



Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3)

11 March 2025, (10:30-13:30), Online via Teams

Attendees

Sam Julius, Clinks (Chair)
Bronte Jack, Clinks
Alasdair Jackson, Recycling Lives (Employment)
Catrina McHugh, Open Clasp Theatre (Arts)
David Morgan, Entrepreneurs Unlocked CIC (Small organisations)
Joanne O'Connor, Junction 42 (Prisons)
Josh Stunell, bthechange CIC (Organisations by and focused on racially minoritised people)
Jess Mullen, Alliance for Youth Justice (Youth Justice)
Joanne O'Connor, Junction 42 (Prisons)
Josh Stunell, bthechange CIC (Organisations by and focused on racially minoritised people)
Maria McNicoll, St. Giles Trust (Education)
Matina Marougka, Together for Mental Wellbeing (Mental Health)
Paula Harriot, Unlock (Lived Experience)
Vicki Markiewicz, Change Grow Live (Substance misuse)
Victoria Baird, Spurgeons (Families)
Steve Matthews, Shelter (Accommodation)

Officials

Dame Anne Owers, leading the Prison Capacity Review
Claire Fielder, Director of Youth Justice and Offender Policy, HMPPS
Matt Grey, Executive Director for Rehabilitation, HMPPS

Apologies

Anne Fox, Clinks
Andrew Lewin, Senior Manager of Third Sector Partnerships and Programmes, HMPPS
Bettina Crossick, Head of Third Sector Partnerships and Programmes, HMPPS
Dave Higham, The Warrior Down LERO CIC, (Lived Experience)
David Maguire, Prison Reform Trust (Longer sentences)
Nicola Drinkwater, Women in Prison (Women)
Paul Grainge, Recoop (Older people)
Richard Knibbs, Nacro (Resettlement)
Stephen O'Connor, Deputy Director for Probation Policy, Ministry of Justice

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 Sam Julius (Chair) welcomed members, officials, and gave an overview of agenda items.
- 1.2 He welcomed Karina Ffrench, the new seat holder for organisations led by or focused on racially minoritised people.

- 1.3 The Chair also announced that this would be David Morgan's last meeting and thanked him for all his contributions as the small organisations seat holder.
- 1.4 The Chair set out the meeting agenda - referencing group Dame Anne Owers' attendance, in her capacity leading the Prison Capacity Review. He explained that this item would take the form of a Roundtable discussion, framed by pre-shared questions
- 1.5 He then explained that this would be followed by the second agenda item, to be covered by Claire Fielder, Director of Youth Justice and Offender Policy, HMPPS, to provide updates on the Sentencing Review, the review of the Youth Justice Board, and the Women's Justice Board.
- 1.6 Finally, the group will be joined by Matt Grey, Executive Director for Rehabilitation at HMPPS, to cover the ongoing Spending Review.

2. Dame Anne Owers, review into prison capacity: Introduction

- 2.1 Dame Anne Owers started by explaining that she views capacity not just in terms of spaces in prisons but also in terms of the system's ability to carry out meaningful, rehabilitative work with people in custody. This isn't new, it's a long-standing challenge spanning the past 20 years, not just the recent crisis. She emphasised that solutions to the problems within the criminal justice system cannot be found solely within the system itself, as many of the root causes lie outside it.
- 2.2 Dame Anne noted that the number of children and young adults in custody has steadily decline and there they may be lessons from this.
- 2.3 In addition to addressing the challenges, she is keen to identify examples of good practice, both current initiatives and forward-thinking approaches, that can serve as models for the future.
- 2.4 The Chair then directed questions to the RR3 group members to share their insights.
- 2.5 **What was the main impact of the most recent crisis on ongoing work to reduce reoffending?**
- 2.6 Josh Stunell observed a stark contrast between the prison systems' structured early release process and the overwhelmed community services. Josh's organisation bthechange has experience a 30% increase in demand, without the corresponding increase in funding, leading to a lack of comprehensive and wrap-around support for those re-entering society. This inadequacy contributes to high recall rates.
- 2.7 Matina Marougka noted the high rate of recalls, including amongst those who have been released under the early release scheme. She highlighted that probation services have struggled to make appropriate referrals and assess needs properly. Many people have faced housing insecurity upon release, a problem worsened by the lack of preparation before an early release.
- 2.8 Jess Mullen noted AYJ's focus on changing the age at which individuals transition from the youth to adult estate, from 18 years old to 19. She pointed out the current trend of over 18s being held in the youth estate, possibly as a means to compensate for capacity issues in the adult state. This shift has overburdened the youth estate, which was unprepared to absorb additional numbers.
- 2.9 Vicki Markiewicz identified understaffing in prisons as a major barrier to rehabilitation, with individuals unable to attend substance misuse interventions or participate in programmes and other activities such as work. Additionally, the unpredictability of release dates due to ESCL has made it difficult to secure housing and other necessary resettlement support.

