

STATES OF JERSEY



FREEDOM FOR LIFE MINISTRIES: GRANT FROM CRIMINAL OFFENCES CONFISCATION FUND (P.123/2014) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 19th September 2014
by the Minister for Home Affairs**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

Introduction

Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier has lodged P.123/2014 to request a grant of £200,000 from the Criminal Offences Confiscation Fund (C.O.C.F.) for the Freedom for Life Ministries (F.F.L.M.) to cover one-off costs to refurbish their drop-in facility. His proposition covers the work of the F.F.L.M., both inside and outside the prison, and the economic argument in favour of grant assistance. There is no need, therefore, to repeat them in these comments.

The proposition has my broad support, but I would like to assist the Assembly by supplementing the detailed information that the Deputy provides, with further comment on the value of resettlement arrangements; the position in Jersey; and a perspective on the use of the C.O.C.F. as a funding stream.

Resettlement – Evidence from the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's experience and available evidence suggests that resettlement is an important part of a holistic package to help reduce offending and re-offending –

- Not having a suitable place to live after release from custody is a significant risk factor in re-offending. Surveys indicate that 30% of people released from prison will have nowhere to live. This is despite the fact that stable accommodation can reduce re-offending by over 20%.
- The Revolving Doors Agency found that 49% of prisoners with mental health problems had no fixed address on leaving prison. Of those who had a secure tenancy before going to prison, 40% lost it on release.
- A lack of accommodation can also severely hinder former prisoners' chances of finding employment. Unemployment is another significant risk factor in re-offending. Almost one quarter of employers would not consider employing a homeless person.
- Getting ex-prisoners into stable housing can act as a gateway to effective resettlement. Home Office research has found that prisoners who have accommodation arranged on release are 4 times more likely to have employment, education or training arranged than those who do not have accommodation in place.
- A survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development showed that people with a criminal record are part of the 'core jobless group' that more than 60% of employers deliberately exclude when recruiting.

The position in Jersey

At the moment, Jersey does not have the equivalent of an Offender Rehabilitation Bill and, whilst the resettlement team at H.M.P. La Moye help individuals with resettlement plans whilst they are in prison, their influence stops once the person has been discharged. The Probation and After-Care Service provides a voluntary aftercare service which was accessed by 72% of released prisoners in the first half of 2014, and

is accessible to all released prisoners. The statutory agencies work very closely with voluntary agencies, including the prison chaplains' team and the F.F.L.M., to help prisoners with resettlement. A resettlement strategy is being developed by H.M.P. La Moye, and they are working with the Probation and After-Care Service, the chaplains and F.F.L.M. towards its development.

The recent H.M. Chief Inspector of Prisons' report on La Moye Prison, Jersey (11–15 February 2013) stated –

“The Freedom for Life Ministries worked with around 25 prisoners at any time prior to their release and more after release. It was disappointing, however, that the service was not funded by either the prison or the councils of Jersey and was dependent on donations; as a result, the support could not necessarily be relied on in the long term.”

Given that resettlement of prisoners is an important aspect of a holistic criminal justice system, and that it is a key aspect in both the Criminal Justice Policy and the 'Building a Safer Society' Strategy by helping to reduce re-offending, funding via the C.O.C.F. through this proposition provides an ideal opportunity to work with the F.F.L.M. in a closer partnership.

Financial Comments

F.F.L.M. also wrote to me about their proposals, from which it appears that they have raised the money for purchase of the building through an interest-free loan. Their letter to me states there is £50,000 outstanding (rather than £75,000 as stated in the proposition). They have also raised £21,000 towards building development and have been promised £5,000 towards running costs of the building. The £200,000 requested in the proposition relates to the first phase only of the project, which is to provide a ground floor drop-in centre, with the first floor being accessible for storage only.

As well as meeting the criteria for funding from the C.O.C.F. outlined at page 11 of the proposition, the request also meets the requirement that it is intended to meet 'one-off' capital costs rather than recurring revenue or running costs. However, there is no indication in the proposition as to how the F.F.L.M. intends to meet these future costs. The Home Affairs Department made a grant of £20,000 last year to help F.F.L.M. defray its running costs. Members may wish to enquire how the additional running costs are to be met in the future.

I should also draw members' attention to other possible bids for funding from the C.O.C.F. which may not be known to the proposer. By their nature, propositions tend to put forward worthwhile projects in isolation; but the following projects, which are believed to be at various stages of business case preparation, are thought to be potential bids for C.O.C.F. funding –

- Telecommunications intercept capability
- Video-link for courts
- Prison telephone system and blocking
- Victim Support
- States of Jersey Police scanning project.

Conclusion

Many ex-prisoners find it extremely difficult to secure work, and consequently they have a lot of free time and very limited resources available to them. Some lack self-confidence and experience significant difficulty integrating back into the community. Having a safe place to go where they can meet and socialise with others, but also get the opportunity to engage constructively with voluntary and statutory agencies, would be of huge value to Jersey and contribute greatly to maintaining a safe community. The drop-in centre in Nelson Street will provide such a facility and opportunities, and I fully support this funding application and will, in any event, be submitting a bid to the C.O.C.F. for the sum of £200,000.