

Justice Committee – Call for Evidence
Rehabilitation and resettlement: ending the cycle of reoffending
May 2025

Section 1: Reoffending – measuring the problem

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

a) What are the different approaches to measuring reoffending?

b) How does reoffending in England and Wales compare to other countries?

The overall proven reoffending rate was 27.5% for the April to June 2023 offender cohort.^[1] This represents an increase of 1.7 percentage points from the same quarter in 2022 and an increase of 0.9 percentage points over the last quarter. Adult offenders had a proven reoffending rate of 27.3%. This is an increase of 1.8 percentage points since the same quarter in 2022 and an increase of 1.0 percentage points over last quarter.

Adults released from custody or starting court orders had a proven reoffending rate of 35.2%. This represents an increase of 1.8 percentage points since the same quarter in 2022 and an increase of 1.4 percentage points over last quarter. Adults released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months had a proven reoffending rate of 59.2%. This is an increase of 3.2 percentage points from the same quarter in 2022. Adults released from sentences of less than or equal to 6 months had a proven reoffending rate of 62.3%, which is an increase of 2.9 percentage points since the same quarter in 2022.

The underlying principle of measuring re-offending (or recidivism, which is the most used term internationally) is that someone who has received some form of criminal justice sanction (such as a conviction or a caution) goes on to commit another offence within a set time period. Measuring true re-offending is difficult. Official records are taken from either the police or courts, but they will underestimate the true level of re-offending because only a proportion of crime is detected and sanctioned and not all crimes and sanctions are recorded on one central system. Other methods of measuring re-offending, such as self-report studies, are likely to be unreliable. Following the Ministry of Justice consultation on Improvements to Ministry of Justice Statistics (2010), a proven re-offence is defined as any offence committed in a one-year follow-up period and receiving a court conviction, caution, reprimand or warning in the one year follow up or a further six months waiting period. The data source is the extract of the Police National Computer (PNC) held by the Ministry of Justice.^[2]

England and Wales have high reoffending rates for short-term custodial sentences (e.g., 59.2% for sentences under 12 months), significantly higher than countries like Sweden, which focuses on rehabilitative approaches. Sweden's "Better Out" philosophy emphasises reducing criminal identity through education and structured activities, achieving recidivism rates below 33%.^[3]

Section 3 – resettlement services and alternatives to custody

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

The probation service does not have sufficient capacity to support effective resettlement pre and post release. In our joint thematic inspection of Offender Management in Custody (pre-release)^[4] only three of the eight Offender Management Units (OMUs) were fully staffed with probation Prison Offender Managers (POMs); vacancy rates were 56 per cent in HMP Aylesbury, 55 per cent in HMP Highpoint, 33 per cent in HMP Manchester, 20 per cent in HMP Cardiff and 17 per cent in HMP Brixton.

Over half of the Community Offender Managers (COMs), and half of the POMs, we interviewed thought that their workload was 'not so manageable' or 'not at all manageable'. Over a third of COMs and almost two-thirds of POMs held responsibility for 41 cases or more. Workloads, across the board, were too high for staff to deliver a high-quality service. We saw examples of POMs who held more than 100 cases and were understandably overwhelmed by this workload. There was some evidence of pre-release OASys assessments being completed by COMs, but these varied in quality and were generally insufficient, with fewer than one in three focused on engaging the individual and keeping other people safe. POMs appeared to spend a large amount of time at their desks, and this was echoed by people in prison, who reported that OMU staff were not visible on the wings.

In our Offender Management in Custody (post release) thematic inspection^[5] we again found that staff shortages and high workloads did not support the delivery of a high-quality service. Fifty-seven per cent of the practitioners we interviewed stated that their workload was not so, or not at all, manageable. Practitioners told us that high workloads have a significant impact on the quality of practice and leave them little time to plan and complete structured offence-focused work. Some were visibly stressed and reported working long hours to try to manage their workload. Examples provided to inspectors included receiving counselling as a way of being able to stay in work, resignation due to workload pressures, and staff returning from stress-related sickness absence to find that their work had not been covered. One senior leader told us that they were fully aware of the pressures on staff but felt "impotent", given the difficulties in recruiting enough practitioners to do the work required.

In our National Inspection^[6] we noted some modest improvements in recruitment and staffing levels, and leaders were taking some action to reduce workloads and create more space for practitioners to develop their knowledge and skills to improve practice.

Nevertheless, progress remained slow. The shortfall of probation officers in some regions was still high and average workloads for this group remained a problem. We have consistently reported on limited and ineffective management oversight at PDU and regional level and found it again in this inspection. The opportunities for newly qualified and trained staff to implement learning are still often undermined by high workloads and limited numbers of experienced staff to support them.

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

a) Is there sufficient data sharing between services?