- 2.10 Alasdair Jackson highlighted issues in Category D open prisons, where instability in other higher security prisons has caused disruption. There are fewer people in open prisons, and some are transferred to open prisons before they are ready, only to be sent back to Cat C/B facilities. Most prisons are understaffed, which was exacerbated by the large number of releases on one day through SDS40. Cat D prisons have yet to recover. He suggested that the best way to reduce reoffending is to invest time and resources in open prisons.
- 2.11 **What do the people you work with say about their experience of the capacity crisis?**
- 2.12 Vicki Baird highlighted that one of the most pressing concerns raised by parents in custody is the ongoing struggle to access mental health support. While this has always been a challenge within prisons, the situation has worsened. She noted a troubling rise in self-harm incidents, including in places where such behaviour was previously rare, such as during family visits.
- 2.13 Maria McNicholl reported that staff shortages prevent individuals from accessing education, leaving them confined to their cells.
- 2.14 Jess Mullen stated that AJYC conducted research with children and young people who spoke about the stark impact of separation and spending time in cells. According to the participants, the situation has either remained severe or worsened over the last year.
- 2.15 Katrina Ffrench noted that her organisation, Unjust, have held focus groups with people who have been in prison at which participants spoke about the impact of social isolation. This significantly hinders rehabilitation as it limits access to education, outdoor spaces, and has negatively impacted mental health and the ability of people to reintegrate.
- 2.16 Joanne O'Connor shared her observations from working in prisons, noting an emerging "engagement problem" even where the regime was relatively stable. An increasing number of people in prison are choosing to self-isolate due to safety concerns or poor mental health, which has caught staff by surprise. Joanne described it as if prisoners have been "conditioned" by prolonged periods of isolation during previous lockdowns, making it harder for them to reintegrate into communal activities or engage with support services.
- 2.17 Dame Anne Owers highlighted the challenges surrounding open prisons which are staffed and structure around people eligible for Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL). If a lot of people in prisons cannot access ROTL, the open prison environment becomes ineffective for them. A key issue was the transition from Covid lockdowns directly into capacity problems, which meant staff have been cautious about managing movement of people out of their cells.
- 2.18 Vicky Baird also noted a high staff turnover in prisons. She explained that following Covid, a large proportion of prison staff were relatively new and had never experienced what prison life was like before the pandemic. This lack of experience has created gaps in knowledge and confidence, particularly when it comes to facilitating visits and supporting prisoner-family interactions.
- 2.19 Paula Harriott highlighted the relationship between healthcare and overcrowding. A study she participated in revealed a sharp rise in mental health related prescriptions in prisons and is interested in whether these numbers have since decreased or persisted. Paula found that the increased isolation, during and after Covid, contributed to the growing reliance on mental health medication. This in turn, may have affected prisoners' willingness to engage with activities and support services. She also raised concerns about how this could impact peoples' relationships with probation services upon release. If individuals are leaving prison more isolated and mentally unwell than when they entered, their ability to cooperate

with probation officers, access community support, and successfully reintegrate into society is significantly compromised.

2.20 How has the most recent crisis impact services in prison and on release?

2.21 Vicki Markiewicz explained that whilst the previous prison culture was not perfect, there were more staff with a better understanding of substance misuse issues. However, the reduced number of staff has meant that access to drug and alcohol support has been deprioritised. Some individuals on methadone prescriptions are receiving their medication, but they are not getting access to the necessary psycho-social interventions. Regarding releases from custody, Vicki noted that the SDS40 release system was more effective, while the ESCL release system proved disastrous. Under ESCL, people were moved far away from their established support networks, including health services, which made it more difficult for them to engage in necessary drug and alcohol treatment and hindered their overall reintegration.

2.22 David Morgan highlighted that the programmes his organisation delivers operate outside the core provision, meaning they are not given priority. As a result, many sessions are under-attended, not due to lack of interest, but because of infrastructure issues or people simply not showing up. He emphasised that while demand for these programmes has never been higher, the ability to deliver them effectively has never been more challenging.

2.23 How has the crisis and efforts to mitigate the crisis impacted different groups?

2.24 Victoria Baird observed that there was significant movement of people in custody, with parents often being relocated far from their families. This created a complex juggling act, as many were placed much further away than necessary, making it harder to maintain family relationships. For some, the long travel times, up to four hours for family days, meant they were unable to take advantage of these vital visits, further straining family connections.

