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**Prison chiefs: Short**

## sentences are a university of crime

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By HAMISH MACDONELL

MANAGERS of Scotland's prisons' estate yesterday backed the Scottish Government's policy of eradicating short-term sentences.

Mike Ewart, the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, said that locking criminals up for six months or less made the community a more dangerous place. He said short-term sentences did nothing to rehabilitate offenders, they just exposed th

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em to a "university of crime" behind bars.

Mr Ewart was supported by the director of prisons at the SPS, Rona Sweeney, who said that short-term sentences did nothing to prevent reoffending.

The SNP government wants to scrap short-term sentences and replace them with tough community sentences designed to make criminals work hard rather than doing nothing inside prison. But this approach has been criticised by the Conservatives, who have warned the Scottish Government has a "soft touch" approach to crime and that tougher prison sentences are the answer.

The proposal is contained in the Criminal Justice and Licensing Bill, which came before the Scottish Parliament's justice committee yesterday.

Mr Ewart told the committee the bill was aimed at making the "best use" of prisons.

The current prison population stands at about 8,500 – but Mr Ewart said this masked the 40,000 admissions that the service deals with in a year.

Claims by sheriffs that short sentences can give relief to communities were questioned by Mr Ewart.

He said: "The overall question of community safety might be compromised more by a short sentence than not."

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