



Justice and Home Affairs Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Community sentences

Tuesday 11 July 2023

10.30 am

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Members present: Baroness Hamwee (The Chair); Lord Beith; Lord Blunkett; Lord Filkin; Lord McInnes of Kilwinning; Baroness Meacher; Baroness Prashar; Lord Sandhurst; Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia.

Evidence Session No. 9

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Questions 104 - 116

Witnesses

I: Dr Juste Abramovaite, Research Fellow, Institute for Global Innovation, Birmingham University; Jenny George, Director, Value for Money, National Audit Office.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Juste Abramovaite and Jenny George.

Q104 **The Chair:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee. This is another session taking evidence for our inquiry on community sentences. I particularly welcome Jenny George from the National Audit Office and Dr Juste Abramovaite from the Institute for Global Innovation at Birmingham University. Thank you very much for coming. We have apologies from Baroness Chakrabarti, Baroness Henig and Baroness Sanderson of Welton. Baroness Meacher has joined us online but is very much part of the meeting.

Thank you, Jenny, for the NAO's written evidence. We know that there is a typo that you want to correct, and we will deal with that later if we can. Can I come to you first? Is it possible to estimate the cost of reoffending in England and Wales, and if it is possible at any rate to estimate parts of the components, which costs are captured and which are excluded?

Jenny George: Thank you. To give a bit of context, reoffending accounts for a significant proportion of all offences. Our recent study on prisoner resettlement reported that about 38% of adults released from prison reoffended in the next 12 months, so the cost of reoffending is obviously really important. We are not aware of any very recent estimate of the cost of reoffending, but the Ministry of Justice looked at it in 2019. That is the last estimate that we are aware of. It estimated that the total cost of reoffending by people convicted between January and December 2016 was £18.1 billion. That includes adults at about £16.7 billion, and children and young people at £1.5 billion, set at 2017-18 prices. Within that estimate, theft and violence against the person reoffences by adults make up the majority of the costs. About £5.6 billion is from those on community sentences and about £5 billion is from those who had been in custody. So there have been some estimates.

For those captured costs, the MoJ used a Home Office piece of work on the economic and social costs of crime. Three baskets of costs are captured for most of the different types of crime. The first is what they call "costs in anticipation of crime"—spend on crime prevention. It might be things like defensive expenditure and insurance administration. That is about £2.6 billion, I believe.

The second basket contains the direct costs as a consequence of crime, and it is by far the biggest basket of costs. It includes the physical value of property stolen, for example, but also physical harm, victim services, lost output days for people who have been affected by crime, and the costs of medical care. It is a whole range of direct costs from crime.

The third basket is what they call "costs in response to crime", which looks at the costs in the criminal justice system, including police costs, courts and prisons. That is the second biggest of the three buckets, at about £4.1 billion.

The Ministry of Justice used the Home Office study to look at and apply the percentage due to reoffending. It is important to say that that is the best available

data we are aware of, but the MoJ has flagged that it is an underestimate of the cost. For some of those categories of costs, it does not have all the information it would need to put costs in all those buckets. For certain crimes, like summary offences, both motoring and non-motoring, it has included only the costs that are relevant to the criminal justice system and not the wider costs. That is an example of where it is an underestimate.

The Chair: So the figures are about eight years out of date. Well, they are eight years old, anyway; I should not assume that they are out of date. Anyway, they have a lot of caveats attached to them.

Jenny George: Yes.

The Chair: Community sentences have gone down since then, so it is quite difficult to put the pieces of the jigsaw together in a way that would tell us what is currently going on. Juste, you were nodding at one point during what Jenny had to say. Do you want to add anything?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Thank you very much. I am aware of the same figures you are, and I know that we have no better figures at this time. I agree massively that this is an underestimate. Crime has a lot of intergenerational impact, so there will be families, especially young people and children, who will be affected by these crimes. Young people and children whose parents are in prison are much more likely to end up in the criminal justice system when they become young adults. They have poorer life outcomes in school attainment and performance and worse mental health. If you take that into consideration, it is another generational impact, and it is definitely an underestimate. It is a very good estimate and the best we have at the minute, but it will definitely be an underestimate of the cost of reoffending for society.

Q105 Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia: Do you have any more refined data as to re-offending? It is everyone's ambition to break that cycle. Are community sentences, for example, more effective at doing so? Are you able to discern from your data how many people, having offended once, have got sucked into repetitive crime, and how many times, or is it just reoffending?

Jenny George: I believe that, overall, the proportion of reoffending has dropped but, within that, those who are reoffending tend to be reoffending more times. I am afraid I do not know whether that is down to the sentence that was given to them and therefore the connection with community versus custody.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: The latest statistics on reoffending after custody show a much higher percentage rate than a community sentence. I have the precise figures in my bag. I think the recent average for the number of times a person reoffended in the period they were followed was four. That is a significant amount. It is not one reoffence.

Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia: So keeping them out of prison is an improvement?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Yes.

Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia: Excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: You were asking about re-reoffending.

Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia: I am asking about everything. I am asking whether that data distinguishes between one reoffence or six reoffences, and whether community sentencing breaks that Gordian knot so that those people are less likely to reoffend.

The Chair: I just wanted to clarify that it was beyond the first reoffence, as it were.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: It is about the prolific offenders, the offenders who keep going in and out of prison.

Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia: Yes. Exactly.

The Chair: There may be a problem in that “reoffending” tends to mean reoffending within 12 months, so there are a lot of question marks around all that.

Q106 **Lord Beith:** I presume we have fairly reliable figures about the cost of delivering custodial sentences; we just do the arithmetic on the cost of prisons. How reliable is the evidence we have about the cost of delivering community sentences, which I presume is a very broad range of costs? I put the question to Jenny George first.

Jenny George: I think you are right: the cost of a prison sentence is relatively straightforward. Even that has a lot of caveats, but we know that in 2021-22, for example, the Ministry of Justice spent £3.75 billion on prison running costs. If you divide that among the number of prisoners, it equates to something like £4,000 per prisoner per month. At that basic level, we have some very crude data. It does not cover everything that will happen for someone who has a custodial sentence, because since 2015 there has been a requirement for supervision in the community following the sentence, and that cost is only the while-in-prison cost. But yes, there is some basic data available on the cost of prisons.