2.25 Steve Matthews highlighted that a major issue was the lack of preparation for early releases, which put significant pressure on services. There was little consideration of the additional support or capacity needed to manage the sudden influx of people leaving custody. A positive aspect was that many individuals were identified for pre-release support, leading to useful referrals. However, a key challenge emerged as services had to pick up numerous referrals from out-of-area prisons, complicating resettlement efforts.

2.26 Reflecting on lessons learned, Steve stressed the need for better pre-planning. He noted that most additional funding came from the services themselves rather than the government, leaving organisations struggling to provide the necessary support. The after effects of this are still being felt, with finding suitable accommodation for people post-release remaining a persistent challenge, a problem made worse by the growing number of individuals needing support.

2.27 Dame Anne asked whether the alliances formed during Covid helped during this crisis/during the early release schemes.

2.28 Sam Julius from Clinks explained that they were tasked with forming alliances focused on resettlement pathways, such as accommodation and drug support. These alliances were a continuation of the collaborations built during Covid, but they were still relatively new and developing.

2.29 Catrina McHugh highlighted her organisation's work in Deerbolt prison, and the use of theatre and drama to support people in prison during this period. She referenced the deep fear many felt about being released, with some believing that society was setting them up to fail. Despite not feeling safe inside prison, many still felt safer there than on the outside. Catrina stressed that without proper investment in community services, efforts to support these individuals were merely "sticking plasters" over deeper systemic issues.

- 2.30 Vicki M noted that during Covid, there were measures to prevent people from being released onto the streets, which was encouraging. However, once the funding for these initiatives ended, the situation quickly regressed, and people were again left without proper support post-release.
- 2.31 Tammi Owen spoke about the fear within communities during early releases, describing it as a "PR nightmare." Media coverage showing individuals celebrating their release, with visuals like people high-fiving or drinking prosecco, fuelled public anxiety, regardless of whether those events truly happened. Tammi highlighted the concern over who was being released, noting that domestic abuse is not a standalone offence, meaning some individuals convicted of harassment, assault, or stalking within a domestic abuse context were released early. There was little time for these individuals to reintegrate, further adding to community unease. She emphasised the need to focus on reintegration efforts and suggested that the criminal justice system often presents itself as more effective than it really is, with Wales experiencing added complexities due to cross-border custody between England and Wales.
- 2.32 Matina Marougka shared an anecdote from a London borough, where there were concerns that older individuals, released after long sentences for gang-related crimes, returned to their communities and began recruiting teenagers into gang activity. This was seen as a result of limited resettlement support, which negatively impacted the wider community.
- 2.33 Dame Anne concluded that while releases happen all the time, the intense media coverage during early releases amplified public concern. Additionally, the sudden surge in releases placed added strain on service capacity.
- 2.34 **What could have been done differently to deal with the capacity crisis?**
- 2.35 Tammi Owen emphasised the need for greater community support and reintegration efforts. She advocated for more restorative approaches, engaging both the families of people in prison and their wider communities. Evidence shows that when people feel connected to their communities, they are more likely to take responsibility for their actions, and community-based methods of accountability can reduce crime.
- 2.36 Vicki Markiewicz called for expanding community options, pointing out that many individuals in prison, particularly those imprisoned for non-violent drug offences, who aren't dangerous, do not need to be there. She stressed the need for the judiciary to be better informed about alternatives and suggested more use of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) and blended sentences to support gradual reintegration.
- 2.37 Matina Marougka highlighted the importance of earlier engagement with the voluntary sector, which often picks up the support for prison leavers. She also stressed the need for better coordination between government departments, noting that while the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is a key player, other departments should also be involved in supporting individuals.
- 2.38 Josh Stunell urged a return to basics, stating that people are repeatedly set up to fail with little accountability. For example, releasing people into homelessness seems to be accepted, and he called for more honesty about where improvements are needed. He pointed out that while the system often focuses on the first night post-release, not enough thought is given to the second night and beyond, especially for women, who require ongoing support to secure stable accommodation.
- 2.39 Alasdair Jackson raised concerns about the disconnect between prisons and probation services, noting that they often fail to communicate effectively. He criticised the effectiveness of commissioned community services compared to the voluntary sector, urging

a review of how voluntary organisations are funded to deliver better outcomes where probation services fall short.

- 2.40 Katrina Ffrench stressed the role of local authorities, particularly in housing. She called for a rethink on how new housing is built and allocated and challenged the notion of who is considered “worthy” of housing. Katrina also highlighted the need for better technology within probation, mentioning cases where faulty electronic tags wrongly led to individuals being recalled to prison. She stressed that private companies holding these contracts must ensure their technology works reliably.
- 2.41 Jess Mullen warned that without addressing these systemic issues, the crisis will simply shift, either to the youth justice system or directly into affected communities, perpetuating the cycle of harm.