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

Data sharing between services involved in supporting people after their release from prison is not good enough. Drug misuse services, for example, supported desistance in just under a quarter of cases and supported keeping other people safe in only one in five. Pre-release planning is often insufficient and our inspections have not detected a material improvement in drug treatment in the community following schemes such as Reconnect. Most services did not provide continuous support before and after release, which is highly disappointing given that prisons and probation have been led as a single agency for several years. Substance misuse services are contracted and commissioned separately before and after release. This leaves many prisoners vulnerable to a relapse on release from prison and a quick return to reoffending.

Consistent service provision by the same provider before and after release could provide the glue to link services for the person on probation, by providing immediate access to the right substance misuse treatment on release from custody. In one poor practice example, a prison leaver was released from a custodial sentence for burglary. He had an entrenched pattern of acquisitive offending to fund substance misuse, leading to repeated periods in custody. He was released to an approved premises, and on the day of release disclosed that he feared relapse. He was advised to self-refer for relapse prevention support. He (all too predictably) relapsed after seven days in the community and was recalled to custody.

In 2023 HMPPS published its Rehabilitation Strategy, which set out its vision for a whole-agency, person-centred approach to 'build the right systems, promote the right culture and environments, and provide the right rehabilitative services for the right person at the right time, delivered in the right way'. During our national inspection we found HMPPS had made limited progress towards achieving these aims. This was reflected in our case inspection findings, which identified that implementation and delivery of services only sufficiently supported desistance in 32 per cent of cases and contributed effectively to keeping people safe in just 18 per cent of cases.

National arrangements for the provision of services were not meeting the needs of regions or the people on probation they managed. We did not find sufficient evidence that the right partnerships were in place or operating effectively at a national level to support service delivery, and we were not assured that both public protection and reducing reoffending were central to the national commissioning and delivery of services.

There were also deficits in the availability and use of data and analysis to inform and enable the delivery of probation services. These included gaps in the analysis of diversity factors and disproportionality, which were attributed to data quality issues and resourcing constraints. There had also been a lack of evaluation of the effectiveness of commissioned services. This had the potential to undermine the quality of decision-making by senior leaders in relation to future service provision and demand management.

In our national inspection, we found that resettlement activity supported the individual's integration into the community in too few of the cases we inspected (42 per cent). Information-sharing between prison-based staff and the COM was sufficient in just 60 per cent of cases. A variety of factors were responsible for this, including ineffective communication routes and staff turnover.

Inspectors were encouraged by positive work undertaken in some short-term custodial cases. In other cases, however, the short timescales for pre-release activity had a detrimental effect on the quality of resettlement work. In only half of cases did the community practitioner ensure a proportionate level of contact with the prisoner before release. The practitioner sufficiently identified key risk of harm issues in just 22 out of 49 relevant cases, and identified relevant desistance needs pre-release in only around half of cases. This made it more difficult for these individuals to access appropriate services in

custody and resulted in inspectors seeing concerning examples of people being released homeless and without access to appropriate community-based support.

So far as trauma-informed practice is concerned, most of our inspections have found that practitioners are engaging effectively with people on probation. Practitioners are routinely taking into account personal characteristics, diversity and treating people on probation with dignity and respect. However, that is not translating into delivery of meaningful support for prison leavers to change. Our inspection programme has not found consistent evidence that trauma informed practice during the delivery of services is commonplace, or that it leads to better outcomes.

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

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

Effective support to prevent homelessness on release from prison was provided in most cases. Where a need had been identified, sufficient accommodation services were delivered after release to support desistance in almost seven out of 10 cases, and to keep other people safe in just over half. Community accommodation services tier 3 (CAS3) provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and for move-on from approved premises. We found that CAS3 provision is used well for prison leavers and for approved premises move-on, although it is difficult to secure settled accommodation once CAS3 has ended. Placement into approved premises on release from prisons, followed by placement into CAS3 accommodation, provides up to six months of supported housing when a prisoner is released. HMPPS estimates that 35 to 40 per cent of people on probation move on to settled housing once they have left CAS3 accommodation.

Access to accommodation on release from prison varied across England and Wales. In Greater Manchester, for example, the probation service had good links with local authorities, which helped to prevent homelessness in this region. In other probation regions, we found that some people on probation were released from prison or approved premises with nowhere to live. In our case sample, one in every 10 prisoners were released as homeless, and these were primarily from the probation regions that did not have CAS3 provision.

Only four in 10 of the case sample were in settled accommodation on release. Of those that remained in the community, there was a welcome improvement in the proportion of people on probation who secured settled accommodation during their initial period on licence supervision (six in 10). Nevertheless, at the point of inspection, four out of 10 people in the case sample remained homeless or in transient accommodation. CAS3 achieved positive outcomes in the five regions where it fully operated: East of England; Kent, Surrey and Sussex; Greater Manchester; North West; and Yorkshire and the Humber. Most individuals accommodated in CAS3 enter straight from prison, but a significant proportion enter from approved premises. It is estimated that just under 40 per cent move from CAS3 housing into settled accommodation, though this data was unverified.

