



House of Commons  
Committee of Public Accounts

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# Resettlement support for prison leavers

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Seventy-Eighth Report of Session  
2022–23

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Committee of Public Accounts, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5776; the Committee's email address is [pubacom@parliament.uk](mailto:pubacom@parliament.uk).

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## Summary

Reoffending causes harm to victims and costs the criminal justice system and wider society dearly. In 2019, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) estimated that reoffending across all adult offenders identified in 2016 cost society £16.7 billion. Prison leavers are more likely to reoffend if they are not resettled into the community, particularly if they have nowhere to live, no job or other income and have poor continuity of healthcare. The government provides a range of services to help prison leavers settle back into the community as part of its efforts to reduce reoffending. But there has been a decline in the quality of resettlement services in recent years across England and Wales. For the 30 inspections taking place in 2022–23, and for which details had been published by 12 April 2023, HMI Prisons rated no prisons as “good” for their work on rehabilitation and release planning. As recently as 2019–20, 30% of prisons were rated good. Alongside these worrying figures, we are particularly concerned that the government is not doing enough to support prisoners with substance misuse needs prior to their release. It is disappointing that HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) has not done more to understand why some prison leavers have better outcomes than others, such as for what reasons black prison leavers are less likely than white prison leavers to secure a job post-release.

The Probation Service has struggled to recruit and retain key staff, which has seriously affected the level and quality of support provided to prisoners. Many case officers have excessive caseloads as a result, which reduces the support they can provide to individuals. For example, essential handover meetings between prison and probation staff did not happen in around 50% of cases from April 2022 to January 2023. As recently as December 2022, 29% of probation officer roles were vacant. HMPPS told the Committee that it has made some recent progress on recruitment, with 2,000 more staff in the probation service than this time last year. However, it takes a long time for new recruits to be fully trained and we remain concerned that the workforce no longer has the balance of experience it needs to safely manage the probation caseload. The prison estate is also facing unprecedented pressure to safely meet the current demands on capacity, which will in turn increase demand for HMPPS’ already strained resettlement services.

HMPPS relies on local providers to provide tailored support to offenders and address areas of need associated with reoffending, but HMPPS is failing to get many basics right when commissioning these services. Initial performance across high value Commissioned Rehabilitative Service contracts has been poor, and smaller providers report that contracts are “highly process driven” and do not focus on quality outcomes for prison leavers.

## Introduction

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Prisons and probation services have two core purposes: to carry out the sentences given by the courts; and to rehabilitate people in their care and supervision to help them lead law-abiding and useful lives and to protect the public. From April 2020 to March 2021, 38% of adults released from prison reoffended in the 12 months following their release. Reoffending has significant costs to society. This includes direct financial losses to victims and the costs that the criminal justice system must meet, from running police investigations and court hearings, to holding offenders in prisons and ensuring their effective supervision in the community. In 2019 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) estimated that reoffending across all adult offenders identified in 2016 cost society £16.7 billion (in 2017–18 prices).

HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) is an executive agency of the MoJ. It carries out sentences given by the courts, in custody and in the community. It is responsible for operating public sector prisons, overseeing private sector prisons and the Probation Service in England and Wales. When people leave prison, HMPPS aims to protect the public by managing any risks they pose, and to reduce the chances of them reoffending by supporting their resettlement in the community. Prison leavers are more likely to reoffend if they are not resettled into the community, for example if they have nowhere to live, no job or other income, and have poor continuity of healthcare.

## Conclusions and recommendations

1. **HMPPS’s resettlement services are not as effective or consistent as they should be, leading to inequalities for prison leavers.** Following a significant reorganisation of probation services in 2021, HMPPS set out a vision of what resettlement services should look like in its ‘target operating model’. However, prisoners are still not consistently receiving the support they need to resettle into the community. A 2022 internal review concluded that HMPPS’ plans to deliver that vision were unclear, and in 2022–23 HMPPS identified that about half of key resettlement activities were still not routinely happening. For example, essential handover meetings between prison and probation staff did not happen as intended in 50% of cases between April 2022 and January 2023. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) concluded there has been a decline in outcomes for prisoners in recent years, with prison inspections recording a decline in the quality of resettlement work since 2018–19. Of the 30 inspections carried out in 2022–23 and published by 12 April 2023, HMI Prisons rated no prisons as “good” for “rehabilitation and release planning”. These inspections adult prisons containing over 23,600 prisoners). HMPPS also does not understand why some prison leavers experience differential resettlement outcomes based on their race or gender, with black prison leavers less likely to be employed six months post-release than white prison leavers (11% and 18% respectively).