3. Sentencing Review

- 3.1 Claire Fielder began her presentation by focusing on the ongoing Sentencing Review
- 3.2 She covered incentives, sentence management, and the role of probation in community sentencing
- 3.3 She highlighted key areas of focus, including the use of short custodial sentences, frameworks for longer sentences, and inconsistencies in sentence administration caused by multiple system changes over time
- 3.4 Claire clarified that the review, set to conclude in the spring, does not encompass all aspects of sentencing policy. A separate review under the Law Commission is examining issues related to murder and homicide. IPP sentences, and youth sentencing are out of scope.
- 3.5 She referenced the panel’s February report, which provided an analysis of how the current sentencing framework evolved, outlining past challenges and potential directions for reform. While the report did not offer solutions, it provided a foundational understanding of the system’s complexities
- 3.6 As the review nears completion, Claire emphasised the need for swift action in formulating final recommendations to ensure legislative readiness. She stressed the importance of supporting sentencing reform, advocating for a more rehabilitative approach, and improving public understanding of sentencing policies. She noted that widespread misconceptions about sentencing pose challenges to reform efforts and called for better public education on the issue.
- 3.7 Claire concluded her presentation by inviting reflections and questions, encouraging attendees to share their perspectives on sentencing reforms and how best to support meaningful changes
- 3.8 Jess Mullen highlighted that while the sentencing review excludes the youth justice system, her organisation sees this as positive, as youth justice requires distinct considerations aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, she emphasised the need for a separate review to further efforts, with sentencing as a key factor. She inquired about the appetite for such a review beyond the current scope. She also reflected on the voluntary sector’s role in reshaping criminal justice narratives, noting its leadership despite limited communication resources. Given the challenges of countering punitive narratives, she suggested the government could support these efforts and learn from the sector’s experiences.
- 3.9 Tammi Owen raised concerns about the challenges of explaining sentencing guidelines to families, communities, and the third sector, noting significant mistrust and confusion, particularly among victims. She emphasised the importance of starting conversations at the

community level to build understanding. Speaking from her experience in Wales and her role in the RR3, she highlighted the need for proper resourcing of the third sector. She pointed out that while third-sector organisations often go above and beyond in delivering services, they face challenges such as low salaries and short-term commissioning. She stressed the need for a discussion on how these organisations are funded, advocating for longer-term and more sustainable commissioning to maximise their impact as grassroots organisations embedded in communities

- 3.10 Claire responded to the question about a separate youth sentencing review, stating that while the current review is the priority, the absence of a youth-focused review does not indicate a lack of interest. She acknowledged the distinct context of youth justice and the progress already made, noting that ministers are keen to continue building on this. She advised stakeholders to "watch this space" rather than assume inaction
- 3.11 Regarding the role of government in supporting the sector's communications efforts, she recognised the importance of shifting narratives, as raised by Jess, and acknowledged Tammi's concerns about resourcing. While she could not promise additional funding, she assured that issues like single-year funding and financial uncertainty are well understood. She emphasised that reforms must be deliverable within the constraints of the current fiscal situation and that these challenges are being considered throughout the process.
- 3.12 **Alasdair** Jackson asked about the potential for a separate youth sentencing review, seeking clarification on whether its absence indicated a lack of interest or priority. He also inquired about the government's role in supporting the voluntary sector's efforts to shift narratives around criminal justice and how financial constraints impact the sector's ability to contribute effectively.
- 3.13 David Morgan emphasised the importance of considering the full life cycle and societal cost of incarceration, highlighting the need to build relationships and change public perceptions. He referenced the economic impact of reoffending, noting that while keeping someone in prison is costly, the greater expense comes when they reoffend. He argued that investing in rehabilitation and reducing reoffending rates by even a few percentage points could lead to significant savings, reducing the need for new prisons and addressing capacity issues.
- 3.14 David also advocated for a long-term, strategic approach rather than short-term solutions, calling for more emphasis on success stories and the societal benefits of rehabilitation. He questioned why, if the government is willing to invest half a billion pounds in building a prison, a portion of that funding could not be redirected to voluntary sector services to generate long-term savings. He also suggested adopting a more stable funding model for the voluntary sector, similar to the private sector, which benefits from 10-year contracts for prisons.
- 3.15 **Matina** Marougka raised key points about improving communication and engagement between government agencies and voluntary sector organisations. Acknowledging the challenges of funding, she emphasised the need for better access to existing systems within agencies like XMPP and SMLJ to support organisations working across different stages of the justice pathway. She suggested that facilitating this access is something within the government's control and would enhance collaboration.
- 3.16 She also highlighted the importance of continued engagement beyond providing feedback on the new sentencing guidelines. She advocated for an ongoing, hands-on partnership to ensure effective implementation and proper messaging. Drawing from her experience in London, where magistrates often change frequently, she noted that better

communication and system access could help ensure they remain aware of available services.

