

Written evidence submitted by Revolving Doors (RAR0025)

Executive summary

This response centres around the 'revolving door' cohort – people who are committing repeat, low-level offences due to multiple unmet needs including problems with drugs and alcohol, poverty, poor mental health, trauma, and homelessness. This cohort present a low-risk to the public due to their offences being non-violent in nature, and yet are highly likely to experience multiple short prison sentences, breach licence conditions and return to custody, and fall through the gaps when accessing disjointed services that treat intersecting issues separately.

Short prison sentences are ineffective for the revolving door cohort, as they are so short that access to rehabilitation within prison cannot take place, and probation are unable to put proper resettlement measures in place for transition into the community. However, short prison sentences are long enough that they can cause destruction to people's lives, including losing housing, employment, and familial ties. Due to this, there are extremely high reoffending rates associated with short prison sentences. For this reason, Revolving Doors advocates for a presumption against short prison sentences of 12 months or less to be legislated for, with stipulations made to increase its effectiveness, such as the presumption being automatic rather than left to judicial discretion, and for a significant bolster in the community sentence offer to run parallel.

In the absence of short prison sentences, the community sentence offer must be increased and strengthened. Community Sentence Treatment Requirements can work well for the revolving door cohort, but to address multiple disadvantage, they need to be used in combination more consistently, as well as include an offer of peer support throughout, including during waiting times for treatment.

The current overstretched state of the probation service means that there is limited capacity to deliver meaningful resettlement support, with a current prioritisation of risk over rehabilitation. An effective way to ease this capacity crisis is to introduce the roll-out of peer support workers across the probation service, who can act as a point of contact for the individual throughout their journey.

When delivering support to assist those in the revolving door in rehabilitation and resettlement, a multi-agency, wrap-around approach is required, with services working together to deliver a holistic package of support. Yet all too often, disjointed services mean that people are passed from pillar to post when trying to access treatment – not meeting the thresholds for either service – and have to reshare their story repeatedly, leading to re-traumatisation. To address this, greater integration between services that deliver e.g. mental health and drug and alcohol support is needed, and guidance can be taken from initiatives such as the Changing Futures and the NHS Care after Custody programme to make this a reality.

About Revolving Doors

Revolving Doors is a national charity that aims to break the cycle of crisis and crime. We focus on the 'revolving door' group, those who have repeat contact with the criminal justice system due to low-level offending, whose behaviours are largely driven by unmet health and social needs. These include combinations of problematic substance use, homelessness, mental ill health, neurodivergence and domestic abuse, often referred to as 'multiple disadvantage'. We combine policy expertise, independent research and lived experience to champion long-term solutions for justice reform.

Our work is shaped, informed and co-produced with our lived experience members (referred to from hereon as 'members'), namely people with lived experience of the criminal justice system and the revolving door of crisis and crime. We operate forums which meet on a regular basis throughout the year: regional forums across England, and specialist forums relating to the distinct characteristics of our group including women, race, and neurodiversity. Additionally, we also bring together a national forum to support with bespoke policy consultations. The forums enable our members to inform our work and support decision-makers and other stakeholders to develop their work.

We welcome the opportunity for our members to give evidence to the Committee and would extend this offer to the policy leads within the Ministry of Justice to consult on the design, delivery, and policy considerations of solutions to end the cycle of reoffending.

About this response

This response will feature a combination of Revolving Doors' own evidence collected through public polling, research, and data analysis, evidence informed by insights from our members, and statistical evidence collected from Government departments. We have focused on the questions as they relate to the revolving door cohort. Our response to Section 1 will focus on measuring levels of reoffending for those who have served short sentences, which disproportionately affect our cohort. Section 2 will focus on the impact of serving short prison sentences, and Section 3, where the majority of this response lies, will focus on viable alternatives to custody for those trapped in the cycle of crisis and crime, contextualised by challenges faced by the Probation Service and the lack of join up between services.

Summary of recommendations

1. The Government must follow the evidence and finally enact an automatic presumption against short prison sentences of 12 months or less for low-level, non-violent/sexual offences, in line with a redistribution of funds to bolster the offer of community solutions.
2. To take practical steps to address the capacity crisis seen in the probation workforce and to create better engagement between probation officers and people under probation supervision, a sustained, centralised effort should be taken to embed peer support workers within the probation service.
3. A review must be undertaken of vetting, particularly within the probation service, to enable peer support to take place more seamlessly when employing those with criminal convictions.

- 4.** Services need to take a 'whole-person' approach rather than treating problems with alcohol and drugs and mental health as separate issues, embodying the principles of 'dual diagnosis'. Initiatives that do facilitate joint working, such as the Changing Futures programme, should command further investment and geographic roll-out. Insights from people with lived experience, such as NECG members, should inform developments to facilitate joint working.
- 5.** Paid peer support workers should be embedded in services and lead the trust and relationship-building process when someone accesses a service. Peer support is essential for people going through transitions (such as leaving prison and attending treatment in the community, and moving into independent accommodation).
- 6.** Greater integration between services to enable data-sharing is needed, to ensure services work for people experiencing multiple disadvantage and to prevent re-traumatisation of people moving between services. Data collection and sharing should be transparent to enable people to understand what is being done with their data, and processes need to be put in place to ensure data collection is trauma-informed, with training delivered to facilitate this.
- 7.** To facilitate both joint working and improved data sharing between services, greater instances of co-located services should be considered, with guidance taken from existing examples, such as the Changing Futures programme.
- 8.** Probation services, procedures and training should be reviewed and re-designed through a trauma-informed lens, with people with lived experience involved from the outset in the design and delivery of training.
- 9.** Co-design of services with people with lived experience and peer support are central to making services trauma-informed.
- 10.** Prison in-reach probation staff should commence joint resettlement planning as soon as is practically possible to ensure that key factors such as benefits and housing kick in immediately upon release. For those serving short prison sentences of less than a year, this planning should start immediately upon reception.
- 11.** Ensure meaningful co-production of resettlement services with people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, utilising examples of success to ground practice in and directing further investment and resource into areas of success for further roll-out.
- 12.** Whilst emergency recalls should continue to follow the current process, fixed term recalls should be abolished, and breach-style processes adopted instead. Legislation should be explicit that standard term recalls should only be used when there is deemed to be a public protection risk, or the person on licence has lost contact with the officer. In other cases, there should be efforts to improve support for the individual.
- 13.** A comprehensive re-evaluation of our approach to recalls should be taken, with an emphasis on long-term solutions over short-term fixes, as well as a drawing on insights of support workers when making decisions. Alternative measures should be explored, reviewing the proportionality of so many people being returned to custody when there is little suggestion of new offences or when people experience relapses.

