

# Offenders, former offenders and families consultation

For

**CLINKS**



Research

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## 1. Introduction

In a bid to understand how offenders, former offenders and their families could make a greater contribution to the policies and services affecting them, Clinks launched a Taskforce in February 2007. This followed publication of *Breaking the Cycle of Offending* by The Prince's Trust, which sought the views of young offenders about ways to reduce youth crime. The Taskforce's remit was broadened to include adults, former offenders and their families.

The Taskforce decided to focus on five key areas, which it felt would have the greatest impact. These were: policy development, commissioning, employment strategies for the Criminal Justice System (CJS), recruitment, training and organisational development within the CJS and the role of families.

The Taskforce consisted of representatives from Clinks, The Prince's Trust, Prison Reform Trust, Unlock, Action for Prisoners' Families and two former offenders. In order to understand the 'user voice' more clearly, the Taskforce commissioned QA research to conduct interviews with serving and former offenders and family members of those serving custodial sentences. This report outlines the research findings.

## 2. Methodology

Between February and March 2008 a number of people who had experience of the CJS took part in discussion groups. Two groups with former offenders were recruited through agencies that aim to improve the lives of people who have had experience of offending behaviour. Two discussion groups took part in prisons with those currently serving custodial sentences. In addition, four in depth telephone interviews took place with former offenders and finally five depth telephone interviews took place with families of those who are serving or have served a custodial sentence.

The discussion groups aimed to obtain information and opinions about the key themes from the Taskforce and asked participants to identify any actions they would like to see that could potentially have an impact on their likelihood of re-offending, specifically relating to their involvement in the resettlement process and the CJS.

A total of 34 participants (who were former offenders) were consulted through discussion groups and depth telephone interviews. Of these, 19 were men and 15 women. All were aged between 18 and 50 years old. All had served custodial sentences ranging from weeks to life.

### 3. Key findings

#### Background

The majority of women involved in the consultation had only served one sentence whilst men, especially those over 21 years old, had often served more. The largest number of sentences served in prison was stated as 14 times.

Those who had served a custodial sentence previously were asked what preparation had taken place prior to their release. Many explained that this had been very limited and for most had only begun a few days before their release date. This lack of resettlement planning was evidenced by limited contact with resettlement officers, with those who had seen them normally only having one meeting. Those serving longer sentences, for example lifers, were more likely to have seen a resettlement officer on more than one occasion. Comments on this included:

*“You go in you say you have no fixed abode, that gets documented there and then nothing happens really. You go on induction programmes then you go on programmes for drugs... and that goes on throughout your sentence. You have to get a job working in the workshop and then that’s it throughout your sentence. Then a couple of days before your release that’s when the action starts to come. That’s when CARATS come to see you, that’s when housing come to see you, you see them once... and then you don’t see them after that” (Male, former offender)*

*“If they have the time they take you into the room for about ten minutes and just fill out your details of your last address and that’s it... on release they give you a list of accommodation that’s available and then it’s up to you to go and find it” (Male, former offender)*

*“Everything is hard work in jail” (Male, former offender)*

It was felt that there were some differences between men and women relating to their quality of care and support. For example, generally both men and women felt that women have a harder time in prison (fighting and bullying) but that women tended to get more support regarding their resettlement.

Participants who had served part of their sentence in a resettlement prison noted a specific difference in their preparation for release. For example one former offender who took part in a depth telephone interview had received lots of support from their Personal Officer’s while in a Cat D resettlement prison. The support they had received included being given responsibility and earning trust:

*“They give you your first doctor’s appointment so you have to go there yourself, with a map and find it yourself” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

*“They get you ready for jobs, they give you interview techniques and basically sit down and tell you that they need to trust you so you do prison work and community work... They take you out and leave you for full days...that gives you the feeling that things are normal and that you are just going back there to stay.*

*It gives you a boost... [you realise] you never want to do it [spend time in prison] again." (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

When asked why people in prison should be more involved in the CJS, and more specifically the resettlement process, research participants felt it was important because:

- Individual plans are needed
- People should/ need input into their own lives if they are to succeed
- Cannot have one size fits all approach to rehabilitation
- Gives something to work towards while in prison
- Increased responsibility
- They understand the needs of themselves and other prisoners better than anyone else

The overall impact of user involvement is detailed in section 3.7 of this report.

The following section of this report details comments and feelings from research participants on each of the key themes identified within the Taskforce. Many of these themes have overlapping issues and therefore within this report 'employment strategies' and 'recruitment, training and organisational development' are grouped together and can be found in section 3.3.

### **3.1 Policy Making**

#### **Prisoner councils and forums**

Research participants identified that there were already processes in some of the prisons they had been resident in that aimed to engage prisoners in meaningful dialogue. Examples were given as prisoner forums and meetings. Prisoners were recruited in a number of ways including volunteering from a poster and being hand picked to take part. However this was not in all prisons and generally these methods were not seen to be effective. This lack of effectiveness was as a result of those involved perceiving that there was no action taken from the items covered in these meetings.

