



Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3)

10 December 2024, (10:00-12:45), Online via Teams

Attendees

Anne Fox, Clinks (Chair)
Sam Julius, Clinks
Bronte Jack, Clinks
Alasdair Jackson, Recycling Lives (Employment)
Catrina McHugh, Open Clasp Theatre (Arts)
Dave Higham, The Well Communities CIC (Lived Experience)
Dez Brown, Spark2Life (Organisations by and focused on racially minoritised people)
Jess Mullen, Alliance for Youth Justice (Youth Justice)
Joanne O'Connor, Junction 42 (Prisons)
Maria McNicoll, St. Giles Trust (Education)
Matina Marougka, Together for Mental Wellbeing (Mental Health)
Nicola Drinkwater, Women in Prison (Women)
Paul Grainge, Recoop (Older people)
Paula Harriot, Unlock (Lived Experience)
Richard Knibbs, Nacro (Resettlement)
Vicki Markiewicz, Change Grow Live (Substance misuse)
Victoria Baird, Spurgeons (Families)

Officials

Rt Hon David Gauke, Chair of the Independent Sentencing Review
Michael Spurr
Peter Lewis
Michael Harrison, Head of Prison Education, HMPPS
Bettina Crossick, Head of Third Sector Partnerships and Programmes Team, HMPPS
Jurga Kaucikiene, Third Sector Partnerships and Programmes Team, HMPPS
Sarah McKnight, Deputy Director of Employment, Skills and Education, Rehabilitation Directorate, HMPPS

Apologies

David Maguire, Prison Reform Trust
David Morgan, Entrepreneurs Unlocked CIC.
Josh Stunell, bthechange CIC
Steve Matthews, Shelter
Stephen O'Connor, Deputy Director for Probation Policy, Ministry of Justice

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 Anne Fox welcomed members, officials, and gave an overview of agenda items.
- 1.2 She welcomed Tammi Owen, the new seat holder for the Wales Seat on the RR3.

- 1.3 To provide an overview of the Independent Sentencing Review, the group was joined by the review's Chair, the Rt Hon David Gauke. This was then followed by a Roundtable discussion whereby RR3 members provided their thoughts on the challenges contributing to the present prison and population capacity issues, as well as the policy solutions that the Review should consider.
- 1.4 The second agenda item focused on the Dynamic Purchasing System with an update and presentation from Sarah McKnight, Deputy Director of Employment, Skills and Education, and Michael Harrison, Head of Prison Education.

2. Rt Hon David Gauke, Chair of Independent Sentencing Review: Introduction

- 2.1 David Gauke began by thanking the RR3 for the opportunity to attend this meeting. He highlighted the importance of the review and encouraged everyone to respond to the call for evidence, emphasising the need for continued engagement in the future.
- 2.2 He provided an overview of the significant challenges faced by the prison system specifically the rising prison population. This has led to severe strains, including overcrowding and a lack of focus on rehabilitation. Gauke noted that projections indicate the situation could worsen, even with current prison planning measures. Capacity is expected to be exceeded, necessitating the recent measures such as the SDS40 initiative. These challenges will become exacerbated, providing crucial context for the sentencing review.
- 2.3 Gauke then provided an overview of the expertise of the review panel members. The panel aims to deliver its report by Spring 2025 to allow sufficient time for legislation to be published by July 2025, ensuring that solutions can begin to take effect by Spring 2026. He emphasised the urgency of responding to the call for evidence, with a deadline of 9th January. They are particularly seeking innovative ideas to stabilise the prison population in both the short and long term.
- 2.4 Initial considerations include developing a strategic approach to sentencing that has a lasting impact while also providing recommendations to address immediate challenges. The review will draw on both international and domestic evidence to identify effective practices.
- 2.5 Gauke also highlighted the transformative potential of technology in the criminal justice system, which is creating new opportunities for rehabilitation and public protection and offering alternatives to prison or complementing existing measures.
- 2.6 Without drawing firm conclusions, Gauke noted that the review would likely need to examine the use of short custodial sentences and explore viable alternatives to prison. A key issue under consideration is addressing the challenge of prolific offenders.
- 2.7 He highlighted the importance of considering where individuals may not need to serve lengthy prison sentences, acknowledging that sentences are currently longer than ever.
- 2.8 He suggested exploring whether incentivisation mechanisms could be implemented to justify early release to reduce the prison population.
- 2.9 He emphasised the need for sentencing to be clearer and more transparent, ensuring it is easily understood by the public and those directly affected. Rehabilitation, whilst may not necessarily be directly linked to sentencing, is an area of interest for preventing reoffending and the likelihood of individuals returning to prison.
- 2.10 The overarching goal of the review is to reset sentencing policy in a way that not only reduces crime but also delivers better value for taxpayers. Gauke expressed confidence that this approach would yield broader societal benefits.