14. The use of community sentences for people committing low-level offences due to unmet needs should always be prioritised over custodial sentences.
15. With increased funding and better join-up between services, community sentences should be delivered in a way that is person-centred, with input from the person in their application, and should be delivered in combination with other forms of support wherever necessary, including through combined orders and with peer support offered throughout.
16. Sentencers need to have deeper understanding of different community sentence types. They should attend regular sessions with staff who deliver them and people who have lived experience of being on sentences to increase their understanding.
17. To truly transform our approach to offending from a prevention angle, the Government should make a cross-departmental commitment to creating a national framework for diversion, including pre-arrest diversion, along with a review of Liaison and Diversion services to ensure they are effective for those engaged in repeat offending due to multiple unmet needs.
18. Alongside a presumption against short prison sentences, a sustained programme of investment and resource-allocation into CSTRs and the agencies that deliver them must be made.
19. All community sentences should come with a clear timescale that must be adhered to, with each agency having accountability to deliver support to the timescale stated. Any breaches that occur due to a delay in support being given should result in the same community order being given with a more rapid timescale. Peer support should be utilised during the wait for treatment requirements.
20. Integrate peer support into all community solutions, particularly treatment requirements, with integration developed in partnership with people with lived experience.
21. A new resettlement assessment and sentence planning approach should be developed that allows for greater joint-planning on an iterative basis throughout the person's time in prison custody and once they are released. This could be created in partnership between the person and peer support worker, and facilitated by probation and other agencies delivering resettlement services.

Section 1: Measuring the problem

1. What are the levels of reoffending in England and Wales, and how has this changed over time?

As of December 2022, the overall reoffending rate was 26.4%, an increase of 1% on the previous year. Demonstrating how ineffective short prison sentences are at reducing reoffending, this reoffending rate jumps up to 56.6% for adults released from a sentence of 12 months or less, and to 59.6% for those released from sentences of 6 months or less.¹ In 2011, the

reoffending rate for adults released from a sentence of 6 months or less was 58%², thus we can see that short custodial sentences have had a high reoffending rate over a considerable period of time, yet are still frequently given.

Revolving Doors has long argued that short sentences are ineffective for the cohort of people that we work with – namely, people who are trapped in the cycle of crisis and crime through low-level offending due to multiple disadvantage. Since 2018, we have been arguing for a presumption against sentences of 12 months or less (with the exception of sentences linked to domestic violence or sexual offences), and our campaign messages have received substantial cross-party support, with former Prisons Minister Rory Stewart stating ‘we are looking very carefully at a presumption against sentences of under six months’, and our poll of MPs showing that 70% supported introducing such a presumption.³ This support extends to the general public, with our 2022 polling finding that 58% of UK adults believe an alternative to prisons should be found when the person has committed a low-level crime, and only 25% thinking a prison sentence is appropriate in these cases.⁴ Short sentences of 12 months or less are overwhelmingly given for low-level, acquisitive offences,⁵ and as we shall evidence in greater detail in this response, such offences and their drivers can be better addressed through well-funded, person-centered community solutions.

As well as being ineffective in reducing reoffending, short sentences are a costly solution. As of 2022/23, the cost to house someone in prison per year stood at £51,724,⁶ an increase of over £15,000 since 2015.⁷ In contrast, the most recent estimation of the cost of a community sentence stands at approximately £4000.⁸ Between April 2023 and June 2024, approximately 27,000 adults entered prison to serve sentences of 12 months or less, with 21,500 entering to serve sentences of 6 months or less, and 5,700 entering to serve sentences between 6-12 months.⁹ This means that solely housing these people in prison for 6-12 months could cost over

¹ Ministry of Justice (2024) Proven reoffending statistics quarterly bulletin, October to December 2022. Available online at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/671f7c0b4fdbe4653d6ecb39/PRSQ_Bulletin_Oct_to_Dec_2022.pdf

² Ministry of Justice (2013) Proven Re-offending statistics quarterly bulletin January to December 2011, England and Wales. Available online at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c94cf40f0b62aff6c2abd/proven-reoffending-jan11-dec11.pdf>

³ Revolving Doors (2019) Reducing the use of short prison sentences in favour of a smarter approach. Available online at https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/RDA-SHORT-SIGHTED_BREIFING-FEB19-FINAL_0-3.pdf

⁴ Revolving Doors (2022) Majority of UK public believe rising poverty will lead to increase in crime – and this shouldn't lead to prison. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/majority-of-uk-public-believe-rising-poverty-will-lead-to-increase-in-crime-and-this-shouldnt-lead-to-prison/>

⁵ UK Parliament (2023) The use of short prison sentences in England and Wales. Available online at <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0052/POST-PB-0052.pdf>

⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024) Costs per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison. Available online at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65f4229810cd8e001136c655/costs-per-place-per-prisoner-2022-2023-summary.pdf>

⁷ Ministry of Justice (2016) Costs per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison. Available online at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8029f5e5274a2e87db8398/costs-per-place-cost-per-prisoner-2015-16.pdf>

⁸ UK Parliament (2023) The use of short prison sentences in England and Wales. Available online at <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0052/POST-PB-0052.pdf>

⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024) Offender management statistics quarterly, prison receptions April-June 23/2024, table

£1billion per year, without even factoring in the costs of reoffending, the rate of which stands at over 56%. At a time where public finances are stretched, it seems nonsensical to spend this amount of money on a criminal justice solution that fails over half of the time.

To avoid a presumption against short prison sentences that has little to no impact, or worse, results in the up-tariffing of sentences, it is essential that this presumption is automatic, rather than being left to the discretion of judges – with judicial discretion being a key problem with the presumption’s execution in Scotland, combined with a lack of confidence in community alternatives.¹⁰ Alongside the presumption, a reduced cost of prison places must be diverted to a significant increase in funding for community solutions such as Community Sentence Treatment Requirements (which will be discussed in more detail within this response), meaningful unpaid work opportunities with attached accreditations, and a multi-agency approach to address the root causes of offending. Speaking about the reasons behind a failure of the presumption to have an impact in Scotland, Chris McCully, the Head of Policy at Community Justice Scotland, remarked ‘the uptake of community options [in Scotland] is hindered by funding, fragmented services, and a lack of confidence in available alternatives among sheriffs due to concerns about service quality and accessibility. This leads to a lower-than-desired utilisation of community sentencing alternatives.’¹¹

Our members perfectly encapsulate the redundancy of short sentences in addressing reoffending:

“I have done 19 short prison sentences in the last 20 years. A lot of the time I didn’t get any interventions [to address] the problems that led me to being in custody – substance misuse, alcohol, drug addiction, homelessness. These are the reasons I was breaking the law - to try and get myself somewhere to live for the night, to fund my addiction and just to survive really.”

Recommendation: Since 2019, in line with the policy stance of former Secretary of State for Justice David Gauke MP, the Justice Select Committee have recommended that ‘short, ineffective’ prison sentences¹² be replaced with a presumption against short prison sentences of 12 months or less. The Government must now follow the evidence and finally enact an automatic presumption, in line with a redistribution of funds to bolster the offer of community solutions.