**Recommendation 1a:** *In its Treasury Minute response to this report, HMPPS should set out what steps it is taking to understand the causes of inequalities experienced by prison leavers.*

**b)** *Within six months, HMPPS should write to the Committee setting out an action plan for improved support for those who leave the prison system, including clear steps towards its intended approach of an adequate and consistent resettlement service for all prison leavers.*

2. **We are concerned that government is not doing enough to support prisoners with substance misuse needs before they are released.** Despite the previous Committee’s recommendations in 2017, HMPPS and NHS England have been slow to improve the collection and sharing of prison leavers’ data, limiting their ability to provide appropriate support and monitor outcomes. This lack of progress puts the successful resettlement of offenders with substance misuse needs at risk. HMPPS is working on ways to improve data sharing around substance misuse through initiatives such as the Probation Notification Actioning Plan, which will enable drug treatment providers in prisons to notify the Probation Service of referrals they have made to providers in the community. However, support in prisons still lacks consistency, with treatment options often dependent on the length of prison stay. We are concerned that HMPPS and the relevant health bodies involved in resettlement do not seem to have a consistent definition of success when measuring outcomes for substance misuse. Substance misuse is also the only area where the Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Board has not agreed key responsibilities or performance reporting arrangements.

**Recommendation 2:** *The Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Board should agree metrics to measure end-to-end success in treating substance misuse needs in offenders and routinely publish how it is performing against these metrics.*

3. **We are concerned that HMPPS is not doing enough to retain the experienced probation workers needed to safely manage its large and increasing caseload.** Staff shortages and high caseloads are negatively affecting resettlement support for prison leavers. In 2021–22, 8% of probation officers left the service, the highest level in the last six years. People join the prison and probation services to “make a difference”, but those leaving often cite workload pressures and feeling unable to do a good job, with many probation staff managing more than 70 cases against a suggested case load of 30 to 60. HMPPS says it is seeking to improve staff retention through a new three-year pay deal and increased focus on development and wellbeing. It is also working to rebalance workloads by recruiting “a record number” of probation officers, with an extra 2,000 staff now in post across the service compared to a year earlier. However, recruitment will not provide an immediate solution to HMPPS’ problems. It takes 15 to 21 months to train new recruits and we remain concerned that the workforce no longer has the balance of experience it needs to safely manage the probation caseload.

**Recommendation 3:** *In its Treasury Minute response, HMPPS should set out what additional steps it will take to retain and incentivise experienced staff over the next 12 to 18 months and what targets it has for doing so.*

4. **HMPPS is still not getting all the basics right when commissioning resettlement services.** HMPPS works with Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers from the private and voluntary sectors who provide tailored support to offenders in areas such as accommodation, employment and wellbeing. HMPPS issued 110 contracts to CRS providers ready for ‘day one’ of the new unified probation service but a second wave of contracts for a wider range of services, such as finance, benefits and debt support, is still underway. HMPPS holds CRS providers to account against two administrative measures but does not systematically monitor all providers’ activities or offenders’ outcomes. Some providers have criticised the current CRS contracts for being “highly process driven” and focussing too much on inputs, such as whether a prison leaver has been offered an appointment, instead of good quality outcomes. HMPPS’s baseline audit of 28 highest value contracts identified poor performance by both the Probation Service and CRS providers. In 89% of contracts the Probation Service’s referrals to CRS providers did not meet standards in ‘some regards’ or ‘failed’ to meet standards, and in 68% of contracts providers did not sufficiently meet offenders’ rehabilitative needs. We are pleased that HMPPS tried to remove potential barriers to entry for small and voluntary sector organisations, but a 2021 survey of providers found the commissioning process was still “complex, cumbersome and bureaucratic”, with many small, specialist organisations finding it too hard to engage with HMPPS.

**Recommendation 4a:** *In its Treasury Minute response, HMPPS should set out how it will ensure good quality outcomes for prison leavers under its existing Commissioned Rehabilitative Services contracts.*

**b)** *HMPPS should also set out in the Treasury Minute how it will apply the lessons learned from the procurement of these services to its future commissioning exercises.*



5. **It is vital that HMPPS understands more about what works best if it is to get the best outcomes from its limited funds for prisoner resettlement work.** Although it received £550 million in the 2021 Spending Review to reduce reoffending, MoJ says that “difficult choices” lie ahead as it looks for ways to make savings and become more efficient. It is often easiest for departments to save money through cutting spending in “discretionary” areas, such as reducing reoffending. These funding decisions are made harder given many of HMPPS’s planned evaluations for resettlement programmes are still in their early stages, so it lacks the evidence base it needs to determine the effectiveness of its investments. For accommodation support, outcomes have remained stable with 76% of prison leavers from April 2022 to February 2023 in settled accommodation after three months, compared with 75% in 2021–22. HMI Probation found that HMPPS’s flagship initiative to provide 84 days of housing to prisoners at risk of homelessness was working well but securing longer term accommodation for prison leavers remained difficult. There are some encouraging signs within employment support initiatives, with 25% of prison leavers from April 2022 to February 2023 employed after six months, compared with 17% in 2021–22. But HMPPS’s plans to evaluate its employment initiatives are still in the early stages and as of May 2023 it had no firm plans to carry out essential impact evaluations. Determining whether recent improvements in prison leavers’ outcomes are attributable to its interventions or whether they may have happened anyway will be a key challenge for HMPPS.

