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## **Beyond the Cycle:**

# A Plan for Government to Break the Cycle of Crisis and Crime

July 2024

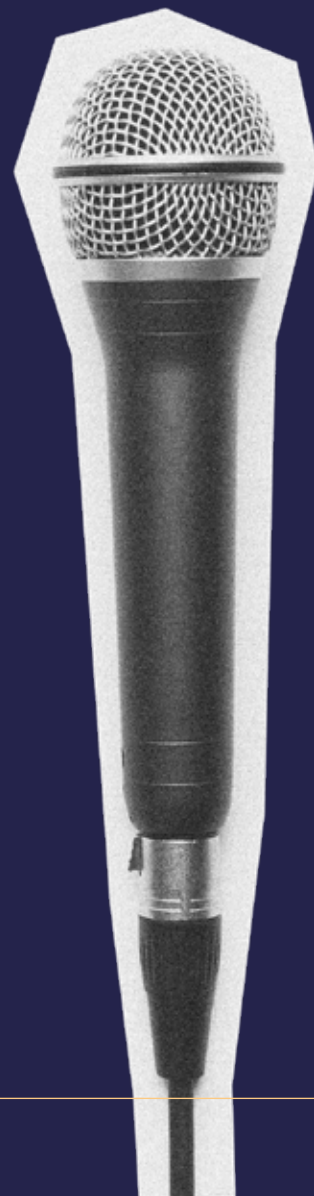


# revolving doors

## About Revolving Doors

Revolving Doors Agency is a national charity that aims to change systems and improve services for people 'in the revolving door' – people who come into repeat contact with the criminal justice system due to multiple unmet needs such as mental ill-health, substance misuse, homelessness, poverty and other traumatic life events.

We work to create a smarter criminal justice system that makes the revolving door avoidable and escapable. We do this by working alongside national and local decision-makers. We combine lived experience insight, robust research and system knowledge to drive effective policy solutions



## Introduction

“Those closest to the problem are those closest to the solution.”

### Revolving Doors Lived Experience Member

Revolving Doors presents “Beyond the Cycle,” a strategic roadmap coproduced with our lived experience members, designed to address the critical flaws in our criminal justice system as they relate to people in the ‘revolving door’. This group, often categorised as persistent and prolific offenders, is responsible for ‘volume crime,’ namely nonviolent offences such as burglary, drug offences, theft, and other acquisitive crimes. They are most likely to serve short prison sentences under six months and cycle in and out of prison adding to the churn and volatility in our prisons. In 2023, there were 13,025 instances where people were sentenced to prison for six months or less<sup>1</sup>. They are also among those with the highest demand due to unmet health and social needs on all four major agencies in our over stretched, under resourced and failing criminal justice system.

All too often, people in the revolving door are both victims and perpetrators. With a new Government comes a unique and timely opportunity to reset the system. Prioritising this group as part of your plan for Government can release human potential and significantly reduce crime and reoffending which currently cost the UK approximately £18 billion annually.

This document, which aligns with Labour’s missions and manifesto commitments, offers actionable, evidence-based solutions to divert individuals experiencing multiple disadvantages out of the criminal justice system towards better lives.

## The Current State of the System

Our criminal justice system is fuelling a cycle of crisis and crime. People are cycling in a broken system with high reoffending rates<sup>2</sup> driven by ineffective short-term custodial sentences, and inadequate support for complex needs and trauma. Root causes of crime such as increasing levels of poverty, housing insecurity, unmet mental health and substance use needs are adding fuel to the fire. This is wasting human potential and placing an unsustainable burden on public resources.

We know that there are systemic, chronic problems in our criminal justice system. Specifically, our prisons are full and under-staffed, our probation service is under-staffed and performing poorly both in protecting the public and in promoting rehabilitation and our courts have unprecedented delays meaning that many victims of serious offences (particularly women and girls) are being denied justice.