- 3.17 Matina Marougka mentioned a specialist working group focused on community support, which has conducted workshops on drug, alcohol, and mental health provisions. A mental health report is in progress, expected by the end of March.
- 3.18 Vicki Markiewicz emphasised the need to address societal stigma towards people leaving prison and those serving community sentences. While the voluntary sector largely supports a rehabilitative approach, she noted that stigma remains a challenge, even within some organisations. She highlighted that stigma, particularly within drug and alcohol services, can discourage service users from engaging, mirroring the negative language sometimes used in the criminal justice system.
- 3.19 She proposed that this group consider developing localised stigma-reduction plans to examine internal practices and attitudes towards individuals in the justice system. Rather than simply signing up for awareness campaigns, she suggested a structured approach to actively challenge stigma within their own organisations and networks.
- 3.20 Vicki Markiewicz raised concerns about public understanding of sentencing. She suggested exploring ways to improve awareness within this group and the wider community to counter media narratives that portray rehabilitation as being "soft on crime." Instead, she advocated for a focus on how sentencing frameworks can support rehabilitation and reintegration. She encouraged further discussion on how this group could collectively address these challenges to prevent having to repeatedly start from scratch in tackling stigma.
- 3.21 Paula Harriott emphasised the importance of engaging with lived experience networks and ensuring effective communication with individuals in prison and on probation. She highlighted that platforms such as Inside Time and Converse are widely read within prisons, and national prison radio is an effective channel for reaching this audience. She stressed the need to maintain the visibility of the sentencing review and its recommendations across these platforms.
- 3.22 She also pointed to the emerging lived experience networks across the sector as valuable engagement channels. She noted that the Lived Experience Engagement Network run by HMPPS is a key space where organizations with lived experience are connecting. Paula underscored the importance of targeting communications towards people directly impacted by sentencing decisions, as well as their families, to ensure they remain informed and engaged.
- 3.23 Paula mentioned the College of Lived Experience Recovery Organisations, particularly in relation to the overlap between criminal justice and drug and alcohol recovery. She encouraged the group to explore how the drugs and alcohol sector could be leveraged to further disseminate information about changes to the sentencing framework.
- 3.24 Claire reflected on the need for government to consider how sentencing reforms will be received politically, in Parliament, and by the public. She acknowledged the importance of ensuring that a broad range of stakeholders are aware of upcoming changes and confirmed that this will be incorporated into long-term implementation planning.
- 3.25 Internally, a structured implementation program is being developed to translate the review's recommendations into legislative action. Since sentencing reforms typically require legislation, this process presents significant implementation challenges. Claire emphasised the need for coordination across probation, prisons, third-party organisations, other government departments, and health services to ensure reforms are effectively delivered.

- 3.26 She also recognised the importance of improving government communications and engagement efforts. While the review remains independent at this stage, once it concludes, responsibility will shift to the government to determine next steps. At that point, there will be more direct control over stakeholder engagement and communication about the specific reforms.