*"Voices should be heard and action taken rather than 'it's being looked into'"  
(Female, Prisoner, 50 years old)*

However this could also be identified as any resulting actions not being communicated back to those involved. This lack of communication resulted in resentment of 'procedures' and disillusionment with the process. Therefore those who had been involved in these forums/ meetings in the past were not likely to want to be involved in the future. However this was not always the case and an example of where the process was working successfully in one prison was explained:

*"Anything that hadn't been looked at had to have an action on it on the third meeting [rather than being left for 12 months]" (Female, Prisoner, 50 years old)*

It was also noted within some groups that prisoners who had achieved a higher status within the prison were more likely to be invited to meetings. This, it was felt, could be

detrimental to other prisoners who may have not achieved higher status but did have things they wanted to communicate within meetings personally.

Generally, prisoner forums and meetings were perceived to be a positive development; however this was only if action was taken as a result.

Those who had served their sentence in a prison where there were no formal channels of upward communication felt that although it was important to have procedures in place for upward communication forums/ councils may not be the most appropriate approach, feeling that this could cause problems and arguments for those on the involved. One research participant suggested:

*“Every wing should have a couple of representative who can put things forward to the governor, who can go and speak to who he needs to and that and then things might start getting done.” (Male, former offender)*

## **Probation**

There was some resentment towards the Probation Service in general:

*“Probation should help! They should tell me where I can live” (Male, former offender)*

*“Probation doesn't do much. They should try and get you on courses but they don't... they should [have] tried to get me on a course where I was doing something every day” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

However, individual probation officers were often regarded highly in the support they had provided to offender in reducing the likelihood of them re-offending. Generally, research participants wanted more involvement from/ with probation prior to their release. Many prisoners had taken the time to write to their probation officers while still in prison, for example:

*“They should have contact with you from day one... it took me about a year and a half to find out who my outside probation officer was. I was the one who wrote to her and introduced myself... They haven't got the funds to come and see you though and then you have this invisible body which can change about four times before you get out... I make contact with her but if I don't do that she doesn't bother... how can they have an input at that stage [point of release] if they don't know anything about you? If they knew you from day one they would have an inkling of your behaviour, your attitude and all the other things that impact on your re-offending” (20 year old female, 3 year sentence)*

One participant felt that probation should also assist them in a more practical way when they leave prison. It was suggested that probation should help them find 'positive activities' which would fill their time and longer term lead to more meaningful employment. It was felt that engagement in such activities could be a condition of their parole ensuring positive engagement:

*“What they should be doing is saying that you are now going on a 12 week course and that is one of your probation things you have to do it. If you are told you have to do it you think well I don’t want to go back into prison so you do it. But while you are doing it you are having fun. You are getting your qualifications... basically that 12 weeks just boosts your morale. By the end of the 12 weeks you just think wow. During that the probation officer could come and see you and ask how it is going” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

### **The application process**

Research participants would like to be involved in designing a new system to the current application process (Aps). Many had poor experiences of trying to set up a meeting with organisations or departments (such as the housing department within prison) as Aps were not processed either quickly enough, and for some not at all. Comments on this included:

*“When you put an Ap in to see housing or welfare and you never get to see them” (Male, former offender)*

*“I kept hearing about this magical place called Nacro and I put an Ap in for that and never heard anything” (Male, former offender)*

To make this process easier and fairer, research participants felt that there should be a drop in centre that did not require an appointment or where an appointment could be made face to face. This is detailed further in section 3.3. It was also suggested that they could be able to chase up their own applications as this would reduce the amount of time they needed to wait to see someone.

In addition to this, it was noted by some that appointments had taken place in cells while other people/ prisoners were around. On this research participants noted that they would prefer somewhere confidential to discuss their problems/ concerns, especially about leaving prison and their personal development.

### **Information and resettlement**

There was a general feeling, especially amongst those who were currently serving their first sentence and those who had served only one sentence, that there was not enough information given to them in relation to what would happen in their lead up to release and after they left prison. Although prisoners knew of procedures that were in place, most had not experienced them with some never having seen a resettlement officer and of those who had, only seeing them once prior to their release. It was noted:

*“You try to make the effort but you don’t get told what you need to do... you don’t know what you need to be asking... there should be someone to tell you.” (Female, Prisoner, 20 years old)*

One former offender stated:

*“With you doing short sentences it’s like they don’t have enough time to give you a resettlement officer” (Male, former offender)*

Research participants wanted greater involvement in their resettlement plan and felt that this could only occur if they were able to have regular face to face contact with an officer who could assist them. It was felt that this should take place as part of sentence planning where they could set targets for themselves and work to these.

Participants in an open prison commented that they have a long waiting time for anything to happen and then feel like everything happens at last minute giving them little time to plan. An example of risk assessments was given:

*“You try to make the effort but you don’t get told what you need to do... but you don’t know what you need to be asking... there should be someone to tell you”  
(Female, Prisoner, 20 years old)*

*“It doesn’t matter how much effort or how much ground work you do... you find that you are having to let people down [community placements] because everything is last minute. Like say your risk assessment...” (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

This demonstrates a lack of communication about what is happening to prisoners and therefore their perception of long waiting times and last minute decisions is not well informed. To alleviate this it was suggested that prisoners are given regular updates regarding where their applications are and the estimated time it would take to be resolved. Some prisoners had gone to extreme measures to work around these processes, including impersonating probation officers on the telephone to speed up risk assessments.

### **Longer term prisoners**

Prisoners who were serving longer term sentences (over three years) felt that they were able to contribute significantly to the running of prisons and be more involved in decision making over policies and day to day activities. However, they felt that they were to some degree ‘forgotten’ about and therefore become disillusioned. This disillusionment can turn to resentment and eventually they no longer feel any benefit of putting any effort into their sentence planning or overall life in prison. This has longer term impacts on their resettlement as they do not access the support available to them closer to their release date because they feel it will not help them.