At the moment, there is no available data released by the Ministry of Justice on the total cost of community sentences. There is a spend. As you know, the National Audit Office audits the Ministry of Justice, so we know the total probation cost, but that will of course include people who have been released from prison and are being supervised in the community at that point, or who are on suspended sentences. There is currently no published data on just community sentencing.

It is doubly hard because within community sentences there are lots of options and, for any individual person, the judiciary might put together a different package of those options. Drilling down to the costs of the different types of community sentence would be even harder, and I do not think that data are available—not that I have found, in any case.

Lord Beith: You describe a process whereby the judiciary puts together a package

for a particular offender. Does cost enter into that calculation at all? Obviously, if a custodial sentence is given, the court does not pay any attention to what the cost is: a van comes and takes the prisoner away. But if it is a community sentence, it has to be satisfied that there is in place a series of the kinds of things that you have just referred to. Does cost enter into that process at all?

Jenny George: I would not like to speak for the judiciary. I am not sure exactly what it takes into account in the sentencing. I am aware that, after a court case earlier this year, there was acceptance that the judiciary could take into account how busy the prisons were and therefore what facilities would be available in prisons—prisons versus community sentences. I am afraid I do not know whether the judiciary takes any costs into account when considering community sentences and what the options are.

Lord Beith: There is not much data, and where there is data the judiciary does not have it either.

Jenny George: Not as far as I know.

Lord Beith: Would you like to add anything, Dr Abramovaite?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I agree with Jenny. To the best of my knowledge, home detention curfew for about 90 days would be £1,300, which is significantly cheaper than paying for the same amount of time for someone to be in prison. When it comes to community sentencing, I worked on a few more intensive programmes that focused on diversions and identifying the vulnerabilities people face that might lead them to commit crimes. They tend to cost £10,000 to £15,000. That was probably pre-pandemic; with the current inflation—I am an economist by training—I would say that we are probably looking at between £13,000 and £18,000. When you compare it with the current average annual cost for prison, of £47,000 to £48,000, it is cheaper.

Q107 Lord Sandhurst: I have a question about what I call the arithmetic and the finances. As I understand it, there is no breakdown in the cost of providing supervision for community sentences as against supervision after release, which everybody has to have if they have had a custodial sentence. Could that be done, or would it be too difficult to break it down? It would be useful to know. We know the overall probation bill, but we do not know how it divides.

Jenny George: Yes. To track that, I would need to know a bit more about the systems the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service have. Going back nearly 10 years, the predecessor to HMPPS, NOMS—the National Offender Management Service—set out some cost data for holding a prisoner versus a community order. It certainly has been done in the past, but it is not currently published. It would be very useful to be able to do that.

Lord Sandhurst: What I am looking at is how the probation budget itself breaks down. Then we could see whether there is a material difference, and then look at effectiveness.

Jenny George: I imagine, but I am not 100% sure, that the way to do that would be to look at the proportion of time in the case load of individual probation workers, and the categories of prisoner they oversee. It would need to be built up in that way from the case records. That is my best guess. I cannot guarantee that it is 100% right.

The Chair: It is against a background of the Probation Service being short of staff and probation officers often being young and beginning to get experience, and so on. Some of us are used to keeping timesheets in our professional careers, but not everybody is.

Q108 **Lord Blunkett:** Thank you very much for being with us. It is staggering, is it not? When it comes to determining the investment of scarce resources, actually having the data on which you can make decisions is pretty fundamental, so thank you for that insight.

To return to an earlier point that was raised about the effectiveness of community sentences as opposed to short custodial sentences, did I understand aright that the calculation made in relation to the effectiveness of the sentence was 4:1? Can you clarify that, Juste? Perhaps Jenny can add to it. We are struggling all the time to understand the ratio of effectiveness of investment in community sentences as opposed to short custodial ones.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Yes, of course, thank you. First, there is a solid evidence base to show that community sentences are more effective than short-term custodial sentences. Plenty of studies explore this topic and they give us some indicative figures. It is important to note that every study is slightly different and may be analysing slightly different crime types, in a different country, in a different police force area, and so on, but there is some indication.

When it comes to various interventions, I am fairly confident in saying that for every £1 invested you are likely to get £2 or £3 back. I am also confident that, again, that is a massive underestimate because of the same things I mentioned before about the intergenerational impact. We know that 65% of the children of prisoners end up in the criminal justice system or prison. That cost is massive and will be paying us back later on. Do you have anything to add, Jenny, or would you like me to say something more?

Jenny George: On the effectiveness of the two different routes, as it were, comparisons between them are complicated and tricky. One reason is because the judiciary obviously takes a whole range of factors into account when it sentences, including things like prior offences, what is known about personal circumstances, health needs, addictions and the likelihood of being able to follow the community order. Overall, the people who go towards a community sentence are likely to be not exactly the same population of people as those who are sentenced to short custodial sentences.

That is a big generalisation, but it is really important. If you are trying to look at the effectiveness of the outcome, you have to be careful that you do not end up saying

purely that community sentences are better because the reoffending rate is definitely lower, because if that same person had gone into a custodial sentence they may not have reoffended. It may not be to do with the sentence but with the person's circumstances. There is that layer to add, although I do not disagree with anything that Juste said.

Lord Blunkett: I do not want to put words in your mouth, but did I understand from an earlier answer that, although the number of those reoffending has fallen, the intensity of reoffending among those who are still in the system is greater? Is that a reasonable interpretation? In other words, we have a smaller but critical mass of people who are more likely to reoffend.

Jenny George: I think that is the case. I am trying to remember exactly where I read it. The proportion of people reoffending has definitely reduced in the last 10 years, but it is still a significant proportion.

Lord Blunkett: Perhaps you could both follow up in writing on that.

Q109 **Lord McInnes of Kilwinning:** On that point about the difference between those who are sentenced to a short custodial sentence as opposed to a community sentence, has there been any academic work on the very narrow group of people who could be sentenced to either? Is there any way of identifying that cohort? That could be a question for both of you. My second question relates to the children of offenders. Is there enough data now to look at the children of those sentenced to community sentencing and their risk of offending? I think you said that it was about 65% for the short custodial sentences.

So, first, what work has been done on the narrow cohort of people who could receive a custodial or a community sentence, and, secondly, what work has been done on the children of those who have received community sentences?

Jenny George: I will take the first of those. The Ministry of Justice, for example, has done a matching analysis study. It took a whole load of characteristics of people and then took somebody who had a community sentence with the same characteristics as somebody who went to prison, and tried to look at the reoffending rate. In any method that you try in a study, there are always some caveats and limitations, but in evaluation it is a reasonable way of trying to look at what the outcomes would be. The MoJ did that work in 2015 and again in 2019, and both times it found that there was a slightly lower rate of reoffending for those who had a community sentence.