The system suffers both from under-staffing and cumbersome bureaucracy. The centralised approach sucks energy and morale from a beleaguered staff group with the centralisation of probation exacerbating this problem following its disastrous privatisation and reversal. The impact of devolving powers, harnessing staff enthusiasm (most people working in this area do so as a vocation) by providing leadership and hope and removing centralised bureaucracy can’t be under-estimated.

However, we know what works. Good public services, community-based interventions, trauma informed approaches, and services and policies designed in partnership with people with lived experience. With leadership at both central and local levels, the new Labour Government can implement many of these strategies for meaningful change from day one.

<sup>1</sup> Source: *Offender management statistics quarterly*: October to December 2023. Prison receptions, Table 2\_Q\_2 and 17,123 people were released from prison having served 6 months or less. Same Source, Prison Releases Table 3\_Q\_2

<sup>2</sup> The latest available reoffending rate for those sentenced to 6 months or less (Apr-Jun 2022) was 59.4%. In this quarter alone, 2,430 people committed 14,236 reoffences, an average of 5.86 for every reoffender. Source Proven Reoffending Statistics released 25 April 2024 Table C2A

We are keen to emphasise that this strategy is not a wish-list for a better society but a practical approach to tackle both short-term failures and long-term endemic faults in the system.

It will save police time, but its main impact will be on reducing demands on the courts, helping to get unprecedented Court delays down, and easing pressure on the prison and probation services, both trapped in a spiral of worsening staff shortages.

As a result of over 30 years of focused work at Revolving Doors, we are at the point where many of these solutions do not require new policies or innovations but better implementation and a specific approach to those who end up in the justice system due to unmet health and social needs. A Cabinet Office level focus is essential for cross departmental coordination to address these complex issues effectively.

We would urge the new Government to commit to embed and mainstream the learning from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities sponsored Changing Futures Programme which exists to improve outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. The implementation of the 10 Years Drug Plan which was heavily informed by Dame Carol Black's Independent Review of Drugs should also continue and we would also ask that the Lammy Review recommendations are implemented in full and renewed commitment given to the National Race Action Plan for Policing.

## The Roadmap

Aligned with Labour's manifesto commitments, our roadmap focuses on:

- Taking back our streets
- Breaking down barriers to opportunity
- Building an NHS fit for the future
- There are four key components.

### 1. Strengthen community sentences

#### Objective

Replace short term custodial sentences with effective community-based alternatives, supporting the mission of "Taking back our streets."

#### Actions

- Expand community programmes that address the root causes of offending.
- Ensure community treatment orders are tailored to individual needs, including dual orders for mental health and substance misuse.
- Provide training for sentencers including court clerks on community sentence options and ensure pre-sentence reports are high quality and timely.
- Expand Problem Solving/Intensive Supervision courts, focusing on the revolving door group and women's courts.
- Review guidelines around the breach of licence to ensure people are not penalised for insecure housing or factors outside of their control.
- Develop partnerships with local organisations to provide comprehensive support services, including peer support to work alongside probation for higher engagement rates.
- With the expansion of electronic monitoring, work with charities to develop the use of these and related technologies ensuring they are always in conjunction with support to address root causes.

## Impact

Community sentences reduce reoffending by addressing underlying issues such as mental health issues, addiction, homelessness and social deprivation. They are more cost effective and humane than short term imprisonment. Note that none of these measures require legislation nor extensive resources.

“I was a baby when I first went to prison. If somebody had been there, if maybe they had community sentences or done something back then with the resources or the services, and it would have saved 21 years of my life being wasted.”

Lived experience member

## 2. Expand diversion initiatives

### Objective

Strengthen diversion schemes at every stage of the criminal justice process, contributing to “Taking back our streets.”