In addition, one person serving a life sentence noted that in one prison ‘Lifer panels/ meetings’ had been abolished due to ‘fear of a riot’. This had resulted in the prisoners not feeling trusted and that their input was not valued.

## 3.2 Working with commissioners

### Voluntary organisations in prison

Research participants felt that having an external, independent organisation running their essential services would provide significant benefits (such the Visiting Service).

It was felt that this approach should be replicated for all the essential services (such as housing, drug treatment, employment and education). This was because prisoners often felt judged by officers and that they could not discuss their personal feelings with others, and therefore those who are meant to be supporting them may already have preconceived ideas about them before they have even met. It was felt that prisoners would respond better to voluntary organisations and the example of the Samaritans was given:

*“Because we listen to other people we need to talk about that... they come in every couple of weeks and we can talk through things with them... It's different because you know they care, they don't have to come, they aren't paid but they want to help” (Male, Prisoner, 19 years old)*

An independent body which organises and deals with the services regarded as essential to prisoners was felt to be impartial and would not be regarded as part of the 'system' and would therefore have a greater impact because it would be seen differently to Officers who run provision. It was noted:

*“You know that they are doing things for you... they are impartial” (Male, former offender)*

*“You could sit in a room with them [independent organisation] and discuss the options you have; they could help to sort it out for you and before you leave you know where you are going to stay and that you would have treatment for your problems” (Male, former offender)*

### Increasing choice

Although some prisoners struggled with the concept of making their own decisions and having an input into the running of a prison because they were preoccupied by prison regimes and their immediate needs, others identified how they could make more of their own decisions.

Throughout the groups it was generally felt that there could be more input by prisoners on choices such as what educational course they could take and input into the meals served.

*“Things like having an input into what you eat - you could meet with the chef and tell them what you like to eat” (Male, former offender)*

An example where greater choice and increased flexibility would have had a positive impact on a serving prisoner was given. One prisoner explained that he had been

accepted to do an engineering course however could not start this until he had completed a compulsory prison course. This meant he would not be able to complete his engineering course while still in prison, so reducing the likelihood of being able to complete it longer term because he would need to find work as soon as he left prison. He explained the engineering course as 'a life changing opportunity' which had been stopped because of prison procedures.

Other examples where increased involvement into the educational courses offered were given:

*"There are loads of education courses they put up for you and stuff but all those there are there for is to knock down your points. You start with 100 points and you need to get them down to 20 to get into a Cat D prison... I did everything from cooking, painting and decorating, I knew they weren't going to help me but I did them just to get the points. So basically I technically wasted prison money on courses I didn't need but that someone else could have done who needed it..." (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

An example of an approach which would engage serving prisoners, enable them to make their own decisions and have a longer term impact on their likelihood of re-offending was given:

*"It would have been better if they had said to me from the start 'what do you want to do?' I could have said I want to be a plumber. They should have then said 'ok it's a four year course. You are here four and a half years. You can do level one here, level two here and then by the time you get to your Cat D resettlement you could technically go and do that in college and work' if someone had said that to me I would have been very happy to do it" (Male, former offender)*

A former offender who had had a positive experience within a resettlement prison commented on the more appropriate approach from their final prison:

*"In my last prison there was no courses for you, nothing, they say there is the college prospectus, there is the university prospectus – go for it, if you want to do it, apply for it and we will help you with the funding because there are organisations that can help with funding." (Male, former offender)*

Another former offender commented that having the opportunity to make a choice would enable those who most wanted to change to have the opportunity to do so, therefore focusing resources in the most appropriate place:

*"If people are not telling you what to do, you can choose. You can choose what path you go down and if you want the help you can get it. If they don't want the help then they shouldn't get it" (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

## **Access to the internet**

The majority of research participants felt that having access to the internet would empower them make their own decisions in their preparation for release. It was felt that the internet could be used for:

- Increase up take of relevant courses
- Find employment
- Find housing
- Organise travel

Regarding the uptake of more relevant courses it was stated:

*“It would help loads. I’m doing Open University because I want to start a business when I get out and you need internet access to set all the ground work up for when I get out. I’m at the Open University but I had to pick a course that really I didn’t want to do because I didn’t have internet access. If I had to make my choice again I would have done a business course or an IT course but I cannot do that so I have had to do Social Sciences which isn’t really going to help me... The business I want to set up is going to be internet based so it would help me loads to do research and stuff but I cannot do it... [If I could get onto the Open University website] it would help me loads and would give me loads of more opportunities. There are other courses that I want to do but I can’t do them because there is no access” (Female, Prisoner, 20 years old)*

It was also felt that by allowing prisoner to access the internet they could organise their own travel forms and identify train times for any leave they may have.

*“When you apply for a home leave you have to do a travel plan and to do your travel plan you have to go to PS Plus to arrange an appointment for them to do it for you which isn’t teaching you anything” (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

By doing these forms themselves it was felt that not only would they be using less resources and time from staff but would also be learning new skills and taking responsibility for their own travel.

