



**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Magistrates' Association responds to Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle***

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The MA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government's Green Paper on *Breaking the Cycle* and supports the principle of a 'rehabilitation revolution.' It looks forward to serious proposals to re-balance what is currently a fractured incoherent justice system. What is needed is a clear continuous framework of responses that match the seriousness of the offence. The proposals for wider discretionary powers for sentencers and greater involvement in sentence management are welcomed.

Short-term custodial sentences must remain a sentence for those who are unwilling to comply with community penalties or continue to offend. However, a more innovative approach through short intensive training programmes would start to reduce re-offending.

John Thornhill said, "The Association believes there should be greater transparency in sentencing and that 'time sentenced' should be 'time served.' Whilst it is right that an offender should receive discount for an early guilty plea, a 50% discount coupled with release after only serving half the sentence would mean that for a serious case of assault causing actual bodily harm an offender would serve less than one month in custody when the guidelines indicate a sentence of about 4-6 months. Will this inspire public confidence?"

The MA has always supported and encouraged the wider use of effective community penalties, but if the proposed 'payment by results' scheme is to inspire confidence there must be rigorous, open and effective quality assurance procedures.

In order to ensure transparency and accountability, any development of compliance and neighbourhood panels must involve trained and experienced magistrates who currently perform significant service to the community. The focus on raising public confidence and awareness has always been a central focus of the MA's work through long standing community engagement programmes, which are now under threat from financial constraints.

The full response can be viewed on the Home page/Association views/consultation responses at [www.magistrates-association.org.uk](http://www.magistrates-association.org.uk)

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