3. What are the challenges that you perceive to be contributing to the prison and population capacity issues as seen in the criminal justice system today?

- 3.1 **Matina Marougka** highlighted that sentencers often lack clear information about available mental health resources and community-based interventions. As a result, there is a reliance on custodial sentences, even in cases where individuals would benefit more from mental health care.
- 3.2 She also emphasised that certain options, such as Mental Health Treatment Requirements (MHTRs), remain underutilised. If implemented correctly, these measures could effectively address the needs of people with mental health conditions and offer them appropriate support.
- 3.3 **Vicki Markiewicz** highlighted the inconsistency in substance misuse treatment across prisons. Not all facilities offer specialised programmes such as drug recovery wings or incentivised substance-free living units, resulting in a “postcode lottery” where access to treatment depends on location.
- 3.4 She emphasised that short prison sentences disrupt individuals’ lives without providing sufficient time for stabilisation or meaningful engagement with treatment programmes. This limits their ability to achieve long-term recovery.
- 3.5 She too echoed the point that Community sentences such as Drug Rehabilitation Requirement (DRRs) and Alcohol Treatment Requirements (ATRs) are inconsistently applied and remain underutilised. These alternatives can provide more effective support for people struggling with substance misuse.
- 3.6 She also pointed out that the lack of awareness among magistrates, judiciary members, and probation staff regarding available local resources prevents the effective use of community-based sentencing options. Greater knowledge and understanding of these resources could lead to more appropriate sentencing decisions.
- 3.7 She stressed that imprisonment is particularly unsuitable for women dealing with substance misuse issues, as women in prison face unique challenges that are often not adequately addressed.
- 3.8 She highlighted a critical gap in care and support when individuals transition from prison back into the community. Without proper continuity of care, progress made during imprisonment is often lost, increasing the risk of relapse and reoffending.
- 3.9 **Joanne O’Connor** highlighted that alternative sentencing options for women remain underutilised, despite advances in trauma-informed practices and effective models such as Hope Street. These alternatives could provide more appropriate and effective support for women with complex needs.
- 3.10 She noted that alternative sentencing options are sometimes perceived as ‘soft justice,’ which may deter their use. However, these alternatives are specifically designed to address underlying issues and deliver meaningful, long-term outcomes.
- 3.11 Joanne O’Connor pointed out that recalls to prison often undo significant progress made by individuals post-release. This includes efforts to secure stable housing, access benefits, and engage with healthcare services. More efficient recall processes are needed to prevent unnecessary setbacks.
- 3.12 She emphasised that short prison sentences do not provide individuals with sufficient time to engage with or complete rehabilitation courses, treatment programmes, or employment opportunities. As a result, their potential for meaningful rehabilitation is severely limited.
- 3.13 She noted that prisons often rely on roll-on, roll-off programmes due to the transient nature of the prison population. However, these programmes frequently lack the structured progression necessary for effective recovery and rehabilitation.