For access to additional housing information it was stated:

*“Home finders on the computer and you can do it while you are in there. Make a facility where prisons can go in and look...” (Male, former offender)*

*“I wasn’t homeless when I came in here so why should I be homeless when I come out?” (Female, Prisoner, 24 years old)*

However, it was felt that any access would need to be limited to a certain number of sites, for services and support only, and that the time spent on the internet could be monitored. For example a booking system which allowed them to book out an appropriate amount of time (longer for study) where they could spend time identifying potential opportunities for the future.

### 3.3 Employment strategies and recruitment, training and organisation development

#### Services run by prisoners

Many prisoners felt that services in prison could be run by inmates. They felt that inmates could act as information officers providing a drop-in facility which could be accessed by other prisoners to find out information about housing, employment and other issues they may be facing.

*“If you need to know anything in this place you don't go to a member of staff you go to someone who has been here a while... they know the score and know where to find the information...” (Female, Prisoner, 24 years old)*

*“You should be able to have the facilities to be able to sort yourself out” (Male, former offender)*

It was felt that not only would this give prisoners running the service more responsibility but that prisoners accessing it would also get more relevant and helpful information:

*“I would much rather if I had a problem go to an inmate who I thought knew than go to a member of staff because my experience of staff is that if they don't know they make it up” (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

*“It makes you feel like there is no point [when there is no support from officers]... I feel sometimes that they don't want you to do it... they like to feel that something is their idea so sometimes it is better to manipulate them a little bit. So you plant the seed but let them think it was their idea which is a really horrible way to go about it” (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

Participants recommended that the recruitment of the most appropriate people to undertake this role could begin with adverts around the prison and information in their induction about the opportunity of undertaking this role. It was felt that the post should be interviewed for and on the panel should be other prisoners and key staff who would help the person appointed get the information they need to advise others.

It was felt that through this process people could gain qualifications and therefore go on to work for organisations such as Citizens Advice, the prison service or other organisations supporting offenders in the future and that it could be tied into current educational routes such as NVQs:

*“If you are doing a citizen's advice course at college then you could be doing a part time job in here [prison]” (Female, Prisoner, 50 years old)*

It was also felt that it would have an impact on serving prisoners:

*“It would set a standard of what you could achieve” (Female, Prisoner, 50 years old)*

Prisoners would also like more signposting to organisations which would employ ex-offenders and felt that a service run by serving inmates would mean that more posts like this could be found.

It was also felt that in time these posts could be paid and the money saved until the prisoner was released.

### **Other roles within prison**

Generally it was felt that there were other roles and responsibilities that prisoners could take on while in prison and that many of these could be supported by external organisations rather than the prison service. It was felt that this was particularly relevant in open prisons:

*"I think you should be more involved. I think at this stage [Open Prison] the women could be more involved in the running of the prison" (Female, Prisoner, 24 years old)*

It was felt that in open prison a prisoner could do jobs which require more responsibility:

*"We could do the gates and clock the girls in and out... you would need a security officer but [no more than is already needed]" (Female, Prisoner, 50 years old)*

Additionally it was recommended that a prisoner could be the 'House Officer':

*"Someone could do the house office work because all they need to do is delegate jobs to inmates, check the stores, check there is enough cleaning products, make sure the jobs have been done... I think it could give us more responsibility" (Female, Prisoner, 24 years old)*

Participants thought that by the time prisoners had achieved status within an open prison there was less need for prison officers and more need for support agencies to help them plan for their release. It was felt that many of these roles could be done by either serving inmates or non-uniform civil servants.

*"Do they have to be in uniform, is that necessary? There are plenty of civil servants that could do that job... at this stage [open prison]" (50 year old female, 8 year sentence)*

### **Work experience**

In addition to work experience in prison it was also felt that all prisoners (depending on nature of crime and risk assessments) should have the opportunity to undertake work placements outside of the prison. They would like the opportunity to organise these themselves rather than being 'spoon fed' all their opportunities. It was felt that this would also help them find something which was more appropriate to their future and prepare them for leaving by having other contact and interaction. One research participant stated:

*“There should be an agency... you can go to on day release and do a days work at a factory... if you do a good job you can get your money put in the bank and then they might give you an actual job when you get out” (Male, former offender)*

Some prisons would be interested in working within such an organisation longer term.

This opportunity had been given to one participant while in their resettlement prison. They stated:

*“The Governor let me out three times a week and I went into the other [projects] and just helped them out. As soon as I told them I was from prison they related to me more.” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

This participant then went on to gain employment with The Prince’s Trust while still serving their sentence:

*“I was a youth development worker and I did that for four years in that prison. I was allowed to have my own car, my own phone... because of the jail I was in it was fantastic. There is no other jail that would have given me this opportunity” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

It is important to note that this participant went on to gain full time employment within the Prince’s Trust following their release from prison.

The importance of opportunities being offered to prisoners only serving short sentences was also noted as they felt they could miss out on opportunities as things take a long time to organise and they felt that they are not seen as a priority when it came to working placements and the future.