### Actions

- Enhance police-led diversion programmes to prevent repeated contact with the criminal justice system, focusing on pre-arrest diversion. Successful diversion of youth offenders has contributed to the lowest youth crime levels and numbers of children in custody for more than a generation. Extending diversion to vulnerable groups such as women (who are often victims of domestic violence) and those with drug, alcohol and mental health problems would reduce crime, turn people’s lives around, and save public money.
- Expand youth custody to the 18-25 age group and take learning from the Transition to Adulthood evidence base and ensure the Young Futures Programme is inclusive of this age group.
- Add capacity to Liaison and Diversion services so that they are better able to support more people with higher level of needs to divert them out of the criminal justice system into support services.

- Coordinate and commission joint mental health and addiction services to provide holistic support.

### Impact

The evidence shows that effective diversion initiatives can drastically reduce the number of people entering the criminal justice system, focusing instead on rehabilitation and support.

“Trusting relationships and a holistic approach – these were really important for me, and this is what I got from diversion.”

Lived experience member

## 3. Cabinet level focus on root causes

### Objective

Tackle underlying issues such as housing instability, mental health, and substance use that contribute to criminal behaviour, aligning with “Breaking down barriers to opportunity” and “Building an NHS fit for the future.”

### Actions

- Prioritise initiatives to ensure stable, good quality housing is available to people released from prison. Partnerships with the private sector and housing first have worked well for the revolving door group where it happens.
- Expand access to mental health and substance use treatment reviewing thresholds for accessing support.
- Require Integrated Care Boards to work with justice agencies to ensure that services are available to divert to.
- Expand the definition of the socioeconomic duty to extend to policing, in line with Scotland.

- To address these complex issues effectively, we urge establishing a Cabinet Office level focus for the 'multiple disadvantage' group. This would ensure cross departmental coordination and a holistic approach to the problems faced by those with unmet health and social needs who end up in the justice system.

### Impact

Addressing root causes prevents crime before it starts, reducing the burden on the criminal justice system and creating safer communities.

“ Society benefits from what we do to change the system and make it more effective. ”

Lived experience member

## 4. Achieving change for a system under pressure

### Objective

Harness the power and potential of lived experience involvement to address staffing issues and contributing to trauma informed services, supporting “Breaking down barriers to opportunity”.

The key challenge to restoring public services to tackle crime is staffing. Currently, many services are struggling to recruit suitable candidates, a problem from the austerity years. Government has wasted tens of millions of pounds in recruitment campaigns for prison and probation services with minimal returns, more staff are recruited but many leave quickly or are sub-standard.

We know of both private and third sector organisations who have successfully tackled this problem by investing in supporting, training and recruiting people with lived experience, often those who originally used the service provided. This approach has provided these organisations with a pipeline of committed, skilled staff. Data indicates reduced recruitment costs, faster recruitment, higher performing staff who take fewer sick days and faster career progression.

Additionally coproducing the design and commissioning of services in partnership with people with lived experience leads to trauma informed approaches which we know work more effectively.

The importance of lived experience is not just that this approach is morally right, nor that the involvement of people with lived experience improves services by making them easier to engage with; it is a concrete way of getting staffing levels back to required levels with an injection of committed new employees.

### Impact

Addresses staffing challenges but also enhances the overall effectiveness and efficiency of public services.

“ [Trauma informed practices] meant I wasn't just looked at as 'what have I done or not done' but instead 'what happened to me'. You miss so much if you look at the former and not the latter. As soon as my story was heard by the right person, I flourished. ”

Lived experience member



## The Long View

Real systems change cannot happen in one term of government. However, the solutions presented here can be enacted and expanded upon from day one. By implementing these key strategies, we can lay a strong foundation for long term, transformative change.

## Call to Action

We urge the new Government to embrace these recommendations and work collaboratively with stakeholders to create a criminal justice system that truly rehabilitates and supports individuals, leading to safer communities for all. The time for action is now – let’s create a system that works for everyone.

“Voices like mine are needed in all the places people develop policy that affects people with experiences like mine. I thought I was going to die an addict, but now I get the opportunity to help others see there’s hope on the other side and that they should just keep trying. If I can go from the streets to the Houses of Parliament anyone can.”

Lived experience member



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