- 3.14 She highlighted that there is often a disconnect between the length of sentences and the duration of available rehabilitation programmes. This misalignment results in missed opportunities for impactful interventions that could support long-term stability and reduce reoffending.
- 3.15 **Vicky Baird** highlighted that imprisonment disrupts family dynamics, placing significant emotional and financial strain on those left behind. Children are especially affected, facing trauma, stigma, mental health challenges, and academic struggles. Parental imprisonment is now recognised as an adverse childhood experience (ACE), which can have long-term consequences on a child's well-being and development.
- 3.16 She noted that sentencing decisions rarely consider the impact on dependents, overlooking the ripple effects on family stability and child welfare.
- 3.17 Baird pointed out that the criminal justice system often treats families as collateral damage, neglecting their potential role in reducing reoffending. Practical barriers, such as high travel costs for prison visits, and emotional barriers, including stigma and shame, often hinder family engagement. Baird stressed that positive relationships are critical for successful reintegration, yet the prison environment and lack of adequate support frequently undermine these connections.
- 3.18 She highlighted that resettlement and probation services often lack the capacity and resources to meaningfully involve families in the reintegration process. Evidence shows that when families are actively engaged in post-release support, the chances of successful rehabilitation improve significantly.
- 3.19 Baird pointed out that community-based sentencing, particularly for women, remains underutilised. In many cases, such alternatives would better serve both the individual and their dependents, reducing harm to families while supporting rehabilitation.
- 3.20 **Richard Knibbs** highlighted that there is a lack of consistent and sufficient investment in effective alternatives to custody. Expanding well-resourced community-based options could provide more meaningful rehabilitation opportunities and reduce reliance on custodial sentences.
- 3.21 Community payback, while effective in certain examples, often focuses on menial tasks rather than offering skill-building, qualifications, or opportunities for progression.
- 3.22 He noted that Probation services have shifted from being seen as supportive to being largely punitive in the eyes of service users. This strained relationship creates barriers to engagement and reduces the chances of meaningful rehabilitation.
- 3.23 He emphasised that many individuals in the criminal justice system come from backgrounds of extreme disadvantage, trauma, and lack of opportunities. Prison often exacerbates these issues instead of addressing their root causes.
- 3.24 Many individuals leaving prison experience hopelessness, loneliness, and stigma, which create additional challenges for successful resettlement. Without adequate support, these emotional and social barriers can hinder reintegration and increase the risk of reoffending.
- 3.25 He highlighted that navigating support through mainstream services is complex, with gaps in access and poor coordination leading to unmet needs.
- 3.26 While prisons can be effective in supporting rehabilitation (e.g. therapeutic communities like Grendon), systemic pressure limits resources and support.
- 3.27 He also stressed that individuals often face fragmented opportunities and a lack of sustained interventions both in custody and post-release.

- 3.28 **Nicola Drinkwater** highlighted that many women are sentenced for non-violent offences, often posing no risk to society. Community-based interventions could address underlying issues more effectively.
- 3.29 She expressed concern over the two thirds reduction in community sentences for women over the past decade. A Lack of trust in these alternatives, especially since the "Transforming Rehabilitation" initiative, has led to missed opportunities for effective interventions.
- 3.30 She noted that mental health crises often lead to women being imprisoned as a "place of safety," which is unsuitable and counterproductive. The current system lacks adequate community-based mental health support for women, pushing them toward crisis and imprisonment.
- 3.31 She stressed the need for a greater focus on diversion and early intervention, particularly for gender-specific services. Prevention-oriented services are underfunded and inconsistently available across regions.
- 3.32 Women face high rates of remand, often unnecessarily, with many not going on to be convicted. She highlighted concerns that recall and breach processes can be overly punitive, with insufficient consideration of supportive alternatives.
- 3.33 Many women in the justice system have experienced domestic abuse or coercion, resulting in them being criminalised for actions rooted in their victimisation. –
- 3.34 She also noted that antisocial behaviour legislation may also disproportionately affect women, bringing them into the justice system for issues that could be better addressed through community measures.
- 3.35 **Josh Stunell** highlighted that despite repeated discussions and awareness, individuals continue to be released from prison without stable housing. He pointed out that Many accommodations provided, including temporary housing or approved premises, are often unsuitable or even unsafe, further perpetuating instability.
- 3.36 He emphasised that addressing immediate needs (e.g. securing first-night housing) often becomes a box-ticking exercise, neglecting the broader, long-term support required for successful reintegration into the community.
- 3.37 He noted that trauma is a central factor linking many individuals in the criminal justice system, yet services addressing trauma are either insufficient or non-existent. A lack of trauma-informed responses both in prison and the community exacerbates existing challenges and contributes to high rates of reoffending.
- 3.38 He also highlighted that Housing and reintegration services fail to consider gender-specific needs, particularly for women, compounding challenges for vulnerable groups.
- 3.39 **Paul Grainge** added that a significant A significant number of older prisoners require intensive medical care, such as dialysis or chemotherapy. The need for daily escorts to external healthcare facilities places a considerable strain on prison resources, including staffing. This results in lockdowns that prevent the delivery of rehabilitative and support services to the wider prison population.
- 3.40 He emphasised that older people in prison are not always treated as distinct group, meaning that their specific needs, such as mobility issues, healthcare access, and social care, are often overlooked. This lack of recognition hampers tailored interventions and disrupts broader prison operations.
- 3.41 **Paula Harriot** stated that people in prison's experiences often contradict the stated rehabilitative goals of the system. Many perceive imprisonment as a purely punitive measure that fails to provide meaningful opportunities for personal growth or change. People in prison often feel despondent, believing the system will have a long-term