In our national inspection we found the national Community Accommodation Service (CAS) team were leading effective work to house people released from prison, through three tiers of temporary accommodation. National leaders had regular contact and positive engagement with regional teams at a variety of levels, from frontline staff up to Area Executive Directors (AEDs). They had introduced digital tools to simplify and speed up the referral process for probation practitioners. They were responsive to the diverse needs of people referred for

accommodation provision, with a particular focus on addressing disproportionality for women, who were often placed in prisons and approved premises far from their home area.

Sufficient education, training and employment services were delivered after release to support desistance in just over half of the cases where this was required, and to keep other people safe in only a third of cases. Not enough Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) education, training and employment referrals were completed, which meant that people on probation were sometimes left to find employment themselves.

Just eight per cent of prison leavers were in employment on release from custody. Employment hubs are beginning to be put in place in prisons to secure employment on release, though the full benefits of these arrangements have not yet been realised. There was some improvement in the proportion of people on probation securing employment or training during their initial period on licence supervision. One in three were in full- or part-time employment, education or training. Four in 10 of the case sample remained unemployed. Of those who were not available for work, the primary reasons were substance misuse, and physical and mental health difficulties, including anxiety and depression.

We found in our national inspection that national leaders in the Education, Skills, and Employment team had improved their working relationships with the DWP, which was supporting people on probation to access benefits and employment advocacy. HMPPS had also commissioned the Creating Future Opportunities programme to secure positive employment outcomes for individuals with the most complex needs. The Probation Service was represented on the recently launched Employment Advisory Councils, which brought prison, probation and the DWP together with local employers to provide employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

Health and wellbeing services were overstretched. Following the success of some regionally commissioned and funded pilots of the primary care Mental Health Treatment Requirement, NHS funding had been secured to expand the delivery of this intervention to reach more people on probation who reported mental health conditions, although some regions continued to experience long waiting lists related to high demand.

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

Licence conditions are an essential tool to manage risk in cases. In our thematic inspection of recall published in 2023, we found that most recall decisions were taken appropriately. Nevertheless, licence conditions can in some cases have negative impact on promoting resettlement. Recall rates were high, at an average of 30 per cent of the case sample. They varied from 13 per cent in Kent, Surrey and Sussex to 45 per cent in the East of England and Wales. Most recalls were due to non-compliance with licence conditions, following homelessness and relapse into substance misuse. That reflects the paucity of support for people before release and limited meaningful support after release, as we have consistently been finding in our inspection programme. Release from custody with nowhere to live, and a lack of continuity in substance misuse treatment before and after release also contributed to recall.

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

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

An increase in the use of non-custodial sentences would in principle have a positive impact on resettlement services. However, that would be contingent on better services being

delivered in prison before release and much more co-ordination with community-based services after release. In all of the regions we have inspected so far, those ingredients have been absent. In our national inspection we found that the HMPPS rehabilitation strategy was in most respects not manifesting in practice and needed to be reviewed. The level of referrals for some CRS services, in particular women's and accommodation services, was higher than anticipated. This led to delays in prison leavers accessing support. A reduction in the excess demand for resettlement services could free up support for those who most need it.

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

To succeed, the sentencing reforms must ensure the probation service is properly resourced to be able to deal with the cases it is required to manage. A probation service which is under-resourced and over-stretched will not be able to provide the service the public need it to provide. Our evidence shows that if the Probation Service has the right people, the resources and cross-agency support it needs it will be able to make a sustained difference to reoffending and keeping the public safe.

There is significant scope to improve the quality and impact of community sentencing. Our recent Unpaid Work thematic inspection, and inspections of probation regions, have found that placements are often constructive, reparative and meaningful. Unpaid work supervisors routinely oversee placements effectively and provide coaching, advice and feedback to people on probation while they are present. However, recruitment for unpaid work supervisors in many areas of the country is an ongoing problem which acts as a constraint on the ability of HMPPS to deliver placements against current demand. In East of England region, for instance, we found that 40 per cent of unpaid work supervisor posts were vacant, partly because the terms of employment were not believed to be attractive enough to potential applicants.

There is scope to increase the use of electronic tagging in many cases. Too little use is being made of trail monitoring or Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring, both of which are reliant on electronic monitoring. An expansion of electronic monitoring would require significant investment. Assuming that tag installation were to be carried out by a private contractor, there would need to be clear and effective contract management from HMPPS. To date, there have been considerable issues with the timeliness of tag installation and lessons from the existing contract would need to be learned.