Section 2: Rehabilitation in prisons

2. What impact does custody have on prisoner health and wellbeing, and how effective is provision for this in prison in promoting rehabilitation?

2.Q.8. Available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024>

¹⁰ Centre for Justice Innovation (2024) Expert Voices: Presumption against short sentences: the Scottish experience. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OP6zkXWkaIo&t=14s>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² House of Commons Justice Committee (2022) Prison population 2022: planning for the future. Available online at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmjust/483/483.pdf>

For this section, we will focus on the impact of short sentences on the health and wellbeing of people in prison and its effectiveness in promoting and rehabilitation, particularly looking to the destabilisation that they cause for the revolving door cohort.

As discussed above, the reoffending rate for people serving prison sentences of 12 months or less stands at over 56%, which in itself demonstrates a failure to promote rehabilitation. However, delving into the actual issues with short sentences themselves is important to understand exactly why a presumption against their use needs to be enacted. Our members regularly speak of how little support they were able to access during their sentence with issues such as mental health, drugs and alcohol, and education, due to the length of the sentence.

“Although I was in prison for a short time I felt traumatised by the whole experience. In fact, sending me to prison was just a waste of time and money. I was released with no explanation and no support. I found myself back in the violent relationship which exacerbated my addiction which led to further arrests and trauma.”

The need for appropriate rehabilitation is especially pertinent for those who typically serve short prison sentences. As of June 2023, 11,600 people (60%) serving short sentences had a documented need for drug misuse intervention, and 13,700 people (70%) exhibited a significant level or some level of psychological problems.¹³ Pairing people with significant unmet needs with criminal justice solutions that are known to have a significant failure rate is completely at odds with the principles of rehabilitation and deterrence.

“I was offered no support for the domestic violence I was being subjected to, nor was I offered support for my drug and alcohol addiction. When I finally managed to get myself into a women’s refuge, that was when I got support.”

Short sentences are short enough that proper rehabilitative support is not offered, but long enough that people can lose their housing, their employment, and their familial relationships – all principles that are known to affect people’s chances of rehabilitation.

“A short sentence - it affected me a lot. It was my first offence and I had never been in the in the criminal justice system before. Going to prison, I lost my relationship with my son’s father”.

We already know, given the SDS40 early release scheme and a recent announcement of a prison building programme to create an extra 14,000 prison places¹⁴, that there is a prison capacity crisis. As mentioned in Section 1, over the course of a year over 27,000 people entered prison to serve a sentence of 12 months or less. Replacing short sentences with community solutions would instantly free up to a third of prison capacity, greatly easing the prison crisis and leaving prison as a last resort for those who have committed violent offences and require greater rehabilitation. Short prison sentences also substantially increase ‘churn’ within the

¹³ UK Parliament (2024) Question for Ministry of Justice. Available online at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/14892>

¹⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024) Thousands of new prison places to be built to keep streets safe. Available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-new-prison-places-to-be-built-to-keep-streets-safe>

prison regime, which is destabilising to the regime and to people's individual routines within the prison, particularly when trying to provide support to vulnerable people.¹⁵

Section 3: Resettlement services and alternatives to custody

3. To what extent does the Probation Service have the capacity to support effective resettlement pre and post release?

Revolving Doors' Lived Experience Inquiry into Probation spoke to 35 probation practitioners and 141 people with recent lived experience of probation supervision.¹⁶ Amongst people with lived experience of probation supervision that we spoke to, there were general reflections that the probation service prioritises managing risk over supporting rehabilitation due to workloads, frustrations at the churn of probation officers assigned to them and struggling to build relationships with them due to this, and general neglect in appropriate sign-posting to services to assist with problems with drugs and alcohol, homelessness, mental health and poverty.

“They should train the individuals [probation officers] to see people as a person. There is no interest in your future, no curiosity. There is a lack of humanity, no connection, a massive disconnection.”

“It's just a number, it's just like turning up. If you don't come, you go back to prison. That's it.”

The revolving door group in particular may be at a higher risk of reoffending, but present a far lower risk to the public than those who have committed more serious offences. Considering this, there is a need to reframe 'risk', look at people's capabilities to change with the appropriate support, and build on strengths and find solutions.

“Personally, I don't like risk assessments; too much information can be detrimental to how people see you, sometimes it feels like I've already been judged before they (staff) even know me!”

Even when people did have good relationships with their probation officers, people under probation supervision were well-aware of the challenges their officers faced due to capacity constraints, and expressed that their officers had to go 'above and beyond' to offer proper support.

‘The last probation officer, only had him for about 6 weeks. I got more out of him than anyone else. He gave me a phone number out of hours and said I could call him. He was really interested in me, and my journey. He phoned me out of hours. It made me feel good, he cared, he was compassionate.’

Probation workers expressed similar concerns around capacity issues, and lamented the fact that they could not deliver the level of support that they wanted to.

¹⁵ UK Parliament (2023) The use of short prison sentences in England and Wales. Available online at <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0052/POST-PB-0052.pdf>

¹⁶ Revolving Doors (2022) Probation Lived Experience Inquiry. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Probation-Lived-Experience-Inquiry-34pp-A4-2-1.pdf>

‘I joined for the ability to make a difference in society, assisting service users in change... but it’s difficult with a lack of resources.’

‘We need less of a caseload, [risk management] is all we have time to do so we become more risk averse. We need a more mixed caseload, if it’s all high-risk then our role is all about risk management.’

Pairing these reflections from our Probation Inquiry with numerous headlines about an overloaded probation service¹⁷, it is clear to see that the capacity crisis of the probation service is preventing probation workers from being able to deliver a person-centered, rehabilitative service, and is preventing people under probation supervision from developing trusting, strong relationships with the person who is supposed to guide them in their resettlement.

One viable way to challenge the workforce crisis within the probation service could be to introduce new ways of working and roles within the service, such as embedding peer support workers. During the probation inquiry, people with lived experience told us that they would have likely engaged with probation more and from an earlier stage if they had been offered peer support, which in turn would have supported them with desistance at an earlier stage. Additionally, several people we spoke to explained that it wasn’t until they spoke to a peer who had similar lived experience to their own and had turned their life around, that they started to really think about their issues and needs and the steps they needed to take to support their rehabilitation. Peer support workers particularly benefit the revolving door group, who face the most barriers to engagement due to a high level of complex needs, and therefore have the highest risk of reoffending. The impact of peer support could be crucial to reducing reoffending and therefore strain on the probation service.

“Peer support would help the language and dynamics of probation...It would bring more understanding and empathy to service”

Probation practitioners agreed. It was strongly felt that peer support would not only improve the engagement of people under supervision with probation practitioners, but could also support access to services that help address the root causes of crisis, crime, and reoffending.