negative impact on their lives, such as barriers to employment, housing, and reintegration. The absence of clear pathways to rehabilitation leaves many feeling “locked out of life” indefinitely. Even minor convictions are viewed as having lifelong consequences, further diminishing trust in the systems ability to facilitate genuine reintegration and rehabilitation.

3.42 She stressed that sentencing and justice narratives directed at the public fail to acknowledge the audience of people in prison who are directly affected.

3.43 **Jess Mullen** highlighted that people from racially minoritised backgrounds, particularly Black and mixed-race individuals, are more likely to receive custodial sentences and longer sentences compared to their white counterparts for similar offences.

3.44 She also emphasised that structural inequalities, biases, and practices such as joint enterprise disproportionately impact racially minoritised communities. Similarly, policies like those introduced in the Police, Courts, Sentencing and Crime Act exacerbate existing disparities, often disproportionately targeting marginalised groups.

3.45 She pointed out that the Lammy review showed that addressing racial inequality in the justice system could significantly reduce prison populations and improve fairness. Although, many of the Lammy Review's recommendations remain relevant but under-implemented, particularly around increasing transparency, accountability, and fairness in decision-making processes.

4. What policy solutions should the Review consider to reform sentencing to meet its five purposes (punishment, crime reduction, reform and rehabilitation, public protection, and reparation), whilst delivering a sustainable system?

4.1. **Dave Higham** highlighted that many current prison programmes function as ‘tick-box exercises’ rather than comprehensive approaches addressing the root causes of offending. He stressed the need for more meaningful interventions that lead to long-term change to reduce reoffending.

4.2. He advocated for prison environments to integrate daily rehabilitation efforts, addressing adverse childhood experience, addiction, and behaviour. Rehabilitation should be a continuous process.

4.3. He noted that over half the prison population has substance misuse issues and so sentencing should prioritise rehabilitation and recovery. He also proposed the introduction of recovery focused sentences, such as mandatory participation in rehabilitation programmes or recovery housing.

4.4. He suggested the expansion of diversionary approaches, such as substance misuse awareness courses, like how speed awareness courses are used for driving offences.

4.5. He also emphasised the importance of providing real opportunities for transformation through intensive recovery work.

4.6. **Tammi Owen** highlighted public concern about inconsistent and unclear sentencing guidelines, particular for offences related to domestic abuse. She stressed the importance of providing transparent and accurate information to communities to mitigate fear, address misconceptions, and build trust in the criminal justice system.

4.7. **Vicki Baird** emphasised the need to evaluate the impact of custodial sentences on dependents during court proceedings. She advocated for the implementation of

family impact assessments to ensure sentencing decisions consider the broader consequences on children and family stability.