**Recommendation 5:** *In its Treasury Minute response, HMPPS should set out its plan for evaluating its current resettlement initiatives, including confirming how its evaluations for resettlement programmes will inform its approach in the next spending review.*

6. **Unprecedented pressures on the prison estate threaten the quality of resettlement services today and in the future.** The prison estate is under “exceptional” pressure to meet current demands on capacity. At the end of March 2023, the prison population was at around 99% (84,400) of safe capacity (85,500). MoJ forecasts that the prison population could reach somewhere in the range of 93,100 to 106,300 by March 2027, an increase of 10% to 26% compared to March 2023. MoJ and HMPPS are adamant there will always be space to accommodate prisoners without compromising safety. However, they accept that the ongoing lack of “headroom” is hampering much needed refurbishment across the prison estate, and emergency solutions will cost the taxpayer more than traditional prison accommodation. MoJ also says that inflation means it will be “very challenging” to build new prison capacity and increase the number of staff in the prison and probation service. As the prison population grows, it will inevitably add pressure to already strained resettlement services within prisons and the community. HMPPS does not currently have a long-term strategy to manage the anticipated increase in demand for resettlement services.

**Recommendation 6:** *The Ministry of Justice should write to us within six months with its latest 5 to 10 year projections for:*

- *its prison population and its safe prison capacity;*
- *bringing six new prisons online; and*
- *the level of demand for resettlement services.*

# 1 Performance of resettlement services

1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) about the resettlement support provided for prison leavers.<sup>1</sup>

2. Prisons and probation services have two core purposes: to carry out the sentences given by the courts; and to rehabilitate people in their care and supervision to help them lead law-abiding and useful lives and to protect the public. In 2021–22, there were 58,915 releases from prison in total (including some people released more than once). From April 2020 to March 2021, 38% of adults released from prison reoffended in the 12 months following their release. Reoffending has significant costs to society. This includes direct financial losses to victims and the costs that the criminal justice system must meet, from running police investigations and court hearings, to holding offenders in prisons and ensuring their effective supervision in the community. In 2019 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) estimated that reoffending across all adult offenders identified in 2016 cost society £16.7 billion (in 2017–18 prices).<sup>2</sup>

3. HMPPS is an executive agency of the MoJ. It carries out sentences given by the courts, in custody and in the community. It is responsible for operating public sector prisons, overseeing private sector prisons and the Probation Service in England and Wales. When people leave prison, HMPPS aims to protect the public by managing any risks they pose, and to reduce the chances of them reoffending by supporting their resettlement in the community.<sup>3</sup> HMPPS has implemented two major reorganisations of probation services in the past nine years. In 2014, the government contracted out probation services for low- and medium-risk offenders to Community Rehabilitation Companies who were also responsible for delivering resettlement services. In July 2018, the MoJ decided to terminate these contracts.<sup>4</sup> In December 2019 (in Wales) and June 2021 (in England), HMPPS re-unified probation services, including prisoners' resettlement services, bringing this into a newly formed public sector Probation Service comprising 12 probation regions led by regional probation directors.<sup>5</sup> From the first day of the new unified Probation Service, staff have been able to draw on specialist resettlement support from Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers across the private and voluntary sectors.

4. During and following a prisoner's release, support should be available to help them address known barriers to successful resettlement. For example, prison leavers are more likely to reoffend if they have nowhere to live, no job or other income, or have poor continuity of healthcare.<sup>6</sup> Resettlement planning should start from a prisoner's first day in custody and continue throughout their sentence. In February 2021 HMPPS published a new 'target operating model' for probation services in England and Wales, setting out its vision of what resettlement services should look like.<sup>7</sup>

1 C&AG's Report, [Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1282, 12 May 2023

2 C&AG's Report, para 1

3 C&AG's Report, para 2

4 C&AG's Report, para 6

5 C&AG's Report, para 1.2

6 C&AG's Report, para 4

7 C&AG's Report, paras 1.5, 2.2

## The quality of resettlement services

5. HMPPS completed an internal review of resettlement services in July 2022 to understand whether it was on track with its new structure and operations. This review concluded HMPPS had a clear vision for resettlement services but its plan to deliver that vision was not clear.<sup>8</sup>

6. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) provides independent scrutiny of the conditions for, and treatment of, prisoners. In its written submission to us, HMI Prisons concluded there has been a decline in outcomes for prisoners in recent years.<sup>9</sup> At each inspection HMI Prisons assesses the quality of support given to prisoners to help to reduce their likelihood of reoffending and prepare them for release into the community, known as “rehabilitation and release planning”. In 2019–20, 30% of prisons received a “good” rating for this work. Since then the number of prisons receiving a positive rating has fallen year-on-year.<sup>10</sup> There were 30 HMI Prisons inspections of adult prisons in 2022–23 that were published by 12 April 2023, accommodating over 23,600 prisoners in total.<sup>11</sup> None of these 30 adult prisons were rated as good for resettlement work by HMI Prisons. When we asked MoJ about this decline, it argued that the different mix of prisons selected for inspection every year makes it difficult to compare results, although it later acknowledged that there was nothing to suggest HMI Prisons had not inspected a representative sample of prisons in 2022–23.<sup>12</sup>

7. HMPPS told us one of its biggest concerns is whether it can consistently deliver its vision for probation services across all corners of England and Wales.<sup>13</sup> In 2022–23, an HMPPS review found 14 out of 27 key events in the resettlement process were not routinely happening. For example, essential handover meetings between prison and probation staff did not happen as intended in 50% of cases between April 2022 and January 2023.<sup>14</sup> In response to our question about what it was doing to ensure that no-one going through the prison system gets missed, MoJ told us it has a programme of work over the next two years to improve the consistency of resettlement support.<sup>15</sup>

8. HMPPS and MoJ monitor how outcomes for prison leavers vary between groups. For example, in 2021–22: 8% of female prison leavers were employed after six months compared with 18% of male prison leavers; 11% of black or black British prison leavers were employed after six months compared with 18% of white prison leavers. HMPPS has not performed analysis to identify the causes of this variation and accepts that it is an area it needs to develop further.<sup>16</sup> HMPPS gave us examples of how it is working to tailor services to meet individual needs, such as a specialist project in the north west working with individuals who have autism and Anawim, a women’s centre in Birmingham where probation staff are co-located with other relevant support services.<sup>17</sup>

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8 C&AG’s Report, para 3.2

9 [IPL0004](#)

10 C&AG’s Report, para 1.7

11 At the end of March 2023, 119 prisons in England and Wales held around 84,400 prisoners (Ministry of Justice, [Population bulletin: monthly March 2023](#))

12 Qq 29, 40, 117

13 Q5

14 C&AG’s Report, para 2.8

15 Q38

16 Q11; C&AG’s Report, para 1.13

17 Qq 21, 23

## Support for offenders with substance misuse needs

9. In 2017 this Committee recommended that HMPPS and NHS England (NHSE) improve information-sharing arrangements between health, prison and probation staff following concerns that healthcare records do not follow patients as they enter or leave prisons.<sup>18</sup> The NAO found that HMPPS and NHSE have been slow to improve the collection and sharing of prison leavers' data, limiting their ability to provide appropriate support and monitor outcomes.<sup>19</sup> The NHS's 'informed consent' approach to managing patient data means prison and probation staff have not necessarily known whether someone has been referred for drug treatment on release. HMPPS told us that its Probation Notification and Actioning Project (PNAP), which aims to support effective handover between prisons and probation on treatment requirements, will be "game-changing" in giving probation staff the information they need to support prison leavers with substance misuse needs.<sup>20</sup> HMPPS aimed to launch the service across England in April 2022 but was significantly delayed due to lengthy negotiations with health commissioners on the legal basis of sharing prison leavers' health information without their consent.<sup>21</sup> HMPPS now expects to roll PNAP out to all regions of England and Wales by the end of March 2024.<sup>22</sup>

10. The continuity of prison leavers' drug treatment in the community has remained low for many years. In 2021–22, 37% of prison leavers in England with a substance misuse treatment referral were engaged in community-based treatment three weeks after release (38.1% in 2020–21).<sup>23</sup> We questioned whether HMPPS was providing enough support to prisoners with substance misuse needs prior to their release. MoJ told us it has 50 incentivised substance-free living units established in prisons, which will increase to 100 units by March 2025. MoJ also secured £120 million over the next three years under the government's 10-year drug plan, which it told us will be used to improve data and better co-ordinate pre- and post-release support for substance misuse.<sup>24</sup> We asked how much of HMPPS' work is focused on harm reductions, such as drug replacements, as opposed to recovery and abstinence. HMPPS told us that this balance is determined by clinicians from NHSE and the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC). HMPPS told us that the treatment options offered to an individual can depend on the length of their prison sentence.<sup>25</sup>

11. Substance misuse is the only area where the Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Board—made up of senior representatives from 12 central government bodies, and with a remit to identify opportunities to reduce reoffending—has not set out the main departments which have a role. The Board has also not set out a detailed governance structure or performance reporting arrangements across departments' work – either on substance misuse treatment or on other initiatives aimed at reducing reoffending.<sup>26</sup>

12. We asked MoJ and HMPPS about how successful outcomes for prisoners with substance misuse needs are measured. HMPPS told us there is range of things that could

