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## UK Plans Community Bans to Ease Prison Overcrowding

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— *Categories: Breaking News*

The U.K. government has confirmed plans to introduce legislation granting judges in England and Wales wider powers to impose community-based punishments as an alternative to short prison sentences. The move responds to rising pressure on the prison system, with the current inmate population close to or exceeding 86,000, approaching operational capacity.

Under the proposals, judges would be able to order restrictions that include bans from pubs, concerts, and sporting events, as well as limits on driving, travel, and access to certain areas. These measures are to be administered under judicial authority, with the Probation Service tasked with supervision.

The Ministry of Justice has stated that the measures will form part of a Sentencing Bill scheduled for introduction to Parliament in September or autumn 2025. According to Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood, judges will be expected to avoid short custodial terms in most cases, though such sentences will remain available in exceptional circumstances.

The reforms also include an “earned progression” model for earlier release, based on international examples such as practices used in Texas. This approach is intended to allow offenders to demonstrate responsibility and readiness for reintegration.

Existing Football Banning Orders, which currently apply to stadium-related offences, are proposed to be broadened so that they may be issued as penalties for a wider range of

offences. Additionally, mandatory drug testing is to be extended to all individuals under probation supervision, not only those with recorded substance misuse histories.

To support implementation, the government has committed up to £700 million in additional funding for the Probation Service by 2029, supplementing its current annual budget of about £1.6 billion. Recruitment of probation officers is already underway, with resources directed toward ensuring compliance with new restrictions.

The legislation follows recommendations published earlier this year in a sentencing review led by former Justice Secretary David Gauke. That review called for phasing out most custodial sentences under 12 months, expanding community-based alternatives, introducing earned-release opportunities, and providing sufficient probation funding.

According to the Ministry of Justice, the forthcoming bill aims to keep sentencing effective and enforceable outside prison, while reserving incarceration for serious offenders. The framework emphasises accountability for offenders, enforcement by the courts, and support for rehabilitation to reduce reoffending and safeguard public safety.