Recommendation: To take practical steps to address the capacity crisis seen in the probation workforce and to create better engagement between probation officers and people under probation supervision, a sustained, centralised effort should be taken to embed peer support workers within the probation service.

However, it must be noted that for peer support to be embedded into the probation service, a new approach to vetting needs to take place to enable people with criminal convictions to work within the system without significant barriers to overcome. In 2023, Revolving Doors joined with Clinks, the Criminal Justice Alliance and the National Women’s Justice Coalition to challenge issues around vetting within the Ministry of Justice, in particular recommending a review of whether the MoJ requirement for all staff delivering services (including administration staff and

¹⁷ BBC News (2023) Most probation services are over capacity, leaked data reveals. Available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64344284>

client-facing staff who do not go into prisons) is needed, to determine if the levels of vetting required are appropriate.¹⁸

Recommendation: A review must be undertaken of vetting, particularly within the probation service, to enable peer support to take place more seamlessly when employing those with criminal convictions.

4. How does joint working between services happen so that ex-offenders receive the support they need post-release?

Joint working between services is essential for those trapped in a cycle of low-level offending due to unmet need. As of 2023, 71% of people starting treatment for problems with drugs had a mental health treatment need as well.¹⁹ Those experiencing multiple disadvantage in addition to their contact with the criminal justice system often find a lack of join-up between services fails to meet their needs, or worse, further compounds their trauma due to having to reshare their story multiple times with differing agencies.

The work of Revolving Doors' National Expert Citizens' Group (NECG) – groups of people from several local areas with experience of multiple disadvantage working to create cross-sector policy change – demonstrates this clearly. One of our NECG members stated:

“For someone who already experiences multiple disadvantage, the prison environment and wider criminal justice system create immense challenges. Within the system, there is a clear lack of understanding demonstrated by staff. Often those with mental health issues are treated as disruptive or troublesome and sanction or punishment is seen as the most appropriate way to ‘deal’ with them. Access to medical support for those suffering from substance dependency is protracted and very limited.”²⁰

“Thresholds mean preventative support isn’t provided. I don’t want to hit a crisis point where I am using again when I can spot the signs, I need support earlier than that. There is a misunderstanding of just how quickly it can get to a crisis point for someone with co-occurring needs.”²¹

Neurodiversity must also be taken into account when considering joint working, due to many neurodivergent people within the criminal justice system having co-occurring needs. Work with Revolving Doors' neurodiversity forum found that neurodivergent people may use drugs and/or alcohol to ‘mask’ their neurodivergent conditions.²²

¹⁸ Revolving Doors, Clinks, Criminal Justice Alliance and National Women’s Justice Coalition (2023) A summary of anecdotal and experiential evidence demonstrating the impact and issues associated with delays in MoJ vetting and denied clearance of staff and volunteers. Available online at <file:///C:/Users/Zahra%20Wynne/Downloads/Joint%20evidence%20on%20MoJ%20vetting%20issues%20final.pdf>

¹⁹ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2023) Adult substance misuse treatment statistics 2022 to 2023: report. Available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-for-adults-statistics-2022-to-2023/adult-substance-misuse-treatment-statistics-2022-to-2023-report#mentalhealth>

²⁰ Revolving Doors (2023) Beyond mere ‘maintenance’: what people experiencing multiple disadvantage need from the criminal justice system. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/beyond-mere-maintenance-what-people-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage-need-from-the-criminal-justice-system/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Revolving Doors (2022) Exploring the links between neurodiversity and the revolving door of crisis and crime.

“If I was off my face on something, I could blame the drugs and alcohol on my ‘weird’ behaviours, and it helped me be socially more confident.”²³

The Changing Futures programme is a strong example of where a mandate for multi-agency working can work to address multiple disadvantage. An initiative to improve outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage, Changing Futures promotes ‘greater integration and collaboration across local services, alongside increased use of a person-centred, trauma-informed approaches, and in the long-term, reducing demand on services’. At a wider level, the programme seeks to enact change ‘for the wider system of services and support, promoting strong multi-agency partnerships, governance, and better use of data so that local strategy and commissioning better responds to and prevents multiple disadvantage.’²⁴ The programme currently covers 15 areas across England, and we suggest a further roll-out in its approach to challenge multiple disadvantage.

Recommendation: Services need to take a ‘whole-person’ approach rather than treating problems with alcohol and drugs and mental health as separate issues, embodying the principles of ‘dual diagnosis’. Initiatives that do facilitate joint working, such as Changing Futures, should command further investment and geographic roll-out. Insights from people with lived experience, such as NECG members, should inform developments to facilitate joint working.

Better peer support across services through embedded peer support workers who work over a number of sectors could also address the lack of join up in services. Peer support is essential for people going through transitions (such as leaving prison and attending treatment in the community, waiting for support provided through community orders, and moving into independent accommodation).

This is something that is consistently referred to by our NECG members as a role that could address people falling through the gaps between services, particularly when experiencing co-occurring issues.

“I think people should have a peer mentor, a navigator who is trauma-informed and that advocates and sits in the middle between the practitioners and the individual to support both groups.”²⁵

Recommendation: Paid peer support workers should be embedded across intersecting services, and lead the trust and relationship-building process when someone accesses a service.

Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Revolving-Doors-neurodiversity-policy-position.pdf>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024) Evaluation of the Changing Futures programme Third Interim report. Available online at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66fe697930536cb927482b7c/Changing_Futures_Third_Interim_report.pdf

²⁵ Revolving Doors (2023) The National Expert Citizens Group’s blueprint for improved dual diagnosis support. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/the-national-expert-citizens-groups-blueprint-for-improved-dual-diagnosis-support/>

a) Is there sufficient data sharing between services?

People in the revolving door typically have co-occurring needs that necessitate services working together and in turn, sharing data. Nevertheless, our members consistently tell us of the amount they need to reshare their often-distressing circumstances and background when moving between services, re-traumatising them. This could be avoided if services were able to access data on people from related services ahead of appointments.

The Changing Futures programme highlights barriers to data-sharing, but stresses its importance in tackling multiple disadvantage and therefore providing better outcomes for rehabilitation and resettlement. In a recent evaluation of the programme, it was stated: ‘the experience of Changing Futures highlights the multiple barriers to local areas achieving common data systems and resources. It also demonstrates the benefits to services and people experiencing multiple disadvantage when these systems are in place. It is important that learning on data sharing is available to those undertaking work in different sectors, including health and local government, to support and foster better data sharing capabilities in local areas.’²⁶

We consulted with our members on the issue of data-sharing as part of research project between the NECG, Deloitte, and Revolving Doors. Surprisingly, members were less concerned about security issues when thinking about data-sharing, and more focused on data-sharing improving services to make them work better for beneficiaries. Although comfortable that their data should be shared across government, the group wanted to see a system in which they could access their own data and check to see what data points are used to make decisions.²⁷

In addition to data sharing, it is important that data collection is trauma-informed in its practice. Changing Futures and Revolving Doors have been working to create a form of data collection that is trauma-informed, by delivering training to programme evaluation partners. The principles for this are ‘incorporating a trauma-informed approach to collecting information from clients serves as a universal precaution ensuring you approach sensitive topics carefully.’²⁸

Recommendation: Greater integration between services to enable data-sharing is needed, to ensure services work for people experiencing multiple disadvantage and to prevent re-traumatisation of people moving between services. Data collection and sharing should be transparent to enable people to understand what is being done with their data, and processes need to be put in place to ensure data collection is trauma-informed, with training delivered to facilitate this.