18 Committee of Public Accounts, [Mental health in prisons](#), Eighth Report of Session 2017–19, HC 400, 13 December 2017

19 C&AG's Report, para 22

20 Q63; C&AG's Report, para 2.12

21 C&AG's Report, para 2.12

22 Q63

23 C&AG's Report, para 1.24

24 Qq 64–67; C&AG's Report, para 3.7

25 Qq 69–70

26 C&AG's Report, para 3.13

be measured and that HMPPS and clinicians would “all measure slightly different things”. For example, while MoJ told us that DHSC evaluates different types of intervention and what is successful in helping people to stop substance misuse, HMPPS told us its primary interest is potential harm to the public and whether a prison leaver reoffends.<sup>27</sup>

## Staffing pressures

13. When speaking about the recent decline in the quality of resettlement services, HMPPS told us that it needs “good staffing levels to deliver the best services”.<sup>28</sup> Although the number of probation officers increased following the service’s unification in June 2021, the number of unfilled roles has also increased and pressure on the Service is acute. In December 2022 1,762 out of 6,158 probation officer roles were unfilled, a vacancy rate of 29%. In 2021–22, 8% of probation officers and 15% of prison officers left the service, the highest levels in the last six years. As a result of these staff shortages, HMPPS is not completing all the resettlement work that it recognises is essential.<sup>29</sup>

14. MoJ explained that people join the prison and probation services to make a difference but HMPPS told us that staff who are leaving “consistently” blame workload pressures which leave them feeling unable to do a good job.<sup>30</sup> HMPPS’s audit of 98 cases and feedback from 15 service managers confirmed many of their probation staff were managing more than 70 prison leaver cases at a time, against a suggested case load of 30 to 60.<sup>31</sup> MoJ told us that caseloads are directly related to stress levels and the difficulty of the job, which it says makes recruitment a “really important driver for retention”.<sup>32</sup> HMPPS told us it has recruited 4,000 probation officers over the last three years, which it described as “a record number”, and that HMPPS now has an extra 2,000 staff in post across the service compared to the previous year. However, HMPPS explained it takes 15 to 21 months to train new probation recruits and, even after they have completed training, it will take them a little while to get completely up to speed.<sup>33</sup> HMPPS told us that working with such a different mix of new and experienced staff is creating some “real challenges” for managing the probation caseload.<sup>34</sup>

15. HMPPS told us it is seeking to improve the conditions of service for existing staff to assist with staff retention. It has implemented a new three-year pay deal and increased its focus on staff development and wellbeing. We asked whether pay increases would reduce the amount of resettlement funding available for other activities, HMPPS acknowledged that getting both the right number of staff and rate of pay was a “constant balancing act” but insisted that investing in its staff was a priority. HMPPS told us it has recently seen a slight improvement in the rate of retention for probation officers.<sup>35</sup>

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27 Qq 77–79

28 Q42

29 C&AG’s Report, paras 2.6–2.8

30 Q57

31 C&AG’s Report, para 2.8

32 Q35

33 Qq 32, 43

34 Q58

35 Q57, 115



## Commissioning resettlement support

16. Probation staff can draw on specialist support from Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers from the private and voluntary sectors to help support the resettlement of prison leavers. HMPPS issued 110 contracts to CRS providers ready for ‘day one’ of the new unified probation service in June 2021, covering accommodation; employment, training and education; personal wellbeing; and tailored services for women.<sup>36</sup> A second wave of contracts for a wider range of services, such as finance, benefits and debt support, is still underway.<sup>37</sup> As at July 2022, HMPPS had awarded 131 CRS contracts with a maximum total value of £340 million.<sup>38</sup>

17. We asked HMPPS what it had done to remove potential barriers to entry for small and voluntary sector organisations. HMPPS told us it “worked hard” to remove barriers. For example, it reduced the IT standards CRS providers must demonstrate in applying for funding. HMPPS told us its historic requirements had been identified as barrier to entry, particularly by the women’s sector, and lowering the threshold had not exposed it or prison leavers to any additional cyber security risks.<sup>39</sup> However in its written evidence submitted to us, Clinks—the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system—described how its survey of 241 voluntary organisations and interviews with eight organisations between May and July 2021 found that HMPPS’ commissioning process was “complex, cumbersome and bureaucratic”. Clinks told us that many small, specialist organisations were unable to engage with the commissioning process due to the financial thresholds set by HMPPS, the geographical footprint of contracts, and the amount of information HMPPS required.<sup>40</sup>

18. HMPPS holds CRS providers to account against two administrative measures (their timeliness in holding appointments and their production of action plans for service users) but does not systematically monitor all providers’ activities or offenders’ outcomes.<sup>41</sup> In written evidence to us St Mungo’s—a CRS provider for housing advice and support—criticised the current contracts for being “highly process driven”. It told us HMPPS is too focussed on measuring inputs, such as whether a prison leaver has been offered an appointment, instead of securing positive outcomes to reducing reoffending.<sup>42</sup>

