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Sir

There are many offences for which imprisonment will remain the most appropriate punishment. (Scrapping of short jail terms urged – Oct 6). There are others, however, for which a community sentence would be preferable.

Jail sentences of less than a year neither effectively reduce reoffending nor act as a general or individual deterrent. Sentences of six months or less can mean that the offender spends less than half that period behind bars and is then released without any form of statutory supervision.

Far from being the soft option, community sentences afford protection across the longer term, and are seen as onerous by offenders who have to deal constructively with their problems.

Supervision can last up to three years and requirements such as exclusion orders and curfews can add protection to specific victims or vulnerable individuals and businesses.

Moreover, community service actually reduces the number of victims. The reconviction rate for offenders who receive prison sentences of a year or less is 60%. For those who serve community sentences the figure is 38%.

Community service also offers value for money. The most recent figures show the average annual cost of custody is £37.5K per prisoner. The average annual cost of a community sentence is £3.2K.