²⁶ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024) Evaluation of the Changing Futures programme Third Interim report. Available online at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66fe697930536cb927482b7c/Changing_Futures_Third_Interim_report.pdf

²⁷ Confidential research project between Deloitte and Revolving Doors.

²⁸ Wilder Foundation (2016) Trauma-Informed Evaluation: Tip Sheet for Collecting Information. Available online at <https://www.wilder.org/wilder-research/research-library/trauma-informed-evaluation-tip-sheet-collecting-information>

Where services are co-located, data-sharing often improves, enabling better services and reducing the risk of retraumatisation. The Changing Futures programme again provides evidence to this end:

'In areas where services do have shared data systems, they have enabled a better understating of a service users' journey and resulted in less time being spent sharing a participant's story. For example, in Stoke-on-Trent, the Changing Futures team and the other non-statutory services they are co-located with are able to access the council adult social care team's customer relationship management and data systems. While stakeholders acknowledge that the system is not perfect, it enables services to see the same information about people and reduces the need for service users to continually repeat themselves. This is a widely acknowledged enabler for improving system working.'²⁹

Recommendation: To facilitate both joint working and improved data sharing between services, greater instances of co-located services should be considered, with guidance taken from existing examples, such as within the Changing Futures programme.

b) What role does trauma-informed practice play in the delivery of these services?

Revolving Doors' definition of trauma-informed practice is: 'a way of supporting people that recognises and responds to the specific needs that people may have as a result of past or ongoing trauma'. Other common principles include providing safe environments, strengths-based approaches, and building empowering relationships. Trauma-informed practice is important because – with trauma heavily influencing low-level offending due to unmet needs – exacerbating trauma risks relapse, breach, and reoffending.

Unfortunately, evidence shows that there are many instances where services are not trauma-informed, resulting in poorer outcomes. This can be seen within our lived experience inquiry into the Probation Service:³⁰

“I had to tell him everything I did [around the crime], relive that trauma, but they didn't ask me what I needed going forward.”

“It [Probation] should be trauma informed, currently their reactions to you just increases that trauma.”

Recommendation: Probation procedures and training should be reviewed and re-designed through a trauma-informed lens, with people with lived experience involved from the outset in the design.

In terms of delivering resettlement services, our vision is that resettlement services will embed a person-centred and trauma-informed approach that is co-designed with people with lived

²⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024) Evaluation of the Changing Futures programme Third Interim report. Available online at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66fe697930536cb927482b7c/Changing_Futures_Third_Interim_report.pdf

³⁰ Revolving Doors (2022) Probation Lived Experience Inquiry. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Probation-Lived-Experience-Inquiry-34pp-A4-2-1.pdf>

experience, as those who have experienced trauma often instinctively design trauma-informed services. Such services would recognise and nurture people's strengths and ambitions, not only their past offences.

Related to this, peer support is also central to trauma-informed working, ensuring that people with an understanding of trauma are central to service delivery.

Recommendation: Co-design of resettlement services with people with lived experience and the embedding of peer support are central to making services trauma-informed.

5. How effective is support provided to ex-offenders on release such as homelessness prevention, employment opportunities and health and wellbeing services?

a) Do these services encompass the principles of individual desistance, and to what extent could it?

Support with health, employment, education and homelessness is crucial upon release to ensure individuals do not fall back into the cycle of crisis and crime. However, whilst there are pockets of good practice, work with our members shows that all too often, services fail to address unmet needs and as such fail to encompass principles of desistance.

“Resettlement is impossible without hope of better life and income. There needs to be better access to jobs and training. You also need to ensure people are on the right benefits so they don't resort to crime for financial gain. Work is not available, education is hard to get into, and benefits are not enough to live off, so people are going to end up in revolving door.”³¹

All of the people we spoke to who were under probation supervision for our Probation Inquiry had experienced short prison sentences, which as we have discussed earlier, are destabilising in terms of resettlement. When it came to their release from prison: preparation happened too late, communication with their probation practitioner was challenging and delayed, and there was a lack of support around practical issues including housing, healthcare, and securing an income (either through employment or social security).³² The day of release is a particularly pertinent time to ensure that wrap-around services are present, yet this is typically the day where people are failed.

“You're full of fear [when you are released], you've got family problems, no clothes, no food and you only have £40, its gonna take ages to get social and you have to go to probation, and they can't do anything for you. If someone is able to help you, then it becomes a different story. They need to become an asset and not an adversary.”³³

To address the issues of appropriate support not being in place on the day of release, it is clear that support from probation when in prison needs to happen a lot earlier. However, the issue with short sentences is that often, probation does not have time to put in place appropriate

³¹ Quote from women's lived experience forum

³² Ibid.

³³ Revolving Doors (2022) Lived experience inquiry into Probation. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Probation-Lived-Experience-Inquiry-34pp-A4-2-1.pdf>

support whilst the person is in prison. Nevertheless, as we have already discussed a presumption against short sentences at length in the sections above, it is necessary to focus on the importance of probation putting in place support well before a person is released from prison, to ensure that issues such as housing, drug and alcohol services, mental health support and strengthening familiar ties are addressed well in advance of release.

Recommendation: Prison in-reach probation staff should commence joint resettlement planning as soon as is practically possible to ensure that key factors such as benefits and housing kick in immediately upon release. For those serving short prison sentences of less than a year, this planning should start immediately upon reception.

Despite negative experiences, our members also had positive things to say about various services they have accessed upon release from prison. In a session held to inform HMPPS' Women's Policy Framework, we asked our members to tell us about times where good resettlement practices were put in place by services.

“I’ve spent 15 years on probation, but only the last time did it feel trauma-informed, this was due to having MHTR as part of order. I felt like the Probation Officer helped me, and it didn’t feel like a tick box exercise. They collaborated with the psychologist, and didn’t focus on what I’d done wrong, but focused on what my strengths were. It felt like my PO wanted to help, she listened to me, the communication really worked. Lots of appraisal for the things I was doing right which helped build my confidence.”