19. HMPPS audited 28 of its highest-value CRS contracts between June and September 2022, which identified ineffective early performance against service standards and contractual requirements. HMPPS rated the quality of the Probation Service’s referrals to CRS providers as ‘amber/red’ or ‘red’ in 25 contracts (89%), with problems including a lack of clarity on the reasons for referrals, missing information on individuals’ risks, and gaps in information on individuals’ personal circumstances.<sup>43</sup> In its written submission to us, St Mungo’s told us that chasing up poor quality referrals created additional unplanned workloads for providers and left them with “unrealistically short timeframes” to support prison leavers.<sup>44</sup> HMPPS also rated the sufficiency of CRS providers’ delivery to address

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36 C&AG’s Report, para 1.3

37 Q15

38 C&AG’s Report, para 1.4

39 Qq 49–55

40 [IPL0006](#)

41 C&AG’s Report, para 13, 1.27

42 [IPL0002](#)

43 C&AG’s Report, para 1.28

44 [IPL0002](#)

offenders' needs as 'amber/red' or 'red' in 19 contracts (68%) and the quality of CRS providers' communication with probation staff as 'amber/red' or 'red' in 13 contracts (46%). However, HMPPS found a more positive picture across the CRS contracts for women's services, where services took account of women's specific needs and were supported by clear records of activity and progress.<sup>45</sup>

## 2 A challenging future for resettlement services

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### Getting the best outcomes

20. In the 2021 Spending Review, MoJ secured £550 million over three years to reduce reoffending. MoJ allocated this funding to HMPPS, with £484 million assigned to support adult offenders. However, this funding is subject to change as MoJ considers the potential impacts of the government’s Efficiency and Savings Review.<sup>46</sup> MoJ told us that “difficult choices” lie ahead as it looks for ways to save 7.5% across its budget. We asked MoJ how and where it expected to make the necessary savings. MoJ told us that the easiest place for departments to make cuts is in discretionary programmes, such as reducing reoffending and victim support, but that it has a clear steer from ministers to protect these areas as far as possible. MoJ told us it is “crucial” that it finds more efficient ways to deliver resettlement services while protecting the most effective initiatives from budget cuts.<sup>47</sup>

21. Good evaluation practice emphasises the importance of understanding how a new intervention is expected to achieve the intended outcomes and the need to plan evaluation at the design stage before implementing it.<sup>48</sup> But the NAO found that HMPPS does not yet have a mature evidence base for the impact of its new areas of investment, and its evaluation plans may not provide the evidence it needs.<sup>49</sup> MoJ explained that deciding where and how to curb spending is easier in areas where its resettlement initiatives are more developed.<sup>50</sup> HMPPS acknowledged that many of its evaluations are still in the early stages but told us it had hired 40 new analysts to support the work.<sup>51</sup>

22. MoJ told us it is working with HMPPS to better understand what works best on accommodation support for prison leavers.<sup>52</sup> Outcomes have remained stable in recent years despite HMPPS’ investments, with 76% of prison leavers from April 2022 to February 2023 in settled accommodation after three months, compared with 75% in 2021–22.<sup>53</sup> In its March 2023 inspection of post-release support for prison leavers, HMI Probation found that HMPPS’s flagship initiative to provide 84 days of housing to prisoners at risk of homelessness (Community Accommodation Service Tier 3, or CAS3) was working well but securing longer-term accommodation for prison leavers remained difficult.<sup>54</sup> HMPPS told us that finding housing in some parts of England and Wales is challenging, and it needs to do more to understand how to improve the long-term outcomes for prison leavers.<sup>55</sup> HMPPS plans to compare outcomes for CAS3 against control groups in late 2023 to isolate the effectiveness of the service in improving accommodation outcomes.<sup>56</sup>

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46 C&AG’s Report, para 3.7

47 Qq 86, 94

48 C&AG’s Report, para 3.10

49 Q86; C&AG’s Report, para 3.9

50 Q86

51 Qq 11, 15, 22, 85

52 Q3

53 C&AG’s Report, para 1.15–1.18

54 C&AG’s Report, para 1.20

55 Qq 8–9

56 C&AG’s Report, para 3.9



23. HMPPS told us it is proud of the progress made on employment support initiatives with 25% of prison leavers from April 2022 to February 2023 employed after six months, compared with 17% in 2021–22.<sup>57</sup> But HMPPS’s plans to evaluate its employment initiatives are still in the early stages and as of May 2023 it had no firm plans to carry out essential impact evaluations. Determining whether recent improvements in prison leavers’ outcomes are attributable to its interventions or whether they may have happened anyway will be a key challenge for HMPPS.<sup>58</sup> MoJ told us it is “hard to identify exact causality” in complex systems but it is confident that HMPPS’ employment initiatives in prisons are “making a big difference”.<sup>59</sup>

