

# Letting people out of prison

Prison is essential for criminals who threaten our safety. Terrorists, murderers and all who attack people violently should be given custodial sentences to protect the rest of us from their attacks. They should serve more than 40% of the sentence before discharge. There should be no early discharge for anyone who might revert to violence on leaving prison.

It is more debatable what to do with offenders who steal. If someone fails to pay the BBC licence fee it should not be a criminal offence. It should be treated as an unpaid invoice. There should be legal redress for the BBC to demand payment, and to send in bailiffs if all else fails.

If a thief stole my car I would like him to have to buy me a replacement. I have no wish to have to pay for him to stay in prison if he could stay in work and pay compensation out of his wages. Punishments need to fit the crime. If he cannot work and pay then a stay in prison to put him through training to make a more useful contribution to society would be a good idea.

Prison has three purposes. It is used to protect the rest of us from those who would harm us. It is a deterrent to people contemplating a crime, though only if the clear up rate of such crime is suitably high. It is a means of trying to help people change their lives for the better when they come out. It has proved bad at this last.

Prisons need to be drugs free, with a disciplined environment. Overcrowded prisons in old buildings struggle to be effective. Parliament is too ready to create new and additional criminal offences. Most people want the law enforcement system to concentrate on violent offenders, and tackling the big scam gangs who are milking the benefit system, robbing on line commerce and banking and bringing in thousands of illegal migrants.