### **Outside activities**

Across the majority of discussion groups the opportunity to leave prison to take part in social events and activities was noted. For example becoming part of a football team that was already established was noted as a good way to make new friends and have consistency once leaving prison. Activities organised for young people through YIPs and YOTs was noted as a good example of this. Prisoners felt that this would help them start to build a new circle of friends prior to release meaning they were less likely to go back to old friends and old habits once they were released:

*“You could make new friends and have something to work towards... it gets you out of old habits” (Male, Prisoner, 18 years old)*

### **Day release**

Within one group the opportunity of having day release to visit the Jobcentre or college open days would have made them feel that they were being empowered to make their own decisions. It was felt that this could be supervised by an external organisation which could take responsibility for the visit and in the longer term could give them a head start in organising job interviews for immediately after their release rather than starting the process after release. One prisoner commented:

*“I mean if we could go out just to go to the Jobcentre to look at what is out there and get a bit of a head start for when we leave... you [to other prisoner] were saying that there was an open day at college you wanted to go to talk to someone... that kind of thing would be really good, give us a head start” (Male, Prisoner, 19 years old)*

### 3.5 The role of families

All of the family members interviewed for the research (four parents and one spouse) wanted to be more involved in the lives of their loved ones while in prison. All believed this could help resettlement as well as help to reduce their own anxiety and enable them to understand better what help was needed.

Families' involvement or experience of the CJS had come about through links with the voluntary sector, with two mentioning Adfam as particularly helpful. They believed that better links with probation staff pre and post-release, and pre-release family meetings, would help. However, most were unsure about the scope for greater involvement in the CJS.

One respondent described how she had to make a big effort to become involved.

*"We've had to push it ourselves. If we hadn't been bothered they wouldn't have contacted us. It was only because we kept on the ball that we were involved, we put all the effort in." (Mother of female offender)*

Another participant said she had been told that data protection rules meant she couldn't be told what was happening to her son.

*"I think they should tell the family more. They expect them to come and live back with you but they don't keep you informed. He always comes out on a rehabilitation order and seen as he's living with me it would be nice to know if he'd passed that or not." (Mother of male offender)*

All stressed the importance of the family unit in helping to try to prevent re-offending.

*"If somebody's got a family and they want to get involved it shows them they've got support and it's probably those people who don't have a good support network who are going out and re-offending." (Wife of male offender)*

*"I honestly think if they listened to more people on the outside like families and parents it would help. In one prison when she was kicked out and the probation officer said if she didn't have anywhere to go she could sleep on a park bench!" (Mother of female offender)*

For research participants who had family, they were seen to be very important for both long and short term support in reducing the risk of re-offending and making this sustainable.

*"Accommodation and support is the main thing that's why they [families] are important" (Male, former offender)*

*"Other people would have turned back to crime wouldn't they!? Luckily I've got a supportive family environment I can turn to but there are a lot of people out there who don't." (Female, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

*“Family was a big part for me, like I say I got out with nothing, they stuck by me throughout my sentence. It was a great help. If you haven’t got your family you’ve got nobody” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

*“Those people who don’t have families or whose families have broken down because of drugs or whatever need even more support. I don’t know how people in that situation can come out sane... I think most of them come out a mess” (Female, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

It was also felt that if families wanted to be involved more regularly then they should be given the opportunity to do so. Those who were sentenced at a younger age tended to want their family more involved in their lives in prison as they felt that they were still young when they entered and need/ value their families’ support and understanding.

*“My mum would like to be a part of my resettlement plan. Although I’m 25 years old I’ve been in prison since I was 18 so I was still her baby when I came to prison. For my mum to be a little bit involved in what is going on would really make her feel better and put her mind at ease and know that I’m safe and know that things are in place and know what is going to be happening to her daughter.” (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

### **Attendance in prison at significant events**

Family attendance at events such as ETS and SDP presentations were given by some prisoners as examples of best practice of family involvement. This was not a consistent activity which took place across all the prisons people had been in. However most did feel that this would be beneficial not only to themselves but also their family. One commented:

*“I could hug my mum rather than just sit opposite her. I held her hand through the whole thing... it was a brilliant day... it really brought us together.” (Male, Prisoner, 19 years old)*

It was suggested that where possible and where family wanted to be part of the celebrations they be invited to attend. It was felt that their family did not often have something to be proud of them for and therefore if they were able to see them trying to turn their lives around they would be proud and would have more confidence for the future and their resettlement.

### **Sentence and resettlement planning**

Research participants felt that having their family involved in their sentence planning would have an impact on themselves and family members. It was suggested that family members could attend sentence planning boards. It was also felt that they should have a larger input into resettlement planning. They could meet with key members of staff involved in the resettlement process, such as resettlement officers. It was felt that this approach would enable family members to see the prisoner’s resettlement plan as a family resettlement plan and would ensure that prisoners would be able to meet key members of staff which, as stated above, does not happen currently for many prisoners. This approach would also enable the prisoners to help their family understand how

difficult they can find resettlement and would not make them feel that once leaving prison they would be 'asking for too much' from their families as they would already be aware of what was going to happen and have their own plan for the resettlement.

*"Attending sentence planning boards, having bits of input maybe a letter or a phone call from the probation officer, just some interaction from here." (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

### **Increased interaction with prison**

Key to having family more involved was felt to be in an increase in general interaction between the prison and family. It was felt that this should be in the form of letters or phone calls informing family members of the progress prisoners had made.

*"The family could liaise with the resettlement officer nearer to your release and discuss what plans you've got" (Male, former offender)*

It was explained that when younger people serve a custodial sentence the additional support required by families is often available however, this support does not continue into adult prisons, leaving families members within a disjointed system:

*"When I was in the juvenile it was ok because the youth offending worker used to ring my mam and tell her if needed anything... it was good. They could have been more involved when I was in the adult because all she got was a letter about visiting... I think she could have done something with my probation." (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

Additionally contact from probation with family members prior to release was perceived to be beneficial, because they would be making contact and developing relationships with the people who would be supporting the prisoners once they leaving prison.