“I met 2 women in a homelessness centre who showed empathy, listened and communicated well. I was taken as a person, not an ex-offender. They asked what I wanted and needed.”³⁴

It is clear from this feedback that the principles that inform effective resettlement services centre around a person-centered, empathetic and strengths-based approach, as well as collaboration between services to address multiple needs. To truly embed these principles within services, people with lived experience of the criminal justice system and other forms of multiple disadvantage need to be at the forefront of co-designing services, in both their content and delivery. A strong example of this is the NHS Health and Justice RECONNECT: Care after Custody service that has been co-produced with Revolving Doors' lived experience members (the Lived Experience Team, LET), who sit on the programme board and are involved in its continuing development.³⁵ Originally, the service was not going to be tailored to people experiencing homelessness, due to perceived difficulties around engagement. The LET successfully challenged this perspective, ensuring that people experiencing multiple disadvantage could benefit from the service. Since then, the LET has conducted service visits, contributed to research reports and recommendations, and remained central to the ongoing development of the service.

³⁴ Revolving Doors (2023) Quotes from women during a session between Revolving Doors' lived experience members and HMPPS, to inform the refresh of their Women's Policy Framework

³⁵ Clinks (2021) RECONNECT: Care after custody. Available online at <https://www.clinks.org/community/blog-posts/reconnect-care-after-custody>

Recommendation: Ensure meaningful co-production of resettlement services with people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, utilising examples of success to ground practice in and directing further investment and resource into areas of success for further roll-out.

6. What impact do licence recall conditions have on promoting resettlement?

The number of licence recalls between April and June 2024 stood at 9,784, a 44% increase on the same quarter in the previous year.³⁶ Licence recalls currently contribute substantially to the prison population crisis, and we can again see a link to the negative impact of short prison sentences, with the Ministry of Justice noting that ‘from 2021, the number of quarterly recalls has generally gone up, with the latest figure being the highest in the series and an increase of 44% from a year ago. The increase from 2021 has largely come from recalls of offenders released from a sentence of under 12 months.’³⁷ Of the recalls during April to June 2024, 77% involved non-compliance, 36% involved failure to keep in touch, and 23% involved failure to reside – meaning the vast majority of recalls were not linked to further offending.³⁸ For those who fall within the revolving door cohort, their backgrounds paired with an overwhelmed probation service, disjointed services and destabilising short sentences mean that abiding by licence conditions and consistent communication with probation services can be incredibly challenging.³⁹ People under probation supervision that we spoke to for our Probation Inquiry reflected these sentiments.⁴⁰

“They are breaching you for being late, you know. That’s not what you want, you want to make progress, and you want to see what you can get out of it.”

This extended to people feeling that they could not be honest with their probation workers about issues they were experiencing with drugs, alcohol, and housing – despite probation workers needing to be supportive, it was felt they were operating more like a police force.

“If you’re having issues with drugs and alcohol and stuff, and you mention something that relates to your risk, then they’re just gonna recall you. It’s a very counter-productive thing, you have to be very, very careful what you say to them.”

Probation workers mirrored this view, often feeling that needing to prioritise risk and having huge caseloads undermined their ability to play a supportive, rehabilitative role.

“We send them [people under supervision] to prison, we punish. But we don’t give them a house, they are at the bottom for everything. All the research says if you support people, they are less likely to reoffend.”

³⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024) Offender management statistics bulletin, England and Wales. Available online at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672366d046aa392ce3565542/OMSQ_Q2_2024.pdf

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Revolving Doors (2024) Recalls in crisis: What needs to change? Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/recalls-in-crisis-what-needs-to-change/>

⁴⁰ Revolving Doors (2022) Probation Lived Experience Inquiry. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Probation-Lived-Experience-Inquiry-34pp-A4-2-1.pdf>

“[There seems to be an] increasing culture of fear, fear of the worst possible outcome, this has taken us away from where we should be, of making fair and balanced decisions.”

It is clear to see that there is a need for a rebalancing of risk and support, as well as a serious overhaul of the probation service itself to increase capacity and enable probation workers to deliver a more personalised, tailored approach. Additionally, a presumption against short sentences would serve to dramatically reduce the recall rate and in turn reduce the prison population and prison churn.

Recommendation: Whilst emergency recalls should continue to follow the current process, fixed term recalls should be abolished, and breach-style processes adopted instead. Legislation should be explicit that standard term recalls should only be used when there is deemed to be a public protection risk, or the person on licence has lost contact with the officer. In other cases, there should be efforts to improve support for the individual.

Recommendation: A comprehensive re-evaluation of our approach to recalls should be taken, with an emphasis on long-term solutions over short-term fixes. Alternative measures should be explored, reviewing the proportionality of so many people being returned to custody when there is no suggestion they have committed new offences.

7. What role should non-custodial sentences have in promoting rehabilitation?

Polling commissioned by Revolving Doors in 2022 found that the majority of the public (65%) think most people commit non-violent, low-level crimes due to poverty, mental health issues, and problems with drugs and alcohol. The majority (58%) also believe that alternatives to prison should be found in these cases.⁴¹

For people who are committing low-level crimes due to unmet needs relating to drugs and alcohol, poor mental health, housing, and poverty, non-custodial sentences that address the root causes of crime are essential to reduce reoffending, reduce strain on an overwhelmed prison system, and promote a rehabilitative approach to desistance.

Community sentences are a key tool in promoting desistance for the revolving door cohort. A recent impact evaluation of Community Sentence Treatment Requirements (CSTRs) found that those undertaking CSTRs reoffended less frequently than those released from short custodial sentences.⁴² However, they are not a panacea as they currently work: there remains the need to bolster the community offer beyond what is currently provided.

In June 2023, three of Revolving Doors’ lived experience members gave evidence to the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee’s inquiry into community sentences. All three members agreed that for community sentences to be effective in promoting rehabilitation, they

⁴¹ Revolving Doors (2022) Majority of UK public believe rising poverty will lead to increase in crime – and this shouldn’t lead to prison. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/majority-of-uk-public-believe-rising-poverty-will-lead-to-increase-in-crime-and-this-shouldnt-lead-to-prison/>

⁴² Ministry of Justice (2024) Evaluation report: The impact of being sentenced with a community sentence treatment requirement (CSTR) on proven reoffending. Available online at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e83dadf8082e9740881b7f/cstr-proven-reoffending-report.pdf>

needed to be timely, well-rounded, and include many forms of support.⁴³ The three members had all had very different forms of community sentences, including a Mental Health Treatment Requirement (MHTR), a Drug Rehabilitation Requirement (DRR) and Rehabilitation Activity (RA) days in the form of unpaid work.

The member who undertook an MHTR discussed how effective the community sentence was in promoting rehabilitation, and felt the process to be integral to both her recovery and her ability to move away from the cycle of crisis and crime. What made the community sentence so effective was its combination with other forms of support, as well as the support from her probation officer.