## Managing increased demand

24. MoJ told us several times that the prison estate is under “exceptional” pressure to meet current demands on capacity.<sup>60</sup> At the end of March 2023, the prison population was at around 99% (84,400) of safe capacity (85,500).<sup>61</sup> While projections are uncertain, the MoJ expects significant increases in the prison population in the near term, primarily due to the impact of higher demand caused by increases in the number of police officers and increases in the duration of serious offenders’ prison sentences. MoJ forecasts that the prison population could reach somewhere in the range of 93,100 to 106,300 by March 2027, an increase of 10% to 26% compared to March 2023.<sup>62</sup>

25. MoJ told us it has multiple options to increase prison capacity, including building new prisons and refurbishing the existing estate. MoJ told us it plans to increase prisoner capacity by 20,000 places at a cost of £3.8 billion, but it will need more funding after 2024–25 to bring its planned six new prisons ‘online’.<sup>63</sup> It told us that since September 2022 HMPPS has brought online 2,500 of these new places though refurbishing the existing prison estate. In addition, MoJ told us it will be “very challenging” to build new prison capacity and increase the number of staff in the prison and probation service given current inflation, with less money in real terms.<sup>64</sup>

26. We asked MoJ how it would protect against unsafe spaces being reopened to provide increased prison capacity. MoJ told us it has clear safety standards for cells that it would never go below, and HMPPS added that these standards are “absolute” and it would not bend these to improve overall capacity.<sup>65</sup> Both MoJ and HMPPS told us there will always be space to accommodate prisoners without compromising safety.<sup>66</sup> MoJ conceded that the ongoing lack of “headroom” is making remedial works across the prison estate more difficult as HMPPS is not able to close parts of prisons for refurbishment.<sup>67</sup> MoJ told us it has contingencies in place, such as rapid deployment cells, and HMPPS told us about

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57 Q11; C&AG’s Report, para 1.12

58 C&AG’s Report, para 3.9–3.10

59 Qq 3, 80

60 Qq 3, 97, 99

61 Ministry of Justice, [Population bulletin: monthly March 2023](#)

62 C&AG’s Report, para 3.18

63 Qq 95, 96, 123

64 Qq 96, 113

65 Q99

66 Qq 90, 100, 102, 116

67 Q99

Operation Safeguard, where police cells can be used as a short-term contingency to relieve pressure locally. However MoJ explained that these emergency solutions will ultimately cost the taxpayer more per head than traditional prison accommodation.<sup>68</sup>

27. As these additional prisoners progress through their sentences, there will be higher demand for resettlement services. MoJ's central estimate in its recent modelling work on forecast volumes of prison leavers starting their supervision in the community shows that, while projections are uncertain, the Probation Service may need to supervise around 5,900 additional prison leavers by March 2025. This corresponds to an increase of around 10% compared with HMPPS's existing caseload of around 60,900 in September 2022.<sup>69</sup> The NAO recommended that HMPPS develops a long-term strategy to manage the anticipated increase in demand for resettlement services.<sup>70</sup>

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68 Qq 101–102

69 C&AG's Report, para 3.19

70 C&AG's Report, para 30f

# Formal minutes

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## Thursday 19 October 2023

Members present:

Dame Meg Hillier

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Mr Jonathan Djanogly

Mr Mark Francois

Ben Lake

Anne Marie Morris

### ***Declaration of interests***

Dan Carden – declared that he was patron of ADFAM, Director of not-for-profit Addiction Recovery Now, Chair of APPG on Drugs, Alcohol and Justice, and Deputy Chair of APPG on Alcohol Harm. He also declared that he had two prisons in his constituency.

## **Resettlement support for prison leavers**

Draft Report (*Resettlement support for prison leavers*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 27 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Seventy-eighth of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

## **Adjournment**

Adjourned till Monday 23 October at 3.30pm.

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Thursday 8 June 2023

**Antonia Romeo**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice; **James McEwen**, Chief Operating Officer, Ministry of Justice; **Amy Rees**, Chief Executive, HM Prison and Probation Service; **Jim Barton**, Executive Director, HM Prison and Probation Service

[Q1-126](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

IPL numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Barr, Dr Una ([IPL0001](#))
- 2 Catch22 ([IPL0010](#))
- 3 City & Guilds ([IPL0005](#))
- 4 Clinks ([IPL0006](#))
- 5 Fitzpatrick, Dr Claire (Lancaster University) ([IPL0009](#))
- 6 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons ([IPL0004](#))
- 7 LandWorks ([IPL0007](#))
- 8 Parsons, Dr Julie (School of Society & Culture, University of Plymouth) ([IPL0008](#))
- 9 Senior, Dr Jane, Shaw, Professor Jennifer and Lennox, Dr Charlotte (The University of Manchester) ([IPL0003](#))
- 10 St Mungo's ([IPL0002](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