There are a couple of caveats to that. Because the MoJ had to try to find people it could match, it could do so only when it had sufficient data. It could not match about 80% of the people, so it is likely that the population that we are looking at are more entrenched offenders than may be the average for a community sentence, if you see what I mean. It is a particular population. That is an interesting study in trying to get to the point that you are making.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I can add to that. The method that Jenny described is called quasi-experimental design. The golden standard would be a randomised controlled trial, where you would send certain people randomly—on a random allocation—to custody and a random allocation of others would not go to custody. That is very difficult to implement when it comes to the criminal justice system. Can you imagine going to the judge and asking them to designate everyone as a one or a two, with the number ones going to prison and the number twos getting a community sentence? It has been done to some extent. You can look at it if a new policy is being introduced. You could say, for example, that from January 2019 this jurisdiction will give more community sentences and then take the pool of people from the previous year, compare them to the current year, follow them up for exactly the same amount of time and look at their reoffending. So a randomised controlled trial would be the first way.

The second way would be looking at policy change and comparing before and after, because you are very likely to have similar populations. As long as the population and sample sizes are big enough, you will get results to quite a high power with a high confidence interval. So it will definitely indicate here.

When it comes to quasi-experimental designs, I ran one myself in the West Midlands, in a programme called New Chance, which targeted low-level, low-harm and first-time female offenders who were sent to prison for up to six months. They matched it with a controlled sample, and they gave us a lot of characteristics about each female, such as whether they had children, whether they lived with their partner, and what kind of offence—the offence type—and harm was committed. It was quite an extensive list. We followed them up to a year, and we found 16% less reoffending for those who went through the programme.

The programme was quite intensive, because the offenders were assessed on their needs, such as employability, housing, mental health, physical health, substance misuse—whether drugs or alcohol—and domestic violence or abuse at home. For me, the most striking result was that, after treatment, people who had mental health issues had a 37% lower reoffending rate than the control group. Among those who had substance misuse, which we know is a big issue and driving force when it comes to crime overall and reoffending, the results were 55% lower.

As an economist, I fully agree with Jenny. These are the indications. To run that kind of trial as a randomised controlled trial would be a long and expensive process and there are a lot of ethical steps to go through. How can you tell one person to go to prison while another will get a community sentence, possibly with some intervention, perhaps for substance misuse? From my own research and that of the team I am working with, I am fairly confident that there is enough academic research to indicate that you can get around the issue that everyone is different. There is an academic way to deal with that.

On your second question about community sentences, I am aware of an extensive report, written by one of my colleagues, about children whose parents are

prisoners. Although the outcomes are really sad, it is a great and thorough report, and I highly recommend that everyone read it. I am not aware of any studies or follow-ups of children whose parents get a community sentence.

The Chair: Jenny, if it is part of your role, has the National Audit Office asked the MoJ to keep any data that it does not keep?

Jenny George: We have not done a value-for-money study on community sentences in quite some time. Often, in value-for-money studies we make recommendations about data, but we have not made one specifically on this. We have not looked at it in that way.

The Chair: Are you aware of whether the MoJ has data on women who are sentenced to community sentences? There are quite different approaches to that cohort.

Jenny George: The Ministry of Justice has a female offender strategy, which was published in 2018. Its three main parts are: first, to try to divert women from entering the criminal justice system at all, by intervening much earlier; secondly, to divert women away from custodial sentences, where possible, to other types of sentence; and, thirdly, better care for women in prison if they need to be in a custodial sentence. The Ministry of Justice has certainly been focused on that and the differences between women and men.

The Chair: Are they evaluating the impact of the strategy?

Jenny George: They will look at what has happened. They have already trialled different pots of money and will evaluate them.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Q110 Baroness Meacher: In the last five minutes or so, Juste Abramovaite introduced some very important information that relates to the question that I need to explore with you both. Juste, you mentioned the work that you and your programme do, where, when you give people with mental health problems mental health treatment, their reoffending rate drops by 37%, and where, when you give people with addictions treatment, their reoffending rate drops by 55%. Thank you very much for that; it takes me right into what I want to explore with you.

We need to look at how we can optimise community sentences to reduce reoffending as far as possible. We know that community sentences have about 16 different options that may or may not be included. We know that certain of those options—notably, mental health treatment and addiction treatment—are rarely used in community sentences. Most of the discussion this morning has referred to community sentences as though they were a uniform package, whereas of course they are not. It matters terribly what is included in the community sentence. I think, Juste, you were really saying that for us.

To get into the question further, are you both aware of the extent to which the different elements of community sentences are evaluated in terms of their

reduction of reoffending? For example, does anybody look at whether unpaid work or tagging somebody—in other words, the punishment element—is a deterrent to reoffending? What evidence are you two aware of about the relative efficacy of different elements of a community sentence in reducing reoffending? What evidence is available on that, apart from yours, Juste, which is very interesting?

Jenny George: I am not aware of any evidence that looks directly at comparisons between the different options for community sentences. I am aware that the Ministry of Justice and others are aware of the need to do some evaluations, and have been doing some evaluations, of particular aspects of community sentences. Last year, we wrote a report on electronic monitoring or tagging. One of its recommendations was that the Ministry of Justice does more to evaluate the effectiveness of tagging in reducing reoffending.

We know that the Ministry of Justice is focusing on when prisoners leave prison and are being resettled, to reduce reoffending, but that will have wider impacts as well. It is looking particularly at accommodation, employment and health needs, particularly substance misuse health needs. Those are three key areas. It considers that if you do not have those you are unlikely to be resettled effectively and so are more likely to reoffend. I have not seen detailed comparative studies that assess the different aspects of community sentences and their effectiveness.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I agree with Jenny. I am quite up to date on crime literature, but I do not know of a study that looks at all those aspects in the same study. For my own thesis, I explored the conviction rate for community sentences, but that was for community sentences as a whole. I found that they lower the overall crime rate for property crime, which tends to be economically motivated, very low harm and low level.

There are a lot of studies exploring different aspects of community sentencing, but not in one study, if that makes sense. What I did in Birmingham with New Chance was about specific intervention for female offenders and assessing their needs. We were not comparing it with other community sentences, electronic tagging or a curfew. To the best of my knowledge, there are only those specific studies about specific interventions.

