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HOWARD LEAGUE FOR PENAL REFORM FEARS OVER ENFORCED CELL-SHARING FOR CHILDREN IN PRISON

The Howard League for Penal Reform today (15 August 2006) raised concern over Youth Justice Board plans to force children to share cells in prisons. The Youth Justice Board is running out of prison spaces for children.

The Howard League for Penal Reform revealed that there are 3,010 children in penal custody in England and Wales, of whom 2,531 are in prison service establishments. The number of children in prison has increased by 402, or 19% since January 2006.

The Youth Justice Board proposals include increasing the number of places for boys at Ashfield, a privately run prison near Bristol which has had a troubled past, to 400 and making up to 156 boys subject to compulsory cell-sharing.

Research by the Howard League for Penal Reform found that in May 2006, 30% of the 2,351 children in prison at that time had been officially assessed as vulnerable. This included 673 boys and 36 girls.

Frances Crook, Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform stated:

“Making more children share cells in prison is dangerous. The inquiry into the murder of Zahid Mubarek by his cellmate recommended the ending of enforced cell sharing in prison in order to keep prisoners safe, yet the Youth Justice Board is suggesting that children should share. The vast majority of children in prison are vulnerable and damaged and we fear this is a dangerous practice.

Rather than locking up ever increasing numbers of children in prison we should be looking at effective community sentences which encourage children to make amends for their crime and reduce re-offending.”

Notes to editors

On 4 August 2006 there were 3,010 children in custody on remand and under sentence. The majority (84%) were held in prison. Of the 2,531 children in prison, 2,470 were boys and 61 were girls. The prison population can be broken down as follows:

Age	Boys	Girls	total
15	337	0	337
16	752	1	753
17	1,381	60	1,441
Total	2,470	62	2,531

The Howard League for Penal Reform conducted research on the number of vulnerable children in custody. An analysis of figures provided by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales revealed that on 12 May 2006, 709 of the 2,351 children in prison custody had been assessed as vulnerable by their youth offending team. This included 673 boys and 36 girls.

Age	Number in prison		Of whom vulnerable	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
15	272	0	91	0
16	702	0	201	0
17	1,322	55	381	36
Total	2,296	55	673	36

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ISDN line available on 020 7923 4196 - uses a G722 system. Interviews may be conducted in advance