- 4.8. She called for a stronger focus on non-custodial alternatives, particularly for primary caregivers.
- 4.9. Baird highlighted the importance of expanding programmes such as parenting courses, restorative justice initiatives, and intensive probation orders. These approaches enable parents to address their behaviours while remaining involved in their children's lives.
- 4.10. She suggested the introduction of family liaison officers and parenting workshops within the prison system. She also recommended the development of child-friendly visitation programmes to strengthen family ties during imprisonment.
- 4.11. Baird stressed that families should play an active role in the reintegration process
- 4.12. She pointed out that housing and employment challenges should be addressed not just for the individual, but for the family as a whole, ensuring stability upon release.
- 4.13. She called for stronger collaboration between family-focused organisations, criminal justice agencies, and social services, to ensure families receive the comprehensive support they need.
- 4.14. Baird advocated for improved access to counselling, clear communication channels, and structured support networks to help families navigate the justice system. She also emphasised the need for programmes that help imprisoned parents reflect on their roles and strengthen family connections, using these as opportunities for behavioural change and reduced reoffending.
- 4.15. She highlighted that whole-family support should be a key priority in justice interventions to prevent children from following their parents into the criminal justice system.
- 4.16. Finally, Baird called for a sentencing approach that balances the need for punishment with the well-being of children and families left behind. She stressed that justice outcomes should be constructive.
- 4.17. **Tammy Owen** raised concerns about the impact of funding cuts on voluntary sector organisations and lack of long-term support.
- 4.18. She stressed the importance of ensuring long-term, sustainable funding that is locally sourced. This would help organisations maintain expertise, local knowledge, and lived experience.
- 4.19. She advocated for greater collaboration between justice-related organisations and the public, to create better understanding and shared responsibility in the justice process.
- 4.20. Owen highlighted the need for accessible and consistent communication about sentencing and justice processes for all stakeholders, including people in prison and their families.
- 4.21. Finally, she emphasised that transparency in justice processes is essential for building public trust and encouraging informed participation from community members.
- 4.22. **Dez Brown** suggested revisiting older models where people in prison were eligible for early release after serving a third of their sentence (EDR), rather than the current standing of serving half. He recommended this for cases where a less

punitive approach may be warranted, balancing rehabilitation goals with public safety concerns.

- 4.23. He also proposed analysis historical sentencing practices and their impact on prison populations to determine if adjustments like returning to one-third sentence terms could alleviate capacity issues.
- 4.24. **Richard Knibbs** stated the need to shift the focus from risk management (traditionally handled by probation services) to addressing the underlying needs that drive offending behaviour. He highlighted the importance of holistic assessments to identify root causes such as financial struggles, trauma, mental health challenges, or addiction.
- 4.25. He then called for clear pathways for individuals to be diverted from the criminal justice system into robust, voluntary sector support networks.
- 4.26. He stressed the need to empower voluntary sector organisations to take on a broader role in rehabilitation, emphasising expert navigators to provide consistent, individualised guidance.
- 4.27. To support sentencing confidence he recommended building robust, community-based alternatives that courts can trust to deliver meaningful interventions.
- 4.28. He also proposed systems designed where individuals are offered every opportunity to engage with support services, and the implementation of a secondary layer where, if people fail to engage despite available resources, alternative actions can be considered.
- 4.29. **Vicki Markiewicz** stressed the importance of developing policies emphasising the need to balance public safety with a deep understanding of offenders' needs and the root causes of their behaviour. She also highlighted the need to address inconsistencies in judicial understanding of drug- and alcohol-related crimes, including stigma and trauma-informed perspectives.
- 4.30. She proposed exploring sentence structures where time in custody can be reduced for meaningful engagement in rehabilitation programs, including rewards-based systems to encourage participation in prison and community-based interventions, ensuring smoother transitions to post-custody care.
- 4.31. To bridge gaps between in-prison and community-based services, she recommended integrating technology, including expanding access to virtual services like in-cell engagement with community rehabilitation providers, ensuring those released into unfamiliar areas can access post-release support.
- 4.32. She suggested leveraging residential rehabilitation and therapeutic communities for behaviour change, with a focus on integrating offenders into supportive environments post-release.
- 4.33. She also emphasised early intervention by strengthening diversion and prevention strategies for young people at the point of arrest to break the cycle of criminalisation.
- 4.34. She called for intensive community-based psychological interventions targeting trauma and promoting long-term behaviour change.
- 4.35. Finally, she urged for consistent judicial training on the drivers of offending and available rehabilitative options.
- 4.36. **Paul Grainge** suggested restoring greater independence to the Parole Board to ensure fairer, unbiased parole decisions.