4. Youth Justice Board Review

- 4.0 Claire then presented on the review of the Youth Justice Board, explaining that while most Ministry of Justice (MoJ) bodies have only undergone self-assessment, the YJB was selected for a full review due to significant changes in the youth justice system since its last review in 2013.
- 4.1 Claire highlighted that since 2013, the number of children entering the justice system has fallen by over 70%, and the youth custody population has decreased similarly. However, the complexity of cases has increased, and the YJB's role has evolved, with responsibilities such as secure estate commissioning transferring to the Youth Custody Service. These shifts necessitated a deeper examination of the YJB's functions and structure.
- 4.2 The review is led by Steve Crocker, former President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, and is supported by an independent team from the MoJ. It is not a policy review but focuses on whether the YJB's statutory functions remain relevant, whether the current delivery model is effective, and how performance is measured and monitored.
- 4.3 Claire outlined the extensive stakeholder engagement undertaken, including roundtables, interviews, frontline visits, and surveys for practitioners. The review team has engaged with third-sector organisations, government officials, and those directly involved in the youth justice system. A challenge panel will assess the findings before the final report is presented to Minister Dakin in the spring.
- 4.4 Claire distinguished this review from the sentencing review, explaining that while the latter focuses on policy, the YJB review is about governance and operational structure. She invited reflections on the importance of having an independent voice in youth justice and how different actors, including the MoJ and YJB, can best contribute to improving outcomes for children in the justice system.
- 4.5 Jess Mullen shared feedback gathered from members, highlighting the importance of maintaining an independent YBJ. She emphasised that the YJB is the only body within the current departmental structure solely focused on children. Without it, there is concern that children's needs may be overlooked in a system primarily designed for adult men.
- 4.6 Members acknowledged the YJB's successes, particularly in reducing youth incarceration and implementing a child-first approach. Jess noted that these achievements were possible because of the YJB's independence, as civil service structures tend to be more risk-averse and lack the specialist expertise necessary for such reforms.
- 4.7 However, concerns were raised that in recent years, the YJB has lost some of its independent voice and authority. Members would like to see a stronger, more vocal external presence, particularly in advocating for systemic change. While the YJB continues to highlight good practice at a local level, its broader oversight role has shifted, resulting in less emphasis on addressing structural issues such as racial disparities and austerity.
- 4.8 Jess conveyed that members would like the YJB to provide clearer, more assertive guidance on tackling these systemic challenges rather than focusing solely on case studies of good practice. This feedback has been shared with the review team, emphasising the need for a reinvigorated and independent YJB with a strong oversight function.
- 4.9 Katrina highlighted the ongoing issue of racial disparity within the justice system, particularly the disproportionate number of racialised individuals in the youth estate. She

emphasised the need to keep racism and discrimination at the forefront of discussions and policies, ensuring a person-centred approach that acknowledges these systemic issues.

4.10 She also pointed out the additional challenges faced by more recent migrant communities, including language barriers and the need for translation services, which add further stress to the system. Katrina urged that racial disparity remains a central consideration a golden thread throughout all discussions and actions related to youth justice.

4.11 Jess Mullen welcomed the Minister's recent announcement of plans to address racial disparity in the youth justice system. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that this work is not siloed but instead properly linked with other departmental initiatives on race and austerity. She stressed the need for coordinated engagement with organizations led by and representing racially minoritised communities to ensure meaningful progress.

4.12 She also raised concerns about the development of the Youth Custody Service Children and Young People's Strategy. While she welcomed the vision and emphasis on a child-first approach, she expressed doubts about whether the strategy, as it stands, will be able to fully achieve this vision. She emphasised the need for a broader policy focus to support these goals, particularly regarding the long-term reduction of youth incarceration.

4.13 Jess reiterated the importance of progressing toward the closure of Young Offender Institutions and Secure Training Centres, as these facilities are not adequately meeting the needs of children in the system. She noted that this was a commitment of the previous government and stressed the need for continued focus on this as a long-term goal.

4.14 Claire acknowledged the importance of ensuring that work on racial disparity is effectively linked with broader departmental initiatives and not treated in isolation. She recognised this as a key challenge but noted that a full response requires further mapping out to determine how best to integrate these efforts. She emphasised the need to avoid a siloed approach, drawing a connection to the sentencing review and the risks of examining parts of the system in isolation, which could lead to unintended consequences or inefficiencies.

4.15 Regarding concerns about the gap between ambition and the ability to deliver on commitments, Claire acknowledged the challenge, particularly in the current fiscal environment. She stated that the upcoming spending review will play a significant role in determining what can realistically be achieved. She noted that more clarity on these issues will emerge over the coming months, which will enable a more detailed response to the concerns raised.

5. Women's Justice Board

5.0 Claire Fielder provided an overview of the current landscape of women in the criminal justice system, highlighting that while there are fewer women than men in the system, they often commit different types of offenses and tend to have higher rates of complex needs. She noted that most women receive short custodial sentences, a key issue previously discussed in the sentencing review.

5.1 She then provided an update on the establishment of the Women's Justice Board, announced by the Lord Chancellor in late 2024. The board has been created to set a vision and direction for reforming women's justice, with a clear goal of significantly reducing the number of women in prison. Claire clarified that despite the name, the Women's Justice Board differs from the Youth Justice Board in terms of structure and statutory basis. It consists of a small group of experts from various fields, chaired by Minister Timpson, with 10 members. The board met for the first time in January and will convene quarterly to set priorities and oversee progress. A Partnership Delivery Group, chaired by Claire, will translate

the board's vision into actionable steps and hold various government departments accountable for implementation.