When you look at the complexity of trying to evaluate something so big, it is not that straightforward. It requires quite a lot of funding for academics to access the data and go through the ethical applications. It is a big undertaking. We are currently trying to collect evidence of all community sentences and diversion programmes across all police force areas. We work closely with quite a few police force areas, and they say that sometimes they do not know themselves what they are running. They are running them in hundreds. It is a lot.

There are a lot of things happening. We are now trying to get the evidence of what is out there, what has been evaluated and, if it has been evaluated, what the findings are, just to get a better picture of what is happening in England and Wales combined, but we are at the very early stages of that project.

Baroness Meacher: Is it fair to take from what both of you have said that either already or very soon we will have the necessary evidence to make rational decisions about what elements of community sentences are effective in reducing the reoffending of different kinds of offenders? Would it be a fair assertion that we will have the evidence that we need to make those decisions sensibly? Is that right?

Jenny George: I do not want to be the negative auditor on this, but I am not sure how soon that will be available. It is really complicated, so I do not think it is easy to come to that conclusion, I am afraid.

Baroness Meacher: Sure. It is just that if you want to reduce reoffending, and different elements of community sentences are far more efficacious than others with different populations of offenders, obviously we need to know the evidence if we are to make sensible and rational decisions. That is fine. Okay.

We know that, overall, the adult reoffending rate following a community sentence is something like 29.5%. It is something like 4% better than after short-term prison sentences for the same population, if you make sure that you are looking at the same population, which is at least something; it is good. But I have a feeling that we are an awfully long way from optimising the community sentence for these different individuals, particularly taking what Juste said, which was very interesting indeed.

Juste, do you agree that if we want to optimise community sentences, we need to make sure that the high percentage of offenders with mental health problems or addictions are given treatment for their particular problems, whether mental health or addictions, in their community sentence? Do you agree that that is crucial if we want to optimise?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I totally agree with that. There is very strong evidence that substance misuse and mental health issues are big drivers for crime overall. It is not just about reoffending. It is about the crime index offence taking place. It is crucial to provide people with support at the right time and to intervene as early as possible to stop prolific offending. As we know, when an offence happens it can happen four times in 12 months by the same person after the first index offence. If we simply send someone to prison for six weeks, how much better off will they be after six weeks or three months in prison?

In order to function in society we need our family, a home and a job. By sending someone to prison you take all three things away. Prison will cost money. Then there will be rehabilitation after prison, because you will try to help people to go back to normal. The stigma of prison is huge, so getting a job is difficult. Keeping a family together is difficult.

A huge criminogenic effect can happen in prison. You spend more time with other people who are more inclined to criminal activities than you would if you were outside prison. There is evidence about robbery specifically, because there tends to be a quite serious and organised crime element to that. Robbery increases a lot

after custody, because while in prison you pick up the trade in an informal way from other prisoners.

We have done workshops with lived-experience groups of people who have been in the criminal justice system and who talked about the current cost of living crisis and the effect it is having. They said—I never knew this before—that if you are in prison you have absolutely no money when you come out. It takes some time to get benefits. You have no home. In prison, people can lend you money. The only problem is that in a week or so you have to give them back double. Some people are always pushed back to crime because they have nowhere to come back to when they have debts to pay off. It is quite a thing. I can quite easily see how for some people that could be the route to becoming a prolific offender and someone who is in and out of prison for a very long time.

I mentioned substance abuse, mental health and having the right support. Another very important thing is having the right assessment. Across all my studies, all the work that I have done over more than 10 years, we have noticed that the right assessment at the right time is very important. It is one thing to have a good community sentence that intervenes and supports you, but if assessment is not being done you can have cases where someone with an alcohol misuse problem ends up on a treatment for mental health support, just because assessment was not done rightly or because organisations were not sharing the details of the assessment. If you are going through a tough time in your life, being reassessed every time you go somewhere can be quite an unpleasant experience. It is about assessment and the right intervention.

Baroness Meacher: Okay. One of the problems we have is that, for the health service, substance misuse in particular is not a very high priority at all. Therefore, these services are not readily available across the country, yet for criminal justice, as we are discussing here, treatments for addictions in particular but also for mental health issues are paramount. Those things have to be the priority if we are really going to deal with reoffending and save billions of pounds. The incentives for the criminal justice system are very different from the incentives for the health system.

It would be very helpful to hear from the two of you about that, particularly from you, Juste, because of the particular work that you do. I do not know whether either of you feel that you can speculate on the effect of a policy that would optimise particular community sentences in relation to individuals, whether they are addicts or mental health sufferers. Can either of you speculate about the effect on the number of offences committed if we got this right and were able to optimise community sentences in relation to the population of people given those sentences? Can you have a crack at it, Jenny? It is a tall order.

Jenny George: It is difficult. The Ministry of Justice research found that if you took a matched population the reoffending rate was four percentage points higher: 76% from custodial and 72% from community. That would imply that if you moved those

people towards the community there might be 40 fewer reoffences, I guess. Coming up with a number of reoffences from that is very tricky.

Baroness Meacher: I think you are talking about just assuming that community sentences are seen as a sort of blanket, as they are now. Juste, based on your experience and evaluation of the efficacy of addiction and mental health treatment, if we got community sentences right and optimal in relation to the population—in other words, if mental health treatment and addiction treatment were provided to people who needed it—what do you think that the effect of that could be on reoffending, in numbers?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I agree with Jenny. It is very difficult to speculate on precise numbers, because you are trying to measure something that has not happened. That is what I always explain to students. You are trying to measure something that has not happened. Crime took place. Reoffending took place. Now we are trying to count the reoffending that did not take place. It is not that straightforward.

To go back to my very first point, all these studies only give you some indication. They can give you some solid evidence, but the study that we did had only 400 people. It was a small intervention, targeting females, for six months. We had a control sample. That is a relatively small study. For all the reasons that I explained before, it is quite difficult to run these things at a high scale. You need upfront investment for the scheme to take place. Then you need upfront investment for the evaluation to take place. There are always loads of teething problems.

In one of my papers, we tried to have this discussion. We provided confidence intervals for increasing the conviction rate for community sentences by 1% for property crimes. Again, I always try to emphasise that, for community sentences, we are talking about low-level, low-harm offenders. We are not talking about violence against the person or sexual assaults. We said that there would be about 3,600 fewer offences per year. The confidence interval, meaning that we are 95% certain that it is going to be in that area, was between 1,600 and 5,600. Again, I would not like you to take that figure and say, “Okay. Juste said that this is exactly how many crimes we would save”, but the study indicated that that could be the reduction in the number of property crimes per year if community sentences were increased by 1%.