### **Key workers and mediation**

Throughout their sentence it was felt that family members should be able to contact members of staff who could then act as a mediator and help family members have a greater understanding of why the prisoner had committed the crime they were in prison for. It would also be beneficial for prisoner to be able to tell their families, with a key worker, exactly what it was like in prison and demonstrate the progression they were making. A specific example of this was enabling families to have 'cell visits' where they could spend time in the prisoner's cell and interact in surroundings other than the visiting room. It was felt that by taking the visits into the cell it would enable families members to have a greater understanding of what they were going through and therefore understand why they would not want to return but would need support form their families.

### **Family visits**

It was felt by some prisoners that for those serving a longer sentence they should be able to go home and spend more time in their family home prior to their release so that there was no initial shock by both the prisoner and the family when they first returned. It was

explained that this can be a very 'exciting time' when prisoners can often become overwhelmed and their plans can become secondary to 'having a good time'.

*"People get gate fever because they have no idea what they are doing, what's happening then they go back to whatever they were doing before." (Female, former offender)*

It was felt that this should be for those prisoners who had worked towards their sentence and resettlement plan and were able to be trusted. It was understood that this already happened in some prisons and it was felt that this should be a policy across the CJS. One prisoner stated:

*"It's like they are doing the time with you. It would ease their minds and let them know you are serious... It takes a lot of time to re-adjust when you leave and that's when it can be dangerous, the first couple of weeks. If you are ready for that [from spending time at home previously] it would be so much easier." (Male Prisoner, 20 years old)*

### **Aftercare**

Prisoners did not want this contact to end once they had left prison. They felt that an aftercare service for family members would be beneficial as they could then seek support from elsewhere should they suspect the prisoner was offending again and would know how to deal with this and an approach to take to further their support.

*"The family could be involved in aftercare - they could carry it on and if you are slipping up they could ask for help - that would make less re-offending yes - people looking out for you." (Male, former offender)*

It was felt that this contact could be either with probation or the resettlement officer in the prison.

### **Overall impact of family involvement**

When asked about the impact of greater family involvement prisoners commented that family could be the key element in their success or failure once they had left prison.

It was felt that if their family wanted to support them and had been through the process above they would understand more about not only the crime committed and conditions within prison, but also why they did not want to go back to offending and it was felt that this would enable families to have a greater role in the process and in doing so they would feel more inclined to offer the support needed by prisoners.

*"It boils down to that when you are a part of it you want to do it, you want to achieve it because it's your plan. If my mum was part of it... she would be more encouraging because she would see it as our plan." (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

For the prisoners it would result in having their family more involved and therefore this would help to keep bonds strong while in prison. With this those leaving prison would

want to make their families proud and therefore there would be less chance of them offending in the future.

*“My family was very shocked when I ended up in jail but they were there for me the whole time... they have let me come back to their home so I could get parole. If they hadn't I wouldn't be out now” (Female, former offender)*

Finally, it was understood that families need support through the process of resettlement and by having key staff that they could contact would help them with this and they would know where to go for help, advice and guidance in the months following release.

### 3.6 Timing of involvement

#### At sentencing

Research participants were asked what stage they felt user involvement in the CJS should begin. All those consulted felt that it should begin when they are sentenced or when they get their ERD (Earliest Release Date).

*“Once you are sentenced you should be given all the dates you are eligible for things. Progressions which you can make if you put the effort in, what is needed to progress to that level and give you the opportunity to make the best of yourself in that sentence.” (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

Some participants noted that they are currently involved in limited sentence planning and that some prisons are better than others at supporting and helping prisoners plan their sentence. It was felt that if their sentence was to have an impact, especially on their changes of re-offending upon release, they needed more input into their sentence planning, and their resettlement planning from the beginning. It was then explained that there should be consequences and sanctions should they not keep to their contract so it could be seen as a serious document that prisoners had to stick to.

It was also felt that after sentencing, and possibly as part of their induction, prisoners should be told about all the opportunities available to them so they could work towards achieving possible goals. This should then be put into their sentence plan and possibly form part of their contract (detailed below).

#### Contracts

It was felt by some participants that they should have a sentence and resettlement plan, which is attached to a contract. This would highlight all the potential opportunities and threats to them and identify what the individual prisoner will do to achieve as much as they can in prison while avoiding their weaknesses. For example, the contract could include regular drugs testing, an obligation to undertake training which would benefit them upon release, attending prisoner forums and training as a listener and supporting other prisoners. Both their personal officer and the prison would then sign this contract and this would enable them to take control of their sentence and commit to getting the most out of it. It was stated:

*“There should be like an agreement made between you and the authorities. So if you highlight problems like housing and drug use... then right at the very start of your sentence sign an agreement and work towards beating it. An ambition, a target, an aim. Instead of forgetting about it for 12 months and then being asked a couple of days before release.” (Male, former offender)*

## Resettlement planning

In relation to involvement in the resettlement process some participants felt this should increase about five weeks prior to their release date while others thought it should take place about half way through their sentence (depending on sentence time served). No research participants felt that it should begin only a few weeks/ days prior to release as many reported it currently does.