- 5.2 The initial areas of focus for the Women's Justice Board, agreed upon in January, emphasise early intervention to prevent women from entering the criminal justice system in the first place. Claire highlighted the importance of working closely with the police and the Home Office, particularly in relation to out-of-court disposals. She noted strong cross-governmental support, with Home Office ministers showing enthusiasm for collaborative efforts in this area.
- 5.3 Claire acknowledged the long-standing nature of many of these challenges, emphasising that while the priorities are well established, execution remains complex. She recognised the significant role of third-sector organisations in this space and noted the importance of ensuring the right level of engagement with all relevant stakeholders. She also acknowledged that achieving this balance will require ongoing adjustments.
- 5.4 Jess inquired about the status of Susannah Hancock's review of girls in the justice system, specifically regarding the recommendation to establish a Girls' Justice Strategy Board that would link with the Women's Justice Board. She acknowledged that the government has not yet fully responded to the review but asked if there was any early thinking or updates on that recommendation.
- 5.5 Katrina Ffrench highlighted the significant role policing plays in individuals entering the criminal justice system and inquired about the connection between policing and the newly established board. She asked whether police representatives were involved or if there was a formal link to policing. She acknowledged that she might have missed existing connections but wanted to flag this as either a potential omission or an opportunity for further engagement.
- 5.6 Claire clarified that the board itself is intentionally small, as per the preference of the Lord Chancellor and Minister Timpson, to maintain a focused group. While there are many areas of expertise that could have been included, space was limited. However, the board includes members with relevant policing experience, such as Vera Baird (former Police and Crime Commissioner) and another member who serves as Deputy Mayor for Policing in the northwest.
- 5.7 She emphasised the importance of ensuring proper engagement with policing and confirmed that the partnership delivery board, which she will chair, will play a key role in connecting with policing stakeholders. This will include engagement with the Home Office as the sponsoring department for policing and broader outreach efforts. She also highlighted strong existing connections with the NPCC leads on these issues and confirmed that these will be built upon to ensure effective collaboration, recognising that progress in this area is dependent on close cooperation with policing.

6. Spending Review

- 6.0 Matt Grey provided an update on the ongoing spending review, which is being conducted in two phases. Phase 1, covering the 2025-26 financial year, has resulted in an overall funding increase for the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). However, final allocations are yet to be determined due to factors such as pay and inflation adjustments. Phase 2, which sets budgets for 2026-29, is currently underway, with the final settlement expected to be announced by the Chancellor in June.
- 6.1 Matt Grey emphasised that the fiscal context remains challenging, with limited government budget headroom and competing priorities, including increased defence spending. To navigate these constraints, the MoJ has conducted a zero-based review, reassessing all budgets from the ground up to identify essential priorities. Even under a flat

cash scenario, financial pressures will necessitate difficult decisions about prioritisation and efficiency.

- 6.2 Key areas of focus for budget allocation on the HMPPS side includes enabling the outcomes of the Sentencing Review, which is expected to shift work from custody to community-based interventions, primarily being delivered through the Our Future Probation Service programme, led by Jim Barton. This initiative aims to enhance probation services and strengthen engagement with the voluntary sector. Additionally, investment in the custodial estate remains a priority, with a commitment to delivering 20,000 additional prison places while also addressing critical maintenance needs.
- 6.3 Matt Grey highlighted that government missions such as Safer Streets and offender employment initiatives will remain central to the MoJ's work, aiming to reduce recidivism and support rehabilitation. There is also a strong emphasis on technology investment, particularly in reducing paper-based processes in prisons and probation, improving data-sharing, and enhancing efficiency while maintaining a human-centered approach.
- 6.4 Acknowledging the financial challenges faced by the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, Matt reassured attendees that the MoJ is committed to early and ongoing engagement with stakeholders throughout the budgeting process. Efforts will be made to ensure adequate preparation and support for the sector despite financial constraints.
- 6.5 Next steps include awaiting the Treasury's settlement in June, followed by internal budget allocation decisions. Matt reaffirmed the MoJ's commitment to transparency and early communication with stakeholders to ensure informed planning and collaboration.
- 6.6 Tammi Owen emphasised concerns regarding funding for the sector, echoing earlier points raised in the discussion. A key issue is the closure of small organisations, particularly in Wales, where several have recently lost their funding and are set to shut down by September. This trend is deeply concerning, as it impacts the availability of essential services and support for affected communities.
- 6.7 Maria McNicholl raised concerns about the efficiency of government prisons compared to other models, emphasising the challenges posed by outsourced contracts that may drive up costs. She expressed frustration over the number of contracts in place and questioned whether they are the most effective use of resources.
- 6.8 Maria highlighted the underutilisation of skilled prisoners, such as qualified electricians, painters, decorators, and plasterers, who could be contributing to maintenance and repairs within prisons while also receiving practical training.
- 6.9 Maria inquired whether the budget review process is considering more practical and cost-effective approaches, such as utilizing existing skills within the prison population, to improve efficiency and reduce unnecessary expenditures.
- 6.10 Tammi Owen emphasised that once funding challenges have been addressed and efforts shift towards supporting those in custody, the landscape will be significantly weaker and less effective without grassroots organisations that provide local, community-based support.
- 6.11 Matt Grey acknowledged the challenges facing grassroots organisations, particularly the financial difficulties that have led to closures. He noted that several organisations have recently raised concerns directly with the department and assured that they are aware of and actively considering these issues.
- 6.12 Matt Grey acknowledged the challenges posed by changes to the minimum wage and national insurance contributions, noting that these constraints affect the sector just as much as other organisations. He emphasised a commitment to improving local