Baroness Meacher: Is that just by increasing community sentences as they are now or by optimising to provide the treatment where it is needed?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: That was just looking at community sentences pooled together.

Baroness Meacher: As they are now.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Yes, as they are now. Again, it depends on the data that is available. I wish I could have included that in the analysis, but we only had the number of community sentences given out. That was the point we had to take the

analysis to, because there was no data on how community sentences were given out. Were they intensive programmes, electronic curfews, unpaid work cleaning the streets or something? We did not have that information. That is why I always say that there are plenty of good studies and good evidence, but it is very indicative. It is difficult to take the precise number and say exactly how many offences will not take place just because you do this thing.

Baroness Meacher: Sure. Perhaps we can use your 37% for mentally ill people, or 55% cuts.

Q111 **The Chair:** I think we need to move on, except that I will pursue this a little more, with one specific question and one very general one, which you may think a very amateur question. You have mentioned property offences. What about violent offences if the use of community sentences on the one hand or custodial sentences on the other were increased? Have you been able to extrapolate any figures or to speculate, to use Molly's original term, about how that would affect reoffending rates?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Personally, I have not done much research on violent crimes. To the best of my knowledge, the dynamics and motivations for violent crimes differ quite a lot from those for economic crimes. With economic crimes, you want to get economic gain. There are studies that show that property crime is seen more as enterprise. You can see it as a business. You need the money, so you do a theft or a domestic burglary. For violent crime, it is different. I am not an expert. I have not done the research. We tend to work more with female offenders or low-level, low-harm offenders. To the best of my knowledge, when it comes to certain violent crimes, judges cannot give community sentences, because the offences committed are far too harmful. Again, I am not an expert in jurisdiction.

The Chair: That is okay. Can I ask my amateur question? Has anyone asked the offenders? You talked about a group that you had involved. We have had some interesting evidence from people who have been subject to community sentences. They talked about what made the difference. That was direct from a very tiny group.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I am an economist by training, so when I do analysis I tend to work with numbers only. In our university, we have a really strong department of psychologists, who do a lot of qualitative work. You would be looking for qualitative studies, which tend to be interviews and focus groups with everyone involved.

Work should be done in that area. I work with a multidisciplinary team, and we have people who talk directly to those concerned. Obviously, talking to the officer providing the community sentence, who is going to be much more willing to talk to academics about what they do, will always be much easier than talking to the offender who is going through the community sentence, but I have no reason to think that that would not have been done. We do a lot with victims and are involved a lot with domestic violence. Quite often, they talk to the victims, so there is an

element of reaching out. I would not know the findings, because I am not a qualitative researcher, but there should be some studies based on that.

Q112 Lord Filkin: Thank you for your evidence and your patience with us on this extremely difficult and interconnected set of questions. As you will understand from the previous notice, my question is essentially about what savings would be produced if we optimised the reduction of reoffending. Pretty obviously, that begs two questions: what would you do to optimise a reduction in reoffending, and what would be the cost and benefits to different parties in the game? The previous evidence, which probably fits with our understanding, seemed to suggest that if you were looking for a focus, as we always are, you would put a pretty heavy focus on increasing the availability of mental health interventions and substance misuse interventions. Is that correct, and is there any other immediate focus that you would recommend?

Jenny George: I feel as though I am saying this a lot, but it is a very tricky question. We do not even have all the information to make a good cost savings point.

Lord Filkin: I am not asking you about the cost at this stage. I am just asking whether, if we were looking to reduce reoffending, we would focus better interventions on substance abuse and mental health problems.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I would put housing interventions equally high currently.

Lord Filkin: Is there evidence to back that up?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Yes.

Lord Filkin: Okay. Maybe we can have that subsequently. If we stick with your premise that there are probably three interventions—better access to substance abuse interventions, mental health and housing—do we know what it would cost for us to give disposals at the level that would be desirable?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: That is a big question.

Lord Filkin: It is a fundamental question. You cannot talk about savings without also talking about the costs of the intervention.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Of course. I would say that it was cheaper than sending someone to prison, so the saving would be there. Prison is so expensive that sending someone to prison and then giving them rehabilitation services after prison will always be more expensive than giving someone interventions for substance misuse or mental health, or addressing housing. When it comes to numbers right now, I would need some data, a calculator and some time.

Lord Filkin: Maybe I can turn the question to Jenny George. Specifically, do you agree that those would be a good focus? Do you have any view on whether we have a rough indication of the costs of raising their availability? They are clearly not available to levels that we desire.

Baroness Meacher: That is tough.

Jenny George: Earlier, I briefly mentioned the study we did looking at resettlement after leaving prison. This connects to community sentences, I guess. Help with accommodation, substance abuse and unemployment, or a means of getting income, is commonly expected to reduce reoffending. The Ministry of Justice is working hard on those. We have some information on new initiatives that it is putting in place for housing. When prisoners leave and cannot necessarily find housing in the local community straightaway, there is a new scheme where they are given temporary housing for 84 days. There are hopeful early signs that show that that would reduce reoffending. I know that I am going around the houses a little. What I am trying to say is that I think that those areas are important, but I do not have the information to be sure that they are the only three areas.

On the costs, you can look at the cost of individual schemes. Housing is very tricky because it is not up to the Ministry of Justice alone. Local government also needs to provide housing, so it is a very tricky area. There is a reducing reoffending board that crosses all of government that looks at some of the difficulties.

On substance misuse, we know that at the moment the proportion of people who leave prison with a diagnosed, assessed substance misuse problem and are in treatment three weeks later is still pretty low. I can check the numbers, but it is only about 30% or so.¹ There is a long way to go to make sure that people, whether they are on a community sentence or leaving prison, are given the treatment in the community that will enable them, hopefully, to reduce their chances of reoffending.

Q113 Lord Filkin: That is helpful. Maybe it will be possible to have a look at that later. If I recollect correctly, the NHS has agreed to ramp up mental health treatment for offenders. Having a look at what they are expecting to put up and whether they are on track to do so could give us a ballpark figure for what we are talking about. Can I leave that question with you, rather than have you answer it now?

