

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's response to the Committee for Justice on the Justice No2 Bill.

1. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee for Justice in relation to the Justice No 2 Bill as presented.
2. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council support the aims of the Bill in relation to fine collection and enforcement. The development of a system which improves people's ability to pay their fines and reduce levels of imprisonment of for non-payment is important; as is the freeing up of police officers time for "more important front line duties" and allow for the "correct targeting" of prison services. However, Council believe that the ability for people to clear their fine through community based opportunities should not be pursued as it may encourage non-payment.
3. We are all too aware of the budget constraints faced by the Department of Justice with the proposed cut to our valued Court Service in Ballymena and funding issues in relation to Police and Community Partnerships. Fine collection, which is cost effective and successful will allow for resources to be targeted in those areas where they can be of real benefit to our communities and to the safety and well-being of our people.
4. Additionally, Council would recommend that once the Bill is passed consideration is given to utilising existing Department building stock, and in particular Ballymena court house, to provide an administrative headquarters for the collection officers and administrative staff.
5. The change of Prison Ombudsman from a non-statutory to a statutory footing and the introduction of an early removal scheme also provides an opportunity to assess the administrative support required to provide these services and consideration of relocation.
6. Council would request that should the potential amendments be included in the Bill that we are afforded a further opportunity to comment on the final detail of those amendments.

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