commissioning, aiming to devolve more funding rather than relying solely on large national contracts.

- 6.13 Regarding the underutilisation of skills within prisons, Matt recognised the risk of missed opportunities related to talent and shared that discussions are ongoing about initiatives such as training long-term prisoners to provide teaching support or take on other roles that leverage their skills for rehabilitation and employment upon release. He acknowledged challenges related to facilities management contracts, which currently limit how prison labour can be used, but noted that the re-procurement process for FM contracts is an opportunity to explore more flexible approaches or exploring avenues such as handymen.
- 6.14 Jess Mullen raised a concern regarding the spending review and its potential impact on youth custody. She acknowledged the challenges facing both the adult and youth custodial estates, noting that while the crisis is often seen as more severe in the adult system, there are also significant issues within children's custody.
- 6.15 Jess' concern was that resources may be disproportionately allocated to the adult estate, potentially leaving the youth estate overlooked. She asked for any insight into the department's thinking on ensuring adequate focus and funding for youth custody amidst broader financial constraints.
- 6.16 Matt Grey emphasised that the youth estate is not at risk of losing focus and may receive increased attention. The key issue is not capacity but rather reducing the number of children in custody. Discussions with ministers focus on finding alternative ways to address youth offending without resorting to imprisonment.
- 6.17 Matt Grey expressed efforts are being made to determine the most effective way to commission youth services, whether through existing structures or other means. Given the higher costs associated with youth services due to the need for additional support, maintaining investment is crucial. Even if no additional funding is available, the goal is to protect existing resources. Collaboration with the Youth Justice Board will continue to refine the approach to commissioning these services.
- 6.18 Joanne O'Connor highlighted the excellent communication and discussions across various forums regarding the DPS, particularly around budget clarity. She emphasised the positive impact of proactive messaging to the MLJ and governors about getting contracts in place at the start of the financial year, helping to reduce volatility.
- 6.19 She noted that while many contracts are recontracting previous provisions, the transparency and reliability of the process have been especially valuable to the voluntary sector. Unlike past experiences with unrealistic start dates that frequently got extended, this process felt more collaborative and impactful. She expressed appreciation for the effort and its significant positive effect.
- 6.20 Matt Grey expressed confidence that with the multi-year SR allocations, future planning will improve. He emphasised the importance of informing voluntary sector organisations as early as possible so they can plan accordingly and engage with their funders. Matt committed to continuing the conversation and exploring new ways to enhance communication with both voluntary sector organisations and their funders.
- 6.21 Vicki Markiewicz provided an update on her participation in James Simpson's Expert Panel on Drugs and Alcohol, a small, focused group similar to the Women's Expert Group. Meeting under Chatham House rules, the panel aims to achieve tangible progress within 12 months, focusing on demand reduction, supply considerations, and service demand in relation to drugs and alcohol. While significant new investment remains uncertain, the

priority is to optimise existing funding in both community and prison settings. Vicki hopes to share further updates on the panel's work and priorities at the next RR3 meeting.

6.22 Jess Mullen provided two key updates. First, the Race Disparity Plan in Youth Justice, where Minister Dakin announced that the MoJ is developing a plan to address race disparity in the youth justice system. A roundtable discussion on this issue is scheduled for the end of the month, with Jess and Josh attending, and a meeting with the Racial Justice Expert Group will be held beforehand to gather feedback.

6.23 Second, the Transitions and Child Criminal Exploitation Project is entering its third phase, examining how responses to CCE change as children get older, particularly the shift from safeguarding to punitive measures after turning 18. Jess encouraged anyone with relevant insights or experiences to contribute to the project.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 The meeting concluded with appreciation for everyone's time and engagement, acknowledging the extensive agenda covered. It was noted that follow-up communication will be sent soon with potential dates for 25th–26th.

7.2 There is hope that the next meeting in June could be held in person, with a possible focus on the final Sentencing Review report if it is available by then. Attendees were thanked once again for their contributions, and the meeting was formally closed.