*“You are not guaranteed to see a resettlement officer, something should flash up like 5 weeks before so that you do get to see one.” (Male, former offender)*

*“If you get out and you are doing nothing you just get into your old routines... [I think resettlement should start] in the middle of your sentence because you can start looking at accommodation or say you want to go on a course you have more time to get things sorted out.” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

This was because they would know if they could go back to a family home and if not they could begin, and have enough time, to organise housing for their release. It was felt that housing was one of the key issues because:

*“Once you are put into them hostels its all downhill... once you get into them its hard to get out of them... it just makes you feel useless.” (Male, former offender)*

It was also felt that this would be a good time for them to start identifying employment opportunities which they would hopefully have been working towards while serving their sentence through education for example.

It was also felt that at this time they could begin to plan any drug support they would need for when they left. Many felt that being able to get their ‘script’ when still in prison ready for the release was wrong as this would mean although they had been through withdrawal they had an option to start using drugs again. However, others felt that without the option of ‘scripts’ they would go back to using their old drugs as soon as they left. When asked if ‘scripts’ should be available one research participant stated:

*“I don’t, no. It’s just another excuse to use really.” (Male, former offender)*

On this issue, it was suggested that there be voluntary drug testing for those who wanted it and this could be part of the contract signed, detailed above.

A minority of those consulted had had a positive experience of the resettlement process and this was attributed to the longitudinal approach taken to it:

*“You need to get everything in order... I was only supposed to be on it (the resettlement programme) for eight or nine weeks but I stopped on for the last four months of me sentence. I found it very useful.” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

Family members interviewed believed that their involvement in helping to plan resettlement should begin early in the sentence.

*"The process should start as soon as possible, so everything is totally sorted out when it's needed." (Father of male offender)*

### **Input in sentencing**

It was also suggested by a few participants that when they are sentenced the judge should have more input into the planning. For example if the judge identifies during sentencing that one of the reasons they have committed the crime is that they do not have stable accommodation, the court should make someone responsible for finding them some accommodation, or supporting the prisoner to find their own, during sentencing:

*"It should be the judge. He should turn around and say 'make sure this individual gets some accommodation.'" (Male, Prisoner, 20 years old)*

### **Throughout their sentence**

It was felt that there should be more done to keep the prisoner informed of any action taking place throughout their sentence. This could be at key milestone points and at this point they could take some responsibility for enabling things to happen themselves.

Critical to them being more involved was that it happened on a regular basis and was something they could work towards, whether this be planning their education, organising housing or attending prisoner forums.

*"All that should be done... at the beginning of your sentence and they should still keep in touch with you to make sure that progress happening." (Female, former offender)*

### 3.7 Impact of involvement

Throughout the discussions the impact of involvement in both the CJS and their resettlement was discussed. The next section provides details of what potential impact some of the above activities could have on those in prison and longer term after their release.

#### Housing

It was felt that greater involvement in housing would have the most significant impact on them both when they were serving their sentence and when they left prison. This was especially true for those who would not be returning to a family home. Comments included:

*"I'm sure if you looked you would get more people committing crimes who were homeless than those who had established addresses." (Male, former offender)*

*"It's disturbing when you get out because you think; I'm back to that again." (Male, former offender)*

*"I thought that the other week, trying to get a flat and somewhere to stay and I thought 'you know what, I'm better off in prison'." (Male, former offender)*

If prisoners were able to find their own suitable accommodation for when they left, while serving their sentence, this would enable prisoners to feel confident about the future and encourage them to want to help themselves while still in prison. For example, if prisoners knew they were returning to stable housing they would want to make sure they had organised employment and had received relevant training while still in prison and had also dealt with their 'demons' in terms of their drug using habits.

Upon release the impact of having housing organised would be that they were less likely to offend because they had worked for their accommodation and would appreciate how difficult it can be to find. Having housing would make them want to work so they could pay rent and subsequently would have a positive impact on their drug using behaviour.

#### Confidence

Many explained the increased confidence and self respect that would result in more involvement and responsibility in prison.

*"Having more involvement gives you more confidence so when you get out you have the confidence to do stuff on your own... the more independence you have the more it is going to help you." (Female, Prisoner, 24 years old)*

*"You'd have more structure and value in your life." (Female, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

Any increase in confidence was perceived by research participants as beneficial. This was not only because of the activities and results from being involved but also that their increase in confidence would help them deal with the potential problems they would face

during resettlement. Being able to make their own decisions and not being overwhelmed at being 'free' would result in them 'taking things slower' once they left, for example not spending their first money on alcohol, which they are less tolerant to after leaving prison.

### **Skills**

By being more involved it was felt that prisoners would have greater opportunities to learn new skills, for example, being on a prisoner forum where actions resulted in their involvement they felt that they would have learnt listening and negotiating skills, which would help them during interview processes.

### **Trust**

It was felt that if prisoners were able to work with the CJS rather than against it they would begin to trust it more. This trust would then also result in them listening more and ultimately 'playing by the rules' and making their sentence time more successful.

This might also result in less resentment towards the CJS so they could then get on with their lives in prison rather than feel they are fighting against it.

### **Individual plans**

It was felt that individual plans, which they had being involved in developing, would help because they would take more ownership of them and would not want to fail. As it would be designed to meet the needs of the individual they would also be less likely to fail as it would be designed around their own identified strengths and weakness.

