

# The economic case for and against prison

5<sup>th</sup> November 2007

With the current prison population at over 81,000 and with further demand for prison places projected, it is important that decision makers have the most complete picture available to inform spending decisions. However, the debate, whether for or against prison, has historically focused on the moral, political and social arguments for sentencing.

“Today’s release of the research report, *The Economic Case for and against Prison*, provides decision makers with new evidence on the most effective ways to spend public money. Economic research of this nature delivers a more complete picture on value for money”  
Jacque Mallender, CEO of Matrix Knowledge Group, said.

The objective of the research is to provide an evidence base that estimates the value for money of different alternatives to prison. Value for money models are widely applied in other government sectors i.e. healthcare, but little has been done in the criminal justice sector.

Although a prison sentence can be applied for several reasons, the research focuses on its ability to reduce re-offending. The analysis demonstrates that more effective community-based alternatives to prison for reducing re-offending do exist. The research also shows that where prison is necessary (for example in the case of violent offenders), prison sentences accompanied by training and treatment interventions are more effective than prison alone in reducing re-offending.

Seven alternatives to prison are shown to offer better value for money for the taxpayer when reduced re-offending is the desired outcome. The value for money savings per offender can be significant, ranging from £425 to £88,469 when considering only the public sector costs, and between £16,260 and £202,775 when also including costs to the victims.

On releasing the report, Jacque Mallender said “as an independent research company we’re very pleased to have been commissioned to undertake this work. Matrix Knowledge Group prides itself in delivering unbiased and evidence-led support to decision makers to assist them in implementing effective policy solutions. An economic approach is not about minimising cost, it is about getting the most value for each pound of taxpayer money spent.”

Copies of the report will be available from the Matrix Knowledge Group website <http://matrixknowledge.co.uk/prison-economics> from 4pm Monday 5 November.

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