In our inspections, we have been finding that Integrated Offender Management (IOM) cases are typically better managed than generic community order and resettlement type cases. Broadly speaking, that reflects closer relationships between police, probation officers and partner agencies. Information exchange is easier to achieve and decision-making on risk are dealt with together as partners, often more swiftly. IOM would not be suitable for all offenders, but there is scope to consider how the principles of the model could be applied more widely across the probation caseload.

What is increasingly clear is that HMPPS will be unable to deliver against its target operating model for several years at least. It lacks sufficient staff to do so and is held back by processes that hinder the ability of regional leaders to make decisions about how to deliver services effectively. The sentencing review would mark an opportune moment to review the target operating model and in particular the permissions given to Regional Probation Directors and local Heads of Community Integration on making decisions about budgetary spending and processes based on their knowledge of local communities, local people on probation and their needs.

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

In all three of the probation regions we have inspected on this programme to date, resettlement has been rated as inadequate. We have seen limited examples of resettlement being delivered consistently to a sufficient standard.

We have found some positive practice in relation to the availability of community accommodation services – tier 3 (CAS3) was positive. Our thematic inspection found that CAS3 accommodation services worked well in the five probation regions where they had fully operated since July 2021. CAS3 provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and for those moving on from approved premises and CAS2 (formerly Bail Accommodation Support Services), as well as assistance to help people move on into settled accommodation. This had significantly reduced homelessness on release from custody or approved premises in the probation regions where it operated.

It was positive to see some probation practitioners working creatively and flexibly to support prison leavers into Education, Training and Employment. In one example, a prison leaver had served a long custodial sentence for serious violence and had a pattern of similar offences. He was referred to the National Careers Service in custody and completed a level two personal training course. He expressed a wish to complete the level three qualification and eventually secure employment as a personal trainer. The community offender manager (COM) referred him to the Shaw Trust for ETE support, and an appointment was arranged promptly once he had been released. The Shaw Trust offered to help him find and enrol on to a course. They also agreed to pay his travel expenses and help him to find gyms where he could undertake practical work. The Shaw Trust later helped him to secure part-time work in an unrelated field. This supported his engagement, desistance and resettlement into the community.

Practical support from Approved Premises staff to help small numbers of high risk prison leavers to access finance and benefits also supports effective resettlement. In one case example, a prisoner was sentenced to a long custodial sentence for supply of class A drugs. He was released from custody without ID and consequently it took four months for him to receive any benefits. This made it difficult to secure move-on accommodation, and approved premises staff commented that he had been “set up to fail”. Approved premises staff were persistent in advocating on his behalf and offered daily support until he secured benefits. He was then placed into CAS3 supported accommodation.

Relationships between the probation practitioner and prison leavers were felt to be beneficial when staff demonstrated a genuine care and warmth towards those they were working with and wanted to support them to improve their lives and keep themselves and others safe. We identified an excellent example of this at the Blackpool probation office. Inspectors commented: “there was a respectful culture in the office. The receptionists were kind and calm, you could hear them dealing with some frustrated people in a calm manner. It was also good to see staff had set up a clothes rail in reception with donated clothing. They had a foodbank at the office and staff had made prison release bags. These bags were handmade and contained toiletries and a towel.”

Our inspections illustrate the benefits of multi-agency working. The examples below demonstrate effective multi-agency work seen on the OMIC inspection.

Induction in Uxbridge and Hillingdon probation offices is carried out jointly by the probation service and Jigsaw, the police public protection team. This ensures that registration of sexual offenders is completed, provides effective joint management to keep other people safe, and reduces uncertainty for the person on probation.

There is an effective working relationship between the Cheshire probation delivery units (PDU) and Seetec (CRS personal wellbeing support service). This was maintained through regular contact with contract managers, PDU heads, managers and practitioners. The employment adviser was co-located in probation offices. This helped practitioners to gain a good understanding of referral processes and led to closer working relationships and more targeted support for people on probation.

Grand Avenues was an HMPPS in Wales priority project, based in the Ely and Caerau areas of Cardiff. The project brought together a neighbourhood team of probation practitioners and local community partners to deliver joined-up services in the local community. The community hub was an innovative response to high rates of recidivism, and the lack of trust between people on probation, the criminal justice system and wider public services.

Good-quality resettlement activity in the national inspected sample was underpinned by effective pre-release communication between the practitioner, the individual in custody and other professionals. Clear and timely information-sharing about relevant risks and needs enabled some community-based practitioners to develop effective licence conditions and release plans.

^[1] [Proven reoffending statistics: April to June 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

^[2] [Proven reoffending statistics: Definitions and measurement](#)

^[3] [Lessons from Swedish prisons](#)

^[4] [A joint thematic inspection of Offender Management in Custody – pre-release – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)

^[5] [Offender Management in Custody – post-release](#)

^[6] [National Inspection – April 2025 – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)

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