*"Also if you have been part of the resettlement and been able to put your input into it, you're going to get more out of it because it is going to be more tailored to what you need, and also because you have been a part of it you are going to trust them more which means if you do have a problem you are more likely to go to them and ask for help [before it gets too late]." (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

*"If you are told exactly what you have got to do and you have no say in, then you are gonna say 'well I'm not doing it' but if its something that you have put your effort into and they are supporting you, you are gonna feel that you want to do well because it is something you have developed." (Female, Prisoner, 25 years, old)*

### **Prison information**

Many prisoners felt that if they were able to run drop-in information sessions/ shops the impact would be twofold. Firstly it would have an impact on the prisoners running it but increasing their confidence, helping them gain new skills, potentially giving them more qualifications and that they were more likely to find relevant employment once they had left.

Secondly, it would have a positive impact on those accessing the service as they would know where to ask for help and advice and in doing so would be less frustrated with the overall CJS as they would have the answers from someone they trusted. This would

enable them to make informed decisions about their own future and by doing this they would be more likely to succeed once released.

*“To help the individual prisoner who is doing it [being involved by taking responsibility for elements of running the prison] because it will help them know more stuff, it's gaining skills and experience and their confidence but also helping the other inmates because they would know where to ask questions. It's more comfortable asking the other lasses than asking the officers.” (Female, Prisoner, 20 years old)*

*“You are less likely to get false information from another prisoner.” (Female, Prisoner, 25 years old)*

It was also felt that this type of empowerment of prisoners would help them to feel more like equals within the system. Helping them take responsibility for their own actions and not feeling like they are looked down upon which in turn would impact positively on their feelings of self worth.

Additionally, it was noted that other prisoners understand and have empathy towards their peers and therefore information would be given in a way which was not confusing and would be understood, rather than a prisoner feeling they could not ask more questions for fear of being judged.

*“Number one, the responsibility of it, number two a lot of the women have a lot more qualifications than the officers, they are a lot more educated and have a lot more understanding of what is going on in their lives at that particular moment and what them women need.” (Female, Prisoner, 50 years old)*

Overall most research participants also noted that an individual needs to want to change for the CJS to be able to assist them with this. However it was felt that for those who did want to change the processes and mechanisms were generally not in place.

*“It wasn't prison that rehabilitated me it was me... If The Prince's Trust, if the Team Programme, if the job wasn't there and if I didn't want to change yeah I would be back to it!” (Male, former offender, Depth telephone interview)*

## 4. Conclusions

As can be seen throughout these findings many of the priority areas within the Taskforce cannot be compartmentalised. The issues faced by those serving a sentence and their greater involvement in the CJS are as complex as the issues resulting in conflict with the law.

Those consulted had ideas about how they could be involved in the CJS as end users, but their lack of past experience resulted in them struggling to understand the overall concept and how it would work in practice. This is a reflection of their perception of the CJS having a 'correctional' role rather than a rehabilitative one.

There is evidence to suggest that steps are being taken to actively involve 'service users' in the decisions that affect their lives in prison. Some research participants could clearly identify how they had been helped and as a result were able to not re-offend on release. However, most of those consulted were sceptical about the impact, believing that the CJS was paying lip service to them rather than providing channels for meaningful dialogue that could have an impact on their lives post release. These feelings resulted in resentment towards the CJS and ultimately could disengage the very people it was meant to support.

It was acknowledged throughout the research that offenders must want to change if any rehabilitation activities such as their greater involvement in the CJS were to work. However, it was felt that upon sentencing the intentions of most were that this would be the last time they went to prison. These feelings were likely to change if action to support them and plan their sentence and resettlement did not occur quickly.

The time it takes to process applications to see the relevant people caused frustration. This is not to say that those consulted did not understand why it could take a long time. In fact when referring to Probation it was acknowledged that officers did not have the resources needed to provide the support required to help offenders either pre or post release. However, this understanding led to disillusionment of the overall system, and in turn those serving their sentence could feel forced to disengage with their rehabilitation and subsequently choosing not to engage in the processes needed to ensure a successful resettlement.

Greater involvement in the resettlement process was seen as a priority. This was because it was felt that a successful resettlement process would assist most in ensuring they did not go back to the life they had before sentencing. Most importantly, housing was seen to be an area where more involvement would result in more successful resettlement.

Research participants understood that if they were to have greater involvement in the CJS they would need support and guidance. They felt that this should not come from members of the CJS (who were perceived to have a correctional role) and that instead the voluntary sector's role was essential to ensure trust could be gained. Evidence from the consultation suggests that the voluntary sector have already gone some way to engage and support former offenders pre and post-release. However, greater involvement in the day-to-day support and engagement of those in prison by the voluntary sector was desired and recommended.

Many of those consulted identified that they had undertaken programmes and courses that were not relevant to them. This was seen as evidence of their current lack of choice within the CJS, resulting in a perception of the CJS wasting resources. This, it was felt, was down to a lack of understanding that individuals needed an individual approach to rehabilitation, causing feelings of resentment.

To combat this and to provide more choice and responsibility to those serving a sentence, it was felt that more 'jobs' should be given to those serving their sentences. It was felt that if prisoners could act as sources of advice for their peers, this responsibility would enable them to learn new skills and help others, which in turn could have a positive impact on their future post-release.

The impact of greater involvement by offenders in the CJS was clearly identified to be twofold. Firstly, on the tangible skills learnt during such a process, which would have an impact on employability upon release. However, the less tangible outcomes such as confidence, patience and self-belief were regarded as even more important because ultimately these were the skills that would enable them to progress and dramatically reduce their likelihood of re-offending.