



Extract from the report to the
Public Accounts Committee on
the initiatives implemented by
the Danish Prison and Probation
Service to reduce reoffending

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I. Introduction and conclusion

1. This report is about the initiatives implemented by the Danish Prison and Probation Service to reduce re-offending. It is the task of the Prison and Probation Service to implement the sanctions imposed on offenders by the courts, and at the same time support and motivate the offenders through personal and social development to become law-abiding citizens.

2. It appears from the multi-year agreement for the Prison and Probation Service for 2008-2011 that reducing reoffending to a minimum requires incarceration soon after conviction and secure and effective imprisonment in combination with opportunities to receive substance abuse treatment, acquire educational skills, and re-enter society on a step-by-step basis. The importance of cooperating with the municipality on the release of offenders is also emphasized in the multi-year agreement. Organising income support, accommodation and employment prior to the release of the offender is essential to reduce reoffending.

3. Action plans are an important instrument for the Prison and Probation Service in its efforts to re-socialize offenders. The Prison and Probation Service has stipulated the contents requirements for the action plans. However, the action plans will remain merely an instrument and as such ineffective unless they are used actively and including relevant information on the offenders during the serving of their sentence, supervision and on release.

4. The Department of Prisons and Probation has implemented several initiatives to reduce reoffending; in September 2006, the "Successful release" project was launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and the Ministry of Interior and Social Affairs (now the Ministry of Social Affairs), among others. The purpose of the project was to create a pool of experience and knowledge of the cooperation between the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities. It was launched as a major methodology development project and since it was completed by the Danish Board of Social Services in 2009, a framework for cooperation agreements has been developed and the first agreements have been entered with the municipalities. The department has instructed its underlying institutions to follow the road map for successful transition from prison to society that was developed as part of the "Successful release" project.

Since 2003, several initiatives relating to the action plans have been implemented, including a new circular and a new guideline, and development and implementation of a new IT-based action plan template. Staff have been instructed on the application of these new initiatives.

5. Rigsrevisionen initiated this examination of its own accord in October 2010, because the area is considered to be of importance in a social as well as a financial context. The report also follows up on report no. 9/2003 on the financial management of the Ministry of Justice, i.e. the application of action plans and the Prison and Probation Service's assessment of the effectiveness of the initiatives implemented to reduce reoffending.

The term "Department of Prisons and Probation" is used when referring only to the central department.

The term "institutions under the Prison and Probation Service" is used when reference is made to the underlying institutions, i.e. prisons, half-way houses and probation offices.

When reference is made to the Prison and Probation Service it includes the department as well as the underlying institutions.

6. The objective of the examination is to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives implemented by the Prison and Probation Service to reduce reoffending. The report answers the following questions:

- Is the cooperation between the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service and between the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities effective?
- Is the Department of Prisons and Probation measuring the effectiveness of its initiatives?

The examination concerns the remit of the Ministry of Justice, including the Department of Prisons and Probation and underlying institutions, i.e. prisons, half-way houses and the Probation Service offices. The examination covers the period 2006-2011.

MAIN CONCLUSION

Convicted offenders may serve their sentence either in a prison or in a half-way house or they may be placed under supervision by the Probation Service. About 9,500 persons were sentenced to prison in 2009. Around 38 per cent of the sentences were for four months or more. Since 2006, the number of convicted offenders who reoffend and are reconvicted within two years of being released has been stable (around 26 per cent). The annual direct costs per offender serving a sentence in a closed prison amount to approximately DKK 700,000.

The fact that many institutions and authorities are required to work together to reduce reoffending represents a special challenge. The institutions under the Prison and Probation Service must work together internally, and the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service must cooperate with the municipalities during the offenders' serving of their sentence, possible supervision and release.

The action plans are fundamental for the support provided to offenders, and it is essential that the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service both internally and in relation to the municipalities work closely together to ensure that the action plans have the intended effect.

The Department of Prisons and Probation has launched several initiatives to reduce reoffending including, for instance, efforts to establish closer cooperation with the municipalities. The department has, in cooperation with other authorities, implemented a project focused on ensuring successful release of offenders. In 2010, the department also entered the first cooperation agreements with the municipalities. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that these agreements provide an excellent framework for dialogue between the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities on the release of offenders. Finally, the Prison and Probation Service has evaluated initiatives in selected areas. Thus the framework is in place to support the offenders in their efforts to become law-abiding citizens.