Turning to the question itself, the written evidence from the National Audit Office basically said, "Although we all love the argument that this is going to save the MoJ or the criminal justice system a lot of money, the evidence for that is extremely weak". So I think we would be on thin ground if we majored on that as an argument. That is probably a slightly tight definition of benefits and costs, because clearly the MoJ is interested in the benefits and costs.

If we widened it to the benefits and costs to society of a reduction in reoffending, I assume that we would get some different figures. It is the same as trying to keep people healthy. You do the same sort of economic analysis for that, looking at the proportion of people who will stay in work, who do not require benefits, who pay taxes and whose demand for welfare benefits is deferred. Has anybody done any wider aggregation of those sorts of costs and benefits, even the financial ones to public services, let alone the benefits to families of the reduction of reoffending,

¹ The witness has confirmed that this was 37% for 2021–22.

and pulled it together?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: It has not all been pulled together. However, for a lot of interventions, there is a cost-benefit analysis that is termed social return on investment. There is an abbreviation for it that I cannot remember on the spot. It usually shows, and I am fairly confident about this, that £1 invested gets you £2 to £3 back, so you have a positive return. As always, because of the intergenerational impact and having healthier families later on—healthier children who are integrated into society are not committing crimes, have better school attainment and get better jobs and higher income—that return will be bigger.

There are studies. At the minute, most evaluations I am involved with require that you do cost-benefit analysis. I have never worked or had anyone working on anything that says that it would be a negative return. There is always a positive return, but we understand that we cannot follow people for long enough. We do not have cohort studies that list the children who are born in one year and you follow them up for 25 years. Then you could really see what the life outcomes were if someone's mum or dad went to prison or got a community sentence. It would require quite a big study that could follow at least 5,000, 15,000 or 25,000 people for 25 years. Then you could analyse the differences and get a picture. It is not that easy to pull all those different things together and to try to do a one-line conclusion.

Lord Filkin: We cannot wait for 25 years. Jenny George, do you have any comments on estimations of the wider benefits if, for the sake of argument, we reduced the number of people with mental health problems or substance misuse problems by 15% in five years' time? What would be the scale of the benefits to society?

Jenny George: I go back to the description that we gave at the start of the Ministry of Justice's estimate for the cost of reoffending. As I explained, basically, that includes things like the medical costs, the physical harm and victim services. The kind of modelling that you would need to do would be to take something like substance abuse or mental health services and then look at the reduction in offending.

Lord Filkin: Has it been done?

Jenny George: I do not think that any has been done.

Lord Filkin: It is not that difficult, is it? It does not take 25 years. No comment?

Jenny George: It did not take 25 years to do the analysis, but it is tricky. As we explained, there are lots of caveats to all these analyses.

Lord Filkin: When will we get it? To have a fighting chance that anything that we say will have any impact at all, it has to have a chance of five minutes with the Treasury. The Treasury gets everybody making these arguments all the time, so one has to be able, first, to be pretty focused on what would be done; secondly, to have strong evidence that it would work; thirdly, to know what it would cost to do it; and, fourthly, to have some evidence of the benefits. Is there any glimmering of a

package like that that you can provide for us, either now or later?

Jenny George: I am not sure whether no is an acceptable answer. I do not think that the data are set out in that way at the moment.

Lord Blunkett: Does that mean that there is no service-level agreement between the Ministry of Justice and the Treasury on this?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I would not know.

Jenny George: I do not know.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: How they agree with each other is definitely not my area of expertise.

Lord Blunkett: Perhaps we can explore that offline. Normally, there would be a service-level agreement, and it would have to be based on something.

The Chair: We started this little round of questions with a reference to housing. I noticed in written evidence that we received recently that housing is mentioned almost as a sine qua non of rehabilitation, which is not at all surprising because it impacts stability, security and so on, but there is no housing requirement that magistrates can impose. Juste, have you noticed any increased comments about the need for stable housing and so on? You talked about the very short term, just getting over the first few days, but is there anything more that you have picked up?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I did, but it is not something I have researched extensively, so maybe because I am hearing more about it I am starting to look for it more. I would not want to say that it is causal, but we ran a workshop with a lived experience group. We worked with APPEAL and Revolving Doors. They have people who have been in the criminal justice system and are now trying to rebuild their lives. There was an interesting and insightful Zoom conversation over a few hours. They mentioned housing quite a few times.

These interventions are very important, but it is also a very complex task to know what to scale up and how, and the optimal way of doing it. Jenny and I would be in an impossible position right now for giving you an exact formula or exact numbers, because it is a huge undertaking. There is evidence on all these things, but the evidence is in individual parts.

I am an academic, and an academic works with specific projects, specific crime trends and specific offenders. A lot of us are doing it; it is not just me. You build that evidence base, but it is different from what you are saying; it is different from pulling everything together and comparing all the different community sentences in one document. It would be worth looking into something like this in future and trying to get specialists to produce it.

The Chair: There is not a great deal of difference in the need for housing between people on a community sentence and people who have been in short-term custody.

It is an issue for everyone.

- Q114 Baroness Prashar:** Thank you very much for your evidence so far, with all the caveats. It has been very insightful. I will read two statements, almost as an attempt to summarise what you have been broadly saying to us. I would like to hear from you, when you have heard those statements, whether they are fair and accurate. If not, why, and what would be the nearest, fairest and most accurate statements?

The first statement is: all other things being equal, community sentences are more cost-effective than short-term custodial sentences at tackling reoffending. The second one is: all other things being equal, do you think reducing the use of short-term custodial sentences and correspondingly increasing use of community sentences would result in significant savings and fewer crimes? What are your observations on those two statements?

Jenny George: In the first statement, I think you said that community sentences are more cost-effective than short-term custodial sentences. Despite all the caveats and the lack of data on community sentences, we are fairly confident that the information we have seen shows that they are cheaper. The information we have seen would imply that, with the best matching possible and everything else, there is a slight improvement in reducing reoffending, but there are lots of caveats to that.

On the second statement, about reducing custodial sentences and increasing the use of community sentences resulting in significant savings, you need to think about the lack of a linear nature of the cost. When you are looking at things like custodial sentences, a high proportion of that cost is fixed or semi-fixed. If you save by one person not going to prison, you do not save one prison officer or one prison wing. It is complicated to see the cost saving from that side of it, if that makes sense.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I agree with the first statement. On the second, I would add that for certain crimes, such as low-level, low-harm offences, it would be important to note the surrounding evidence. I believe that although community sentences would reduce reoffending, and I fully agree with Jenny on the linear cost, I think that long term we will see savings through the reduction of reoffending. Yesterday, I made some notes. Community sentences are cheaper because they cost less to implement, and less reoffending means less cost to the police and courts, but it is important to note the long-term outcomes that will have such a big positive, long-lasting impact on families, especially children and young people. So I agree with the first statement. I would slightly modify the second statement and add certain crimes, such as low-level or low-harm offences. Then I would be happy with that statement.