- 4.37. He proposed introducing geriatric parole for older people in prison whose risk has diminished over time, helping to reduce prison overcrowding and ease resource pressures.
- 4.38. Grainge recommended assessing the risk levels of long-term prisoners approaching release to identify those who could be safely managed in the community.
- 4.39. He highlighted the struggles older prisoners face post-release due to disjointed health and social care services. Grainge called for comprehensive care plans and medication continuity to reduce anxiety and recidivism.
- 4.40. Grainge pointed out the low rates of compassionate release, particularly for end-of-life prisoners. He added that expanding compassionate release could free up prison spaces and ensure humane treatment.
- 4.41. He supported creative use of electronic monitoring, going beyond curfews to target specific offending behaviours. For instance, monitor individuals with specific offending behaviours, such as shoplifting, using tailored strategies (e.g. Restricting access to high-crime areas) to interrupt offending patterns.
- 4.42. **Maria McNicholl** highlighted that life licence supervision has been extended to 10 years under the current system. This extended supervision can hinder resettlement and employment opportunities, negatively impacting rehabilitation. Research indicates that individuals on life licences are the least likely to reoffend.
- 4.43. She recommended a review and potential reduction in the length of probation supervision for those on life licences back to four years, as was the case prior to the extension.
- 4.44. **Nicola Drinkwater** stated that previous efforts by the last government to reduce the use of short sentences were unsuccessful. She proposed revisiting and reviewing whether implementing a presumption against short sentences could be effective.
- 4.45. She stressed the need to bolster community-based support programs as alternatives to short custodial sentences. This includes making better use of women's centres (around 50 nationwide) and other community alternatives already established to support prevention and rehabilitation.
- 4.46. Drinkwater advocated for strengthening pre-sentence reports, ensuring they are comprehensive and well-resourced. Judges need access to detailed information to make informed sentencing decisions.
- 4.47. She stated that speedy justice has proven to be a barrier and there is a need for it to be fair, thorough, and effective.
- 4.48. Drinkwater encouraged exploring deferred and suspended sentences as ways to keep women in their communities rather than in prison — an approach shown to be far more effective in supporting rehabilitation.
- 4.49. She emphasised the importance of addressing domestic violence and abuse as contributing factors to women's offending. Pre-sentence reports should incorporate a deeper understanding of women's experiences, focusing on root causes and tailored responses.
- 4.50. She also discussed the use of tagging technology, stressing the need for gender-sensitive approaches. She highlighted cases where tags have had negative consequences: A homeless woman recalled because she couldn't charge her tag and tags preventing women from fulfilling childcare or other caregiving responsibilities. She called for pairing technological interventions with support

services and offering flexibility for women with tagging requirements. This would ensure these measures do not create additional barriers or undermine progress.

- 4.51. **Alasdair Jackson** emphasised the need to reconsider the use of remand as part of the sentencing review.
- 4.52. He highlighted the importance of the voluntary sector in creating pathways for people to engage in a meaningful way in real-world employment as part of community sentencing.
- 4.53. He suggested proposing the introduction of schemes like the Future Jobs Fund (previously used for unemployment) to support people serving community sentences.
- 4.54. Furthermore, he advocated for the integration of employment schemes into community sentencing by developing pathways that align community service work with skills training and direct employment opportunities, working in collaboration with private employers.
- 4.55. **Vicki Markiewicz** proposed combining Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Schemes, training opportunities, and employment access with innovative approaches like hybrid sentencing and temporary licences to reduce recidivism.
- 4.56. She also stressed the importance of strengthening the prison-to-community pathway by focusing on employment as a core rehabilitation and resettlement tool.
- 4.57. **Matina Marougka** highlighted the importance of building confidence among sentencers in alternative sentencing options to reduce unnecessary imprisonment.
- 4.58. She advocated for a systems approach that links various services—criminal justice, mental health care, and community support—to provide seamless care for individuals across community, prison, and post-release stages.
- 4.59. She emphasised the need to maintain care for individuals with mental health needs, particularly those on remand, who may not receive adequate support due to short stays. The sentencing review should account for the continuity of care to prevent the deterioration of mental health during imprisonment and in the community.
- 4.60. Matina stressed that voluntary sector organisations play a vital role in connecting different parts of the criminal justice system—sentencers, probation, prisons, etc.—highlighting the need for effective liaison and collaboration. Policy support is crucial to strengthen and enhance these communication efforts.
- 4.61. Building confidence in the system involves promoting understanding of community-based resolutions and alternatives, ensuring sentencing decisions are both effective and trusted.
- 4.62. She also underscored the importance of a trauma-informed sentencing process, recognising the emotional and social impact on individuals and families. Sentencing should be inclusive, giving those directly affected a voice, helping them understand the process, and ensuring they feel part of the decision-making under the new guidelines.
- 4.63. **Joanne O'Connor** stressed that sentencing decisions should consider the feasibility of completing meaningful interventions within the period of incarceration. Ensuring that individuals can engage in rehabilitative programmes is essential for improving outcomes.