Yet Rigsrevisionen sees a need for more focused and active efforts to enhance the current framework designed to reduce reoffending, in particular in relation to the following factors:

- There is potential for improvement of the cooperation between the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service regarding sharing of knowledge of the offenders and the action plans. The concept of the action plans is excellent, but the examination suggests that several action plans are incomplete and/or not updated and therefore perhaps not serving the interests of the offender.
- Examinations performed in 2003 and 2009 showed potential for improvement of the cooperation between the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities. The two parties cooperate on, for instance, the provision of income support, accommodation and employment for offenders. According to Rigsrevisionen's examination, there is still potential for improvement of the cooperation between the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities. The Prison and Probation Service has stated that the municipalities are being informed of the release of offenders to ensure coordination of the actions plans, but several municipalities have stated that they are not being informed when offenders are being released. Rigsrevisionen considers fruitful and close dialogue on the release of offenders essential and it rests upon the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities jointly to establish this dialogue. Rigsrevisionen emphasizes the fact that in principle current legislation is not preventing the establishment of a fruitful dialogue between the parties, including exchange of relevant information on offenders.
- In 2010 the Department of Prisons and Probation entered the first agreements with the municipalities in order to strengthen the mutual cooperation. However, Rigsrevisionen's examination suggests that the framework established for the cooperation is not entirely adequate and there is potential for simplifying and accelerating the process for entering cooperation agreements.
- The Department of Prisons and Probation has evaluated selected initiatives. However, Rigsrevisionen recommends that the Prison and Probation Service should focus more on obtaining information on the effectiveness of the initiatives launched concerning employment - including education -, treatment, control and security.

The main conclusion is based on the following findings:

Cooperation between the parties involved

There is potential for improvement of the internal cooperation between the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service in particular in respect to sharing knowledge of the offenders and in respect to the action plans, which are not all updated and complete when an offender is transferred between institutions. A random check made and reviewed by Rigsrevisionen showed that essential information was missing in approximately 34 per cent of the sampled action plans.

Examinations performed in 2003 and 2009 showed potential for improvement of the cooperation between the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities. Rigsrevisionen's examination suggests that there is still potential for improvement of the cooperation between the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities in relation to release of offenders and in relation to the cooperation agreements between the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities.

Preparation and quality of action plans

- The self-evaluation conducted by the Prison and Probation Service in 2010 showed that the deadlines fixed for drawing up and following up action plans are generally observed.
- The action plan guideline specifies the required contents of an action plan, which include details on the individual who is responsible for the preparation of the action plan. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the action plan framework, including the contents requirements, is excellent. However, Rigsrevisionen's review of action plans showed that approximately 34 per cent of the 82 action plans in the sample are incomplete in respect to *evaluations* and specification of the *initiatives* that should be implemented to support the offenders. The action plans are essential for the success of the efforts made to ensure that offenders get an opportunity to live as law-abiding citizens when they have served their sentence, and Rigsrevisionen therefore recommends that the Department of Prisons and Probation should upgrade activities relating to the actions plans. Rigsrevisionen regards it as particularly important that *evaluations* and *initiatives* are properly addressed in the action plans.

Cooperation internally in the Prison and Probation Service

- The "Successful release" project made it clear that the action plans pass through many hands, which involves a risk of losing important information and breaking the continuity. As a consequence hereof, necessary initiatives may not be implemented. According to the consultation organised by the Prison and Probation Service in 2011 with its underlying institutions, some institutions thought the action plans were too elaborate and expressed concern that the overview of the process could easily be obscured when the action plans are transferred between institutions. Rigsrevisionen's examination suggests potential for improvement of the cooperation between the management levels of the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service, and between the individual departments of the Prison and Probation Service. As an example, management meetings for the five types of institutions, i.e. open state prisons, closed state prisons, local prisons, half-way houses and probation offices, are held separately at the premises of the Department of Prisons and Probation, and it is not clear how relevant information collected across departments is reflected in the action plans. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the Department of Prisons and Probation in this particular area needs to focus on the cooperation between the various types of institutions to ensure the coherence of the process planned for the individual offender, and to secure mutual understanding among the institutions of their respective work tasks.