Baroness Prashar: That is very clear. Thank you very much indeed.

- Q115 Lord Sandhurst:** I want to ask an open question. It is now your opportunity; it is open season. Looking beyond cost-effectiveness—I have one or two questions about that—and what is effective, what other things are or might be effective in reducing reoffending? In other words, you have a magic wand and you are in charge. What would you try?

Jenny George: Some of the things we have talked about briefly already, such as making sure that accommodation, substance abuse treatment and employment are in place for as many people as possible. Those are areas that the Ministry of Justice is focusing on. There is a wider number of services that it also provides on things like emotional well-being and family relationships. All those kinds of things are known to be important in reducing reoffending. They are some of the things we focused on in the study we did on resettlement support.

Going back a bit further in our past catalogue, we did a study that looked at improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system. There were some interesting points there, such as pre-sentence reports and their importance in being able to ensure that somebody gets the right package of help in the sentencing. There are some local variations in outcomes. There are things like problem-solving courts that try to take a more joined-up approach to women and their difficulties, understanding the underlying issues of domestic abuse, addiction and so on. I think that joined-up approach helps to reduce reoffending, if you can get the package together. A range of points needs to be in place.

Lord Sandhurst: What data collection is being done specific to problem-solving courts to compare them with outcomes from ordinary or non-problem-solving courts?

Jenny George: It is fairly early days, but there are some positive signs, particularly in Manchester.

Lord Sandhurst: If you are to have a trial, you have to be able to measure the outcomes.

Jenny George: Yes. Looking back at the study, we found that areas with a whole-system approach tended to have initiatives that were clearer referral pathways for women and easier services in the community. I think we were cautiously positive, as much as the NAO is ever cautiously positive about those kinds of things. The pre-sentence reports are important in understanding that.

Lord Sandhurst: I will follow that up in a moment. Juste, what are your bright ideas?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I could not agree more with Jenny. I had highlighted problem-solving courts as something I wanted to talk about. Jenny talked about one in Manchester. I am from the University of Birmingham where we have very close links with West Midlands Police. They came to our annual conference last month and talked about problem-solving courts.

On pre-sentence reports, it is applicable for females to have very clear inclusion/exclusion criteria. It started only in January this year. They are collecting the data, but it is at the early stages, as Jenny said. The signs are very good. They have monthly mentoring sessions, which are provided for low-level female offenders who are not being sent to prison. They said that the biggest challenge for them was to get the right assessment and for all the parties to agree on that one

assessment. They can assess the person once, and all the parties will be happy for that assessment and we do not have to repeat it five times. They spoke a lot about that and said how crucial it was to get it right.

Yesterday, when I started preparing the notes, I noted that it was about a more holistic approach to preventing crime to start with. Most crimes are committed by people who have committed a first offence, so it is not just about reducing reoffending; it should first be about preventing the initial offence taking place. Once that initial offence takes place, the chances of reoffending are much higher than at stage zero. It would mean starting by looking at the school system. School exclusion to prison pipeline is getting more attention now in England and Wales, but a lot of research has been done in the United States of America, so most data is based on that. There are some quite simple things, such as access to activities for teenagers—summer camps, basketball, baseball, football, you name it—that create a sense of belonging and provide children with the right solid role models. That is one of the best and most important things money should be invested in to prevent crime and then reoffending.

Another big point is about not sending people to prison for civil debts. Civil debt is something like TV licence non-payment or council tax non-payment. The vast majority of those it affects are females. A lot of research has been done by APPEAL. I forget the exact percentage, but I think that 70% or 80% of females do not even know that they are being called to court. They tend to be people who have temporary housing, so they move a lot. Then the letter comes about TV licence non-payment. There is a £60 fine. They might not even still live at that address. Within 14 days it becomes £120. Very quickly, within two months, you are talking about a civil debt of £800 or £900.

It is not an offence; it is a civil debt. You do not get legal aid or any support when it comes to court because it is not an offence, but you can still go to prison. That is massively overlooked and it affects mainly females in a very negative way. Quite often, young kids are involved and the mother ends up in prison. It is very likely that the children will go into care. If you send someone down that path, there is reoffending. There is an effect on the mother or the father and children. Problem-solving courts, like the one in Birmingham, follow that closely and do a really good evaluation to see whether it can be scaled up.

The last point is about after-prison support. We ran a really interesting workshop in London last month with people who worked with prison and rehabilitation services. They said that, although support is in place, sometimes very simple, practical steps are missing for people to access it. When they go to see their probation officer, a prepaid bus fare or something is needed. Then they know there is a housing issue, so they will get an appointment to see someone to address the housing issue. The appointment will be 20 miles away and there are no ways or means for them to get to that appointment on time. As an economist, I see that as a huge waste of money, because the housing association support team are waiting, somebody is being paid to attend that appointment and help the person, but a missing bus fare of £2 or £3

means that they cannot attend the appointment. It is important to review the practical steps for rehabilitation after prison to make sure that people are not left without housing and access to transport. As Jenny said, it is the holistic approach—the family connections, physical health, mental health and everything else that all of us need to function well as a society.

Lord Blunkett: Can you find us any statistics on the volume of civil penalties? That would be really helpful.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I can contact APPEAL. I work closely with it. We have an alliance called “Is it a Crime to be Poor?”, which represents how badly poorer people are criminalised in the justice system. If I got a fine of £60 I would pay it, but for somebody else it might lead to a prison sentence. There are lots of examples of how being poor puts you at a disadvantage. It is the same as having a mental or physical disability. It is another vulnerability that makes you more likely to be punished more harshly in the criminal justice system. APPEAL works a lot on civil debt imprisonment. There has been a campaign in Wales to abolish it; for non-payment of council tax you cannot go to prison. That is definitely something to look into in more detail.

Lord Sandhurst: I want to put this proposition to you. Problem-solving courts are in their early days, but they offer a more holistic approach. As I understand it, the two of you think that there is already evidence of cost-benefit gain and societal gain. Is that right?