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2nd	Lessons from implementing IR35 reforms	HC 60
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5th	Local economic growth	HC 252
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14th	Investigation into the British Steel Pension Scheme	HC 251
15th	The Police Uplift Programme	HC 261
16th	Managing cross-border travel during the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 29
17th	Government's contracts with Radox Laboratories Ltd	HC 28
18th	Government actions to combat waste crime	HC 33
19th	Regulating after EU Exit	HC 32
20th	Whole of Government Accounts 2019–20	HC 31
21st	Transforming electronic monitoring services	HC 34
22nd	Tackling local air quality breaches	HC 37
23rd	Measuring and reporting public sector greenhouse gas emissions	HC 39
24th	Redevelopment of Defra's animal health infrastructure	HC 42
25th	Regulation of energy suppliers	HC 41
26th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2021–22 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 44
27th	Evaluating innovation projects in children's social care	HC 38

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31st	Managing central government property	HC 48
32nd	Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity	HC 46
33rd	HMRC performance in 2021–22	HC 686
34th	The Creation of the UK Infrastructure Bank	HC 45
35th	Introducing Integrated Care Systems	HC 47
36th	The Defence digital strategy	HC 727
37th	Support for vulnerable adolescents	HC 730
38th	Managing NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 729
39th	Excess Votes 2021–22	HC 1132
40th	COVID employment support schemes	HC 810
41st	Driving licence backlogs at the DVLA	HC 735
42nd	The Restart Scheme for long-term unemployed people	HC 733
43rd	Progress combatting fraud	HC 40
44th	The Digital Services Tax	HC 732
45th	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Annual Report and Accounts 2021–22	HC 1254
46th	BBC Digital	HC 736
47th	Investigation into the UK Passport Office	HC 738
48th	MoD Equipment Plan 2022–2032	HC 731
49th	Managing tax compliance following the pandemic	HC 739
50th	Government Shared Services	HC 734
51st	Tackling Defra’s ageing digital services	HC 737
52nd	Restoration & Renewal of the Palace of Westminster – 2023 Recall	HC 1021
53rd	The performance of UK Security Vetting	HC 994
54th	Alcohol treatment services	HC 1001
55th	Education recovery in schools in England	HC 998
56th	Supporting investment into the UK	HC 996
57th	AEA Technology Pension Case	HC 1005
58th	Energy bills support	HC 1074
59th	Decarbonising the power sector	HC 1003
60th	Timeliness of local auditor reporting	HC 995
61st	Progress on the courts and tribunals reform programme	HC 1002

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63rd	HS2 Euston	HC 1004
64th	The Emergency Services Network	HC 1006
65th	Progress in improving NHS mental health services	HC 1000
66th	PPE Medpro: awarding of contracts during the pandemic	HC 1590
67th	Child Trust Funds	HC 1231
68th	Local authority administered COVID support schemes in England	HC 1234
69th	Tackling fraud and corruption against government	HC 1230
70th	Digital transformation in government: addressing the barriers to efficiency	HC 1229
71st	Resetting government programmes	HC 1231
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73rd	Access to urgent and emergency care	HC 1336
74th	Bulb Energy	HC 1232
75th	Active travel in England	HC 1335
76th	The Asylum Transformation Programme	HC 1334
77th	Supported housing	HC 1330
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2nd Special Report	Seventh Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 1055



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25th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2020–21 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 633
26th	Lessons from Greensill Capital: accreditation to business support schemes	HC 169
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34th	Local Government Finance System: Overview and Challenges	HC 646
35th	The pharmacy early payment and salary advance schemes in the NHS	HC 745
36th	EU Exit: UK Border post transition	HC 746
37th	HMRC Performance in 2020–21	HC 641
38th	COVID-19 cost tracker update	HC 640
39th	DWP Employment Support: Kickstart Scheme	HC 655
40th	Excess votes 2020–21: Serious Fraud Office	HC 1099
41st	Achieving Net Zero: Follow up	HC 642
42nd	Financial sustainability of schools in England	HC 650
43rd	Reducing the backlog in criminal courts	HC 643
44th	NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 747
45th	Progress with trade negotiations	HC 993
46th	Government preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons for government on risk	HC 952
47th	Academies Sector Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20	HC 994
48th	HMRC's management of tax debt	HC 953
49th	Regulation of private renting	HC 996
50th	Bounce Back Loans Scheme: Follow-up	HC 951
51st	Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system	HC 997
52nd	Ministry of Defence Equipment Plan 2021–31	HC 1164
1st Special Report	Fifth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 222

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36th	HMRC performance 2019–20	HC 690
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49th	COVID-19: housing people sleeping rough	HC 934
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52nd	Key challenges facing the Ministry of Justice	HC 1190
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