5. Michael Harrison (Head of Prison Education, HMPPS) and Sarah McKnight (Deputy Director of Employment, Skills and Education, Rehabilitation Directorate, HMPPS - Discussion on the Dynamic Purchasing System

- 5.1. There are now almost 500 suppliers on the prison Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). When the DPS launched four years ago, Michael Harrison did not expect to have so many suppliers, so reaching 500 is seen as a significant achievement. Around 20% of the suppliers are estimated to be from the voluntary sector, but this is based on self-declaration, so the exact figure may be higher. The number of contracts through the DPS has steadily grown since its launch in 2019.
- 5.2. The total value of the DPS is £13.8 million nationwide for this financial year, a substantial investment in prison education.
- 5.3. Allocations for the next year have been distributed to governors. Michael's team is collaborating with governors and Heads of Education, Skills, and Work to plan future curricula and identify contracts for tender. Establishments with regional contracts, like reading programs across multiple prisons, must account for these in their budgets.
- 5.4. The team is working with sites to ensure they fully utilise their allocations, honour existing contract commitments, and plan for upcoming contracts.
- 5.5. Demand for DPS funds has now peaked, so there is close collaboration with governors to manage budgets and contract pipelines effectively.
- 5.6. Anne Fox expressed doubt about the accuracy of the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) supplier numbers, suggesting the actual figure is likely higher.
- 5.7. She noted that many organisations working in prisons struggle to secure funding, as the DPS is now the primary route for funding unless organisations are part of the larger contract groups.
- 5.8. Anne highlighted concerns about the current situation where some organisations expected to have contracts this year but did not receive them, causing significant disruption. This issue has been particularly challenging for small or relatively small organisations, many of which rely heavily on contracts in specific locations. She pointed out that larger organisations can sometimes distort the overall picture, making it harder to see the struggles faced by smaller groups.
- 5.9. Michael Harrison acknowledged the point about more organisations potentially being eligible for the DPS and emphasized that the DPS framework is designed to be accessible to smaller organisations.
- 5.10. He expressed surprise at the current number of suppliers but mentioned they regularly receive inquiries — about once or twice a week — from organisations interested in joining the framework, and they always provide guidance on how to apply.
- 5.11. Michael encouraged small organisations to reach out directly to the contract management team, specifically mentioning Bryant Crawford for London. He suggested that organisations could verify any uncertainties regarding budgets or messaging with his team.
- 5.12. He mentioned that, starting in April, tenders should be expected, and he urged governors to initiate the tendering process early to avoid delays. He also pointed out that, on average, it takes about 6-7 weeks to put a tender in place.
- 5.13. Anne Fox pointed out that many of the organisations involved in the process have very limited capacity to engage with the tendering process effectively. She

noted that while it's good to take a longer-term view of making the process more established, especially as it has grown beyond just education, it's important to consider the practical limitations of the smaller organisations involved.