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Of course.

Lord Sandhurst: I am not trying to commit you long term, but there is evidence of that at this stage.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: There is emerging evidence. That is what we would say.

Lord Sandhurst: You and previous witnesses have pointed to the importance of dealing with substance abuse, alcohol, housing and mental health. Those have a tie-in with problem-solving courts and community orders generally. I am trying to get some clear ground first. We know that a community sentence is probably cheaper, but certainly not more expensive than a prison sentence. You point out that prisons are already there, and we have the standing costs and so on, and we will have to have prisons anyway for some people.

What emerges is that for lesser offences, particularly where it is dishonesty or just being rather antisocial, proper, effective community sentences are no less effective, probably more effective and, in the long term, probably less expensive. We also need to bear in mind that when someone has been in prison the Probation Service has to devote plenty of attention to getting them up and running again.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Agreed.

Lord Sandhurst: I do not know whether that is included in prison sentence costs. It

jolly well ought to be, because the true cost of sending someone to prison is the cost of imprisoning them and the cost of post-sentence community service, so it is much more. If you were not putting them in prison in the first place, you could divert some of that money to giving better and more effective community service orders, because you would have the same probation officers available and they could do their job more effectively. Is that right?

Jenny George: Yes. One of the earliest studies the ministry did on supervision by probation showed that that was more effective in reducing reoffending, so the role of probation is key, but we must not forget just how stretched that service is. I think that in December 2022 the vacancy rate for probation officers was 29%, so most probation officer areas are operating at over 100% capacity.

Lord Sandhurst: The point I am making is that it would not improve that aspect, because you have them either in lieu of prison or post prison, but they would not have had the prison experience and you would not be having to get them back into society. They might not be very good members of society, but they might be starting from a slightly higher base. Has any thought been given to that? It seems pretty fundamental to me.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I have it in my notes that the cost of prison is not just the cost of the prison; it is also probation services. I completely agree with Jenny that the Probation service is crucial when people come out of prison. Without it, reoffending rates would be much higher. In a way, I see it as the Probation Service supervising community service but after prison. Especially for low-level, low-harm offences, rather than sending someone to prison for six weeks, three months or four months, the money would be much better directed at assessing them. There is a very famous political slogan about being tough on crime, but what about being tough on the causes of crime and why crime is taking place? Is it housing, substance misuse or employment?

The Chair: Before we move away too far from the proposition that the costs of imprisoning someone should include post-sentence supervision, you were nodding at that, Jenny, but it does not show up in our transcript. Perhaps you would say, "Yes, I agree", or something more.

Jenny George: Yes. In the written evidence that we submitted we did a very rough estimate, as I explained, of the total running costs of prison divided by the people in prisons-type number, but that does not include the requirement to supervise them following release, and that will obviously increase the cost.

The Chair: One should include them?

Jenny George: Yes.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I agree with that as well. I am not just nodding; I am also saying it.

Lord Sandhurst: Obviously, you have to break it down, because some people will be

in prison anyway and you will have it for them, but for those who might be kept out, there is a saving.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Yes, absolutely.

Jenny George: Yes.

Q116 **Lord Filkin:** Could I come to the evidence that the Chief Probation Officer gave us, which you may not have seen? He also gave a note subsequently about what is happening in Greater Manchester. One of his arguments is that we have a highly centralised system, and probation by and large is not highly integrated with local communities and local service provision. It cannot effectively brigade the other essential interventions to reduce reoffending into a more sensible package of interventions, putting aside the big questions about enough probation officers and enough money.

The note he gave us is only a one-pager, but it is extremely interesting about what is happening in Greater Manchester, where, as you know, the NHS and probation commissioning are devolved, so we already have an example of a more devolved system with the potential for greater integration of interventions to deter reoffending. It looks as though we already have one being built or under way in the north-west. Are you aware of that? Is it important? Has it been evaluated?

The Chair: This is the Chief Inspector of Probation, not the head of Probation.

Lord Filkin: It is the Chief Inspector of Probation's information about what is happening in Greater Manchester. The question is about Greater Manchester.

Jenny George: Greater Manchester tends to be at the forefront of a lot of the innovation. I have not seen a specific evaluation of this, but, as we touched on earlier, we think that the joined-up nature is a good thing. Often, it is about availability and awareness as to where you can point people, so the more joined-up the system is, the better from that point of view. In the women's report that I talked about earlier, there was comment about making sure that there was enough provision in the community for people to be diverted from prison sentences, but if there is no option it slightly ties the hands of sentencers, so the joined-up approach helps with that.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: I agree. We have seen it not just in Greater Manchester but in a lot of other places. They came to last month's meeting and said that sometimes a very centralised system is very far away from local needs, and better integration and information sharing is definitely key to a more holistic approach to the whole system. We have had a lot of cases where mental health units would dismiss someone on one ground and send them to another unit. Then that unit would dismiss them and send them to another unit. The person would be travelling around in that triaging of services. To have all the services sitting together as a multidisciplinary team trying to assess and help individuals in the best possible way is definitely very much needed.

Jenny George: Historically, it has been quite tricky to navigate sharing data between Justice and Health. It can still be quite tricky, but they are making strides now in being closer to sharing information; otherwise, you can get to a position where a person supervising an offender does not even know whether the health service has assessed them as having a need for a service, so how can they check whether they are getting that health service? There are things like that which historically have been quite tricky, so the closer the agencies can work together, the better.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: We have seen that too, and we have done a lot of work on it.

Lord Filkin: I put the question, because there is considerable political attention at present on whether we can devolve more things and get better results. It does not look as if we are getting great results with a highly centralised system, so what we are doing in Greater Manchester and what is going on there is highly relevant. In particular, if there is evidence that it works and it does not cost a lot more money, there will be interest in that.

The Chair: I cannot remember whether when you asked the question you referred to Greater Manchester or just Manchester, but let us stress that it is Greater Manchester.

Lord Filkin: It is fundamentally Greater Manchester, because that is where the pooled budgets work and the powers lie.

The Chair: Indeed. I am making exactly that point. Do any Members want to ask follow-up or new questions of our witnesses? It does not look like it. Would either of you like to add anything that you think we have managed to overlook but we really should know about?

Jenny George: No, thank you.

The Chair: There will be an opportunity afterwards.

Dr Juste Abramovaite: Thank you.

Lord Blunkett: I think we have made a note of some of the stats we are looking for, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you both very much. It has been extremely interesting.