“My probation officer referred me to [a] domestic violence advocacy [service] on release. That service was really prompt, which made a difference in starting my recovery. I was also referred to a peer mentoring service, and referred to the thinking skills programme (TSP). I started this when my MHTR had finished. The TSP was 16 sessions for 2 hours each week, and the sessions helped me to develop my problem-solving and interaction skills and identify patterns in my behaviour which contributed to my offending ... I think this worked after the mental health treatment because I was able to put the skills and coping strategies that I had learnt into practice.”

Here, we see that non-custodial sentences play a strong role in promoting rehabilitation for people whose offending is intrinsically linked to issues with poor mental health and domestic violence.

Where non-custodial sentences fall short in promoting rehabilitation is often when the sentences are inflexible, do not offer peer support, are impersonal, and do not reflect dual diagnosis principles of treating co-occurring mental health and drug and/or alcohol needs. For one of our members, despite valuing her MHTR, she questioned why she was not given a combination order with an Alcohol Treatment Requirement (ATR), as a lot of her offending was linked to problems with alcohol.⁴⁴

“I had the MHTR, but what I felt was missing, what I needed and what probably would’ve helped me further was the alcohol treatment requirement, because all of my offences were related to alcohol.”

It is clear from the above quote how transformative combined orders could be, but their use remains low, which lines up with previous sentiments on the lack of join-up between services and in turn the failure to address multiple, intersecting needs.

For another one of our members, who was given a DRR, it was felt that the treatment requirement was given to her with no personal input into its design or delivery, leaving her feeling that the form of treatment was not working for her.⁴⁵

⁴³ Revolving Doors (2023) Revolving Doors members give evidence to the House of Lords Joint Justice and Home Affairs Committee’s inquiry into community sentences. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/revolving-doors-members-give-evidence-to-the-house-of-lords-joint-justice-and-home-affairs-committees-inquiry-into-community-sentences/>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

“The requirement was made for me, and it was an order that I had to adhere to. There was no personal input from me for any requirement. I did not have the choice or the decision of what was required of me.”

For this member, ‘the lack of support she received when undertaking a DRR, despite experiencing problems with drugs and adjoining issues at the time, meant that she relapsed, breached her sentence conditions, and was sent to prison. The group work sessions she was given as part of the DRR were inadequate for her recovery, and she felt an in-patient rehabilitation centre would have been more effective. It was only when engaging with a different drug agency that she moved towards recovery.’⁴⁶

It is clear to see that community sentences can play a crucial role in rehabilitating people who are offending due to unmet needs, but they cannot be delivered in a one size fits all manner. They need to be tailored to the needs of the person, and work in combination with other forms of treatment, support, and services to address what are often multiple, overlapping unmet needs that people are going through.

Recommendation: the use of community sentences for people committing low-level offences due to unmet needs should always be prioritised over custodial sentences.

Recommendation: with increased funding and better join up between services, community sentences should be delivered in a way that is person-centred, with input from the person in their application, and should be delivered in combination with other forms of support wherever necessary, including through combined orders and with peer support offered throughout.

Recommendation: Sentencers need to have a deeper understanding of different community sentences. They should attend regular sessions with staff who deliver them and people who have experience of being on sentences to increase their understanding and confidence in community sentences.

Many of our members wish they had been diverted earlier through support rather than criminalisation. Although it does not actually constitute a ‘sentence’, diversion through Out of Court Disposals (OOCs) has proven transformative for some, highlighting the need to expand their use as well as expand liaison and diversion (L&D) services, which identify people with particular vulnerabilities when they are coming into the criminal justice system.⁴⁷ We advocate for pre-arrest diversion to take place, where police officers and other stakeholders can use their discretion to divert people into support with unmet needs rather than arrest. A strong example of this is the LEAD approach, which has demonstrated international success in reducing reoffending.⁴⁸ For such an approach to truly work, a national framework for pre-arrest diversion

⁴⁵ House of Lords (2023) Justice and Home Affairs Committee, Corrected oral evidence: Community sentences. Available online at <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/13430/pdf/>

⁴⁶ Revolving Doors (2023) Revolving Doors members give evidence to the House of Lords Joint Justice and Home Affairs Committee’s inquiry into community sentences. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/revolving-doors-members-give-evidence-to-the-house-of-lords-joint-justice-and-home-affairs-committees-inquiry-into-community-sentences/>

⁴⁷ NHS England (2025) About liaison and diversion. Available online at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/liaison-and-diversion/about/>

must be committed to with cross-departmental responsibility. L&D should also be expanded, with its potential to reduce court entries, address root causes of offending, and lower reoffending risks.

Recommendation: To truly transform our approach to offending from a prevention angle, the Government should take cross-departmental commitment to creating a national framework for diversion, including pre-arrest diversion, along with a review of Liaison and Diversion services to ensure they are effective for those engaged in repeat offending due to multiple unmet needs.

a) What impact would an increase in the use of non-custodial sentences have on resettlement services?

The use of non-custodial sentences, particularly in place of short prison sentences, would mean a dramatic reduction in probation officers having to rush to put in place resettlement services during a short time period within prison, something that our Probation Inquiry found to be a significant issue.⁴⁹ Additionally, the use of non-custodial sentences in place of short sentences would result in a large amount of people not going to prison and therefore not losing housing, employment, familial ties, and access to drug and/or alcohol services, which may serve to reduce the strain on resettlement services. Nevertheless, as noted above, adequate funding must be given to the design and delivery of community sentences to ensure a presumption against short prison sentences is effective.

b) What, if any, changes to community sentencing should be introduced if the Sentencing Review recommends a move away from short custodial sentences?

An increase in funding and resource for CSTRs is essential to support a move away from custodial sentences, to ensure that community sentences can meet their potential to reduce reoffending. Current evidence tells us that the need for treatment requirements far outstrips the current provision. The House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee, in their inquiry into community sentences, stated:

‘The need for mental health, and alcohol and drug treatment far exceeds the current rate of imposition of Community Sentence Treatment Requirements, which itself exceeds the availability of treatment. 38% of people on probation (c. 91,000 people at any point in time) have mental health issues, but only 1,302 of them started mental health treatment as part of a community sentence in 2022. The inclusion of drug treatment requirements has more than halved over ten years.’⁵⁰

Recommendation: Alongside a presumption against short prison sentences, a sustained programme of investment and resource-allocation into CSTRs and the agencies that deliver them must be made.

⁴⁸ Revolving Doors (2022) Briefing for the launch of LEAD UK. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/publications/briefing-launch-lead-uk/>

⁴⁹ Revolving Doors (2022) Probation Lived Experience Inquiry. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Probation-Lived-Experience-Inquiry-34pp-A4-2-1.pdf>

⁵⁰ House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee (2023) Cutting crime: better community sentences. Available online at <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42651/documents/212004/default/>.