- 5.14. Anne emphasised the need for collaboration to ensure that commissioners can manage the process well and at the right time. She also acknowledged that while six weeks for the tendering process is relatively quick, it's crucial to balance both the ability of commissioners and the organisations to respond in a timely manner.
- 5.15. Sarah McKnight acknowledged that the situation this year has provided lessons. She agreed with Anne Fox's point and emphasized the need to work with governors to smooth out the process, ensuring that when things continue, they take into account the re-tendering process.
- 5.16. She explained that both she and Michael Harrison have been working on increasing local capacity through the introduction of heads of education, skills, and work. This new structure aims to help governors and commissioners become better and smarter at managing the process.
- 5.17. Sarah acknowledged that although this isn't a new understanding, it will take time to adjust, given the complex dynamics of the civil service.
- 5.18. She noted ongoing discussions about being more dynamic in their approach and mentioned attending a meeting regarding new procurement regulations, which could offer future opportunities. She expressed that HMPPS has learned valuable lessons from this process and is actively working on ensuring the system adapts to these insights in the future.
- 5.19. Anne Fox emphasised her interest in supporting voluntary sector providers and her willingness to continue working on initiatives to improve the long-term outlook for these organisations. She highlighted her involvement with the Voluntary Sector Crown Representatives Board, where they've been focusing on procuring human-facing services differently from standard goods or commodities. Anne acknowledged the difficulties of the current period but emphasised the importance of getting the system right to ensure that services flow effectively and meet people's needs.
- 5.20. Sarah expressed interest in learning more about the discussions regarding procurement in human resources, particularly in the context of human-facing services. She suggested that she and Michael Harrison could collaborate with Anne to create examples of "what good looks like" in this area, focusing on clear and simple responses. This effort would aim to provide the sector with useful examples of effective approaches and solutions.
- 5.21. Michael Harrison acknowledged the balance between the advantages and disadvantages of the current system, highlighting how it was easier for well-known organisations to get support, while new or lesser-known organisations struggled.
- 5.22. He emphasised that the system had both pros and cons, but he was open to working together to improve it.
- 5.23. He expressed confidence in getting the necessary systems in place to support contracts and financing, specifically by working with governors.
- 5.24. He offered to help new suppliers by providing a simple, clear overview of what's available and ensuring it reaches Heads of Education, Skills and Work.

- 5.25. Jess Mullen reflected on the conversation, acknowledging that it felt like a familiar one, as these issues had been raised by the sector for many years without seeing as much progress as hoped.
- 5.26. She asked how the funding breaks down across the youth and adult estates as her understanding was that there have been some previous procurements in the youth estate under the DPS. She also made a broader point about how understanding the breakdown of funding across different areas would help in matching what is available from the sector to what is needed or on offer.
- 5.27. Michael Harrison added that to his knowledge, the DPS has predominantly been used for the adult estate and not the youth estate. He offered to further discuss it with Jess Mullen via email, as he may not be fully aware of any youth-specific procurements under the DPS.
- 5.28. Joanne O'Connor expressed her appreciation for the honesty in the conversation and highlighting the challenges that arise from working in the prison sector, especially around the need for a highly specialised workforce. She emphasized that the conversation isn't about requesting more money, but about stabilising the workforce to prevent constant staff turnover and redundancy notices.
- 5.29. Joanne also asked a specific question about a graph shown by Michael Harrison, where she noticed a significant drop in the actual financial values of contracts in this financial year. She sought clarification on whether there's a reason for this decline or if she interpreted the data incorrectly.
- 5.30. Michael Harrison explained the history and purpose behind the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), which was originally set up to allow for innovation and experimentation with different initiatives. The idea was to use it for short-term contracts, where new projects could be tested and then handed over to main providers if successful. However, this vision hasn't fully panned out, and what often happens is that initiatives are retendered rather than being handed off to larger providers, which is a key reason why the contracts are shorter in duration (1 to 6 years).
- 5.31. He also acknowledged that there has been a reduction in the budget this year due to funding pressures, which led to a decrease in the available funds for DPS contracts. He mentioned that in previous years, underspending in the DPS budget was often reallocated to other projects later in the year, but this year, funds were taken earlier, which added to the financial challenges. To help offset some of the cuts, the team took money from other parts of the business, such as the Prison Escort and Custody Careers (PECS) service, to support DPS funding.
- 5.32. Despite these challenges, he noted that there will be continued efforts to address the funding pressures, and he reassures that the team is working hard to manage the situation.

6. A.O.B

- 6.1. Anne Fox concluded the meeting by acknowledging Dez Brown's contributions and announcing that his replacement will be in place for the next R3 meeting in March.
- 6.2. Jess Mullen updated the group by sharing that immediately after the meeting, she is heading to a roundtable with Minister Dakin about youth justice at Petty France. She mentions raising concerns with officials that none of the organisations specifically focused on racial justice and race equality were invited to the

roundtable, despite there being two seats on the RR3 (the group) that could have filled this gap. Jess informs the group that she raised this issue with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

- 6.3. Anne Fox acknowledged the importance of including organisations focused on racial justice in such discussions, especially regarding youth justice. She also shared that she and Sam Julius met with Minister Dakin the previous week. Anne reassured Jess that the issue Jess raised about consultation on the youth custody strategy was brought up with Ed Cornmell, Executive Director, Youth Custody Service, and they've since reached out for further engagement on the Girls review.