaign to boost public support for a change in how Britain deals with minor offenders – a switch from expensive and futile short prison terms to intensive and effective sanctions, delivered in the community. It aims to raise public awareness of the pointlessness and expense of locking up low-level offenders, only for them to offend again and again. Crucially, the campaign identifies the community alternatives to custody that are most effective both at reducing re-offending and cutting costs.

We have recently seen the submission by The Howard League to the Leveson Inquiry about the negative impact of the tabloid press upon sentencing policy. The letter was a rational and measured reflection of the situation and we would wish to endorse it wholeheartedly.

However, we feel compelled to highlight the situation in relation to the reporting of community sentencing. Community sentences, and in particular the rigorous and demanding Alternatives to Custody (AIC's), have been shown not only to be more effective in reducing re-offending by changing attitudes and behaviour, but are also far cheaper and therefore cost effective too. This is backed by a plethora of research which can be accessed at <http://www.makejusticework.org.uk/useful-information/publications/>. Furthermore the research indicates that many offenders find the rigours of community sentences onerous and demanding, so much so that they would prefer a short period of imprisonment.

Despite this, the tabloid press continually represents community alternatives proven to be effective as a 'soft option', and that the offender has 'got away' with the crime. This leads to the pressures upon politicians and the judiciary that is outlined so well in the Howard League submission. The result is that whilst politicians are fully aware of the evidence that supports the greater use of community alternatives, they are under pressure from large sectors of the press to develop policies that focus upon imprisonment, which are both less effective and more costly.



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Whilst in no way would we wish to inhibit press freedom, we consider that the ability of the press to influence should come with responsibility and be governed by an ethical code.

For a few individual press proprietors to have so much influence over government policy, as in the formulation of criminal justice policy and subsequent practice, is wholly undemocratic. This is unhealthy and is not in the best interest of the country, either politically or fiscally. In Scandinavian countries, where the press profile is different and where the tabloid press has not developed in the manner it has in the UK, the Governments are able to develop criminal justice policies which are rational and evidence-based upon 'what works', rather than them being formulated under the malign influence of a media seeking headlines to make a profit and to further the influence they have upon politicians.

Make Justice Work urges the Leveson Inquiry to be bold and seize the opportunity to affect a sea change in the culture and ethics of the British media and bring back an ethos of responsibility, and to lessen the influence that the press has upon politicians and policy making.

Make Justice Work would be happy to supply further evidence to support this.

Yours Sincerely

Roma Hooper  
Director  
Make Justice Work