Another key change that must be made is a reduction in the waiting time for CSTRs to take place. In their impact evaluation of CSTRs, the Ministry of Justice acknowledged that long delays in starting treatment requirements can negatively affect reoffending outcomes.⁵¹ We know that long waiting times are negatively affecting people's chances of rehabilitation and in some cases, leading to relapses and/or reoffending due to a lack of support. Giving evidence to the House of Lords Joint Home Affairs and Justice Committee, our members spoke of the negative impact that waiting times had on them.

“I relapsed back to my old behaviour in that time that I had to wait for it.”⁵²

Our Chief Executive, Pavan Dhaliwal, reflected that this same sentiment is heard amongst the wider sector:

“One big issue is around having a treatment requirement and the moment at which it kicks in. Again, it can take seven or eight months in some instances, during which time the person has relapsed.”⁵³

With the current need for treatment outstripping demand as discussed above, it is inevitable that delays will occur, hence our call for a substantial increase in funding to mental health and drug and alcohol treatment services that deliver treatment requirements.

It is our position that when waiting times are inevitable, peer support is crucial to ensure that people do not feel left behind and in a place where they may relapse and/or reoffend.

Recommendation: All community sentences should come with a clear timescale that must be adhered to, with each agency having accountability to deliver support to the timescale stated. Any breaches that occur due to a delay in support being given should result in the same community order being given with a more rapid timescale. Where delays may be inevitable due to systemic pressures, peer support should kick in to offer people a form of support in lieu of treatment.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of peer support being available for people to access within non-custodial services. As set out in our position on prioritising community sentences to address the prison places crisis, ‘truly successful community sentences should adopt a holistic approach focused on meaningful rehabilitation, offering tailored treatment and peer mentoring.’⁵⁴

Recommendation: Integrate peer support into all community solutions, with integration developed in partnership with people with lived experience.

8. What examples of best practice are there for effective resettlement?

⁵¹ Ministry of Justice (2024) Evaluation report: The impact of being sentenced with a community sentence treatment requirement (CSTR) on proven reoffending. Available online at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e83dadf8082e9740881b7f/cstr-proven-reoffending-report.pdf>

⁵² House of Lords (2023) Justice and Home Affairs Committee, Corrected oral evidence: Community sentences. Available online at <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/13430/pdf/>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Revolving Doors (2024) Towards a rehabilitative focus: Why the new Government must prioritise community sentences to tackle the justice crisis. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/towards-a-rehabilitative-focus-why-the-new-government-must-prioritise-community-sentences-to-tackle-the-justice-crisis/>

Through the various lived experience forums that Revolving Doors runs, we have many examples of best practice that are tailored to the individual to enable effective resettlement.

Firstly, when considering women: a gender-informed, trauma-informed practice that considers factors such as domestic violence, housing, and familial ties is essential. Our Women's Forum provided insight into when they had experienced best practice in resettlement:

“I was introduced to a women’s centre by IOM (Integrated Offender Management) who had trauma-informed members of staff, who took a trauma responsive approach. They worked relationally with each woman. The women’s centre took account of family and caring responsibilities, they provided a creche. They picked me up from prison, and then came with me to appointments.”⁵⁵

Through our neurodiversity forum, members strongly recommended that services, including probation, operate with an understanding and curiosity about someone's neurodivergent condition, tailoring their services to be responsive to someone's needs relating to their neurodiversity. A specific recommendation was for treatment and services relating to drugs, alcohol and mental health to be neurodiversity-informed, and not work in siloes or consider neurodiversity to be a 'separate issue', i.e. for services to be co-commissioned and co-delivered,⁵⁶ something that was discussed in more detail above with regards to joint working between services.

Our Lived Experience Inquiry into Probation also looked into best practice in resettlement, from the perspectives of both people under probation supervision and probation practitioners. It was felt that four simple principles could be applied to enable best practice in resettlement, namely: providing consistent relationships between a probation practitioner and a person under probation supervision; being proactive in communication prior to release; more careful planning for release earlier on in a person's prison sentence; and utilising departure lounges within prisons to provide tailored support on the day of release.⁵⁷

People under probation supervision reflected that far more resettlement planning needs to take place prior to release, to ensure smoother transitions into the community and avoid overwhelming individuals with administrative tasks.

‘If you’re going to a brand-new area, then no one knows you. You may have 3 triage appointments, they can last 2 hours each, I was homeless, and then had to go to probation after that. I had a really negative experience. What could have been different, could I have done those triage appointments beforehand. Make the process gentle and give them half a chance to build their lives back up again.’⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Revolving Doors (2023) Quotes from women during a session between Revolving Doors' lived experience members and HMPPS, to inform the refresh of their Women's Policy Framework

⁵⁶ Revolving Doors (2022) Exploring the links between neurodiversity and the revolving door of crisis and crime: Policy Briefing. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Revolving-Doors-neurodiversity-policy-position.pdf>

⁵⁷ Revolving Doors (2022) Probation Lived Experience Inquiry. Available online at <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Probation-Lived-Experience-Inquiry-34pp-A4-2-1.pdf>

⁵⁸ Ibid,

'If I had to go back, then I would have liked it if the probation could have seen me months before release and say, this is me, sit down and talk. If you did that then you could actually build that relationship and get on.'⁵⁹

Recommendation: Prison in-reach probation staff should commence joint resettlement planning as soon as is practically possible. For those serving short prison sentences of less than a year, this planning should start immediately upon reception.

Another essential element for effective resettlement is to involve the person in planning their transition back into the community. However, all too often, people feel that they are shut out of the process, leading to relapses, breaches, and reoffending when resettlement plans are not tailored to their needs.

'Being a mother wasn't taken into account. I had no support. I had to work this out, really hard to adjust. Going to see my son, no one asked how I felt. I was really anxious, wanted to get off my head I was so frightened... I would have liked him [my probation officer] to have acknowledged that.'⁶⁰

Recommendation: A new resettlement assessment and sentence planning approach should be developed that allows for greater joint planning on an iterative basis throughout the person's time in prison custody and once they are released. This could be created in partnership between the person and peer support worker, and facilitated by probation and other agencies delivering resettlement services.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what is truly needed to rehabilitate those committing repeat, low-level offences due to unmet needs is a move away from short prison sentences and move towards community solutions that provide wrap-around support from multiple agencies, with consistent peer support and person-centred planning. To achieve this, there needs to be serious consideration of investment and resource reallocation to strengthen the community solution offer, so that those in the revolving door can benefit, sentencers can feel confident in their use, and ultimately – reoffending rates go down. Where custodial sentences are used, the most effective resettlement services are those that treat individuals with empathy and respect, address their specific needs, and are flexible enough to adapt to the multiple challenges they face. Throughout the entire rehabilitation and resettlement process, it is crucial that people with lived experience of the criminal justice system are central to the design and delivery of services.

January 2025

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.