Cooperation between the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities

- The Department of Prisons and Probation has as per 22 June 2011 entered agreements with nine municipalities and is preparing cooperation agreements with six other municipalities. The department is aiming to enter a total of 20 cooperation agreements before the end of 2011. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the department should consider ways to simplify and accelerate the process for entering cooperation agreements. The department should also consider the appropriateness of the cooperation agreement framework. The department has stated that it is considering how to make the process for entering cooperation agreements more efficient, and has also informed Rigsrevisionen that it is currently revising the framework.
- The coordination with the municipalities was reflected in only a little more than a quarter (29 per cent) of the action plans that Rigsrevisionen had sampled for a check. That the action plans have been coordinated with the municipalities means that the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service have contacted the respective municipality concerning the release of an offender either in writing or by phone. The Department of Prisons and Probation should consider measures to ensure that the respective municipality is contacted for coordination of the release of an offender, in all relevant cases.
- In the opinion of Rigsrevisionen, the Department of Prisons and Probation should consider making the communication with the municipalities IT based to avoid that action plans are forwarded on paper format or as scanned documents. This would allow the municipalities to continue working in the action plans electronically.

- Rigsrevisionen is aware that cooperation across sectors, institutions and authorities is a challenge. Rigsrevisionen considers fruitful and close dialogue concerning the release of offenders essential, and it rests upon the Prison and Probation Service and the municipalities jointly to establish this dialogue. Kommunernes Landsforening (Local Government Denmark - interest group and member authority of Danish municipalities) has in connection with Rigsrevisionen's audit made it clear "that preventing offenders from reoffending after having served their sentence, is a focus area for the municipalities, and precautionary measures are based, for instance, on the recommendations made by the Board of Social Services in the "Successful release" project. Establishing a closer cooperation with the institutions under the Prison and Probation Service concerning the release of offenders and the subsequent process is one of the recommendations derived from the project. Developing excellent processes of cooperation between the municipalities and the Prison and Probation Service is essential to achieve this objective. Local Government Denmark will engage in dialogue with the relevant parties in order to participate in the development of relevant methodology and tools and communicate and support implementation of the methodology and tools that are already available. That way Local Government Denmark is hoping to contribute to reducing recidivism." Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the Department of Prisons and Probation together with Local Government Denmark and the municipalities should identify initiatives to improve the cooperation, and Local Government Denmark's positive response in this respect has been duly noted.

The effect of initiatives launched

Rigsrevisionen recommends that the Department of Prisons and Probation Service should focus more on obtaining information on the effect of the initiatives launched concerning employment - including education -, treatment, control and security. Moreover, the Department of Prisons and Probation should maintain the recently implemented practice concerning programme activities to obtain knowledge of the effectiveness of the programmes.

Objectives and performance targets

- The Department of Prisons and Probation is defining objectives and performance targets for the focus areas in the annual performance contracts. However, the department has not defined objectives and performance targets for all the various institutions in all the focus areas. Furthermore, the targets that have been set are not considered outcome targets. Rigsrevisionen recommends that the department should consider establishing outcome targets for all focus areas.

Employment activities, including education and programmes

- The Department of Prisons and Probation should focus more on obtaining information on the effect of employment initiatives. The department has implemented several research and evaluation projects in relation to the education activities of the Prison and Probation Service, and is also leaning on foreign research findings. Rigsrevisionen is, however, of the opinion that the department should focus more on obtaining knowledge of the effect of the educational initiatives. Rigsrevisionen also finds that the department should have implemented a follow-up practice earlier, and should maintain the recently established follow-up practice to obtain knowledge of the effectiveness of the programmes.

Substance abuse treatment

- Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the Department of Prisons and Probation going forward should ensure the implementation of initiatives launched and focus more on obtaining knowledge of the effectiveness of the programmes dealing with substance abuse treatment.

Control and security

- Among the many aspects of control and security, the Department of Prisons and Probation has evaluated the control of urine tests in 2006 and 2010. And in February 2011, the department analysed the future requirements of the Prison and Probation Service in respect to capacity and security. The department is on a current basis monitoring selected key performance indicators concerning, for instance, escapes, violence and threats. Beyond these activities, the department is not pursuing knowledge on the effectiveness of control and security initiatives.