

An Inspection of Through the Gate Resettlement Services for Short-Term Prisoners

A joint inspection by
HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons

October 2016

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Published by:

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Foreword

'Through the Gate' is a flagship policy of government, intended to bring about a step change in rehabilitation, and so reduce reoffending. New services have been rolled out in prisons to prepare prisoners for release and resettlement and increase their prospects of leading a better life. When the policy was introduced in spring 2015, post-release licence supervision and rehabilitation support was extended to those formerly ineligible (serving short sentences) so as to increase the impact on reoffending overall.

In our fourth *Transforming Rehabilitation* report published in January 2016, we signalled our concern that Through the Gate expectations were not being given priority on the ground. Probation providers were focused on the more immediate demands of leading and managing wholesale change to the delivery model for all probation services. Now, more than six months hence we find little change and little delivered, albeit the reasons for that are more complex than those holding back improvement last year.

Newly formed Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) are responsible for Through the Gate provision, but are not sufficiently incentivised under their contract arrangements to give priority to this work. Payment is triggered by task completion rather than anything more meaningful. Additional financial rewards are far off and dependent on reoffending rates that are not altogether within the CRC's gift. CRC total workloads (and therefore income) are less than anticipated when contracts were signed. As CRCs continue to develop and adjust their operating models accordingly, CRCs are hard-pressed and are generally giving priority to work that is rewarded with more immediate and more substantial payment. These detailed contractual arrangements must change and develop, for the government's rehabilitation policies to be delivered well.

Even then, our expectations should be tempered. Reducing reoffending is difficult, success in individual cases is by no means guaranteed even when everything possible is done, and we find that some issues are most testing: mental illness and addiction can be enduring, and accommodation for former offenders increasingly hard to find.

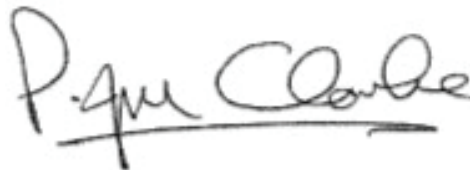
Nevertheless, the prospects of success are greater if those involved are determined to do the best possible job and if systems are designed to support them fully in their endeavours. Instead we have found CRCs' efforts pedestrian at best. What is more, they are often hampered and frustrated by ineffective early screening of prisoners. These are done by busy prison staff and are simply not fit for the purpose they should serve. In our view, this system must change materially so that those responsible and accountable for rehabilitation (CRCs) can get off to a good start in each case.

There were great hopes for Through the Gate, and there is the potential still for the step change that government and others dearly wish to see. We hope that our detailed findings assist government and the National Offender Management

Service to develop the contractual arrangements with CRCs, and to review systems, processes and resettlement targets for prisons, CRCs and the National Probation Service (NPS). CRCs signalled innovative approaches to Through the Gate work in their bids for contracts, and we would like to see those delivered alongside the well-established and evidenced interventions that we know can make a difference.



Dame Glenys Stacey
HM Chief Inspector of Probation



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October 2016

Contents

Foreword	3
Key facts	6
Executive Summary	7
Recommendations	9
Context	11
1. What do prisoners need to help them resettle?	15
2. What help do prisoners get to prepare them for release?	20
3. What are the outcomes for prisoners at the point of release?	27
4. A seamless transition into the community?	34
5. Keeping the public and victims safe	38
6. What happens to prisoners after release?	43
7. The strategic vision - how are the services designed and evaluated?	46
Appendices	49
Appendix 1: Glossary	50
Appendix 2: Inspection methodology	51
Appendix 3: Acknowledgements	53
Appendix 4: References	54
Appendix 5: Role of the inspectorates and code of practice	55

Key facts

40,059	Number of prisoners starting a short (under 12 month) custodial sentence in 2015 ¹ .
58%	Proportion of prisoners starting a custodial sentence in 2015 serving a short sentence ¹ .
9%	Proportion of the prison population serving a short sentence (June 2016). This does not include prisoners on remand or recall ² .
72 hours	The target for screening of new arrivals into custody for resettlement needs from point of arrival.
3.3 months/ 8.5 months	The average time served in prison for those released during 2015 for (i) those sentenced to less than or equal to six months and (ii) those sentenced to greater than six months but less than one year ¹ .
33%	Proportion of prisoners on custodial sentences over 12 months, who reoffend within a 12 month period after release (October 2013 – September 2014) ³ .
60%	Proportion of prisoners on custodial sentence of less than 12 months, who reoffend within a 12 month period after release (October 2013 – September 2014) ³ .
01 May 2015	Date that CRCs began provision of Through the Gate services.
12 months	The minimum amount of time spent on statutory supervision after release from custody.
4	The number of prisons visited for this inspection. In each, Through the Gate services were delivered by a different CRC.
33	Average number of previous offences committed by the offenders in the inspected sample.
42%	Proportion of offenders in the inspected sample that had received at least one previous short custodial sentence since the <i>Offender Rehabilitation Act</i> was enacted in February 2015.
5.8 months	The average length of prison sentence of cases in the inspected sample.

1 Offender Management Caseload Statistics, Ministry of Justice, April 2016

2 Offender Management Caseload Statistics, Ministry of Justice, July 2016

3 Proven Reoffending Statistics, Ministry of Justice, July 2016

Executive Summary

The strategic vision for Through the Gate services has not been realised

Through the Gate services had been in place for almost a year at the time of our fieldwork. Delivering the Through the Gate aspect of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms has been a significant task. To set up and deliver a resettlement service to meet the needs of this cohort of offenders would always be difficult. Despite this, it was reasonable to expect that core services would be in place at the time of our inspection.

Some of the new services that were proposed in the bids for contracts had promise, but had not been implemented. The provision that we saw was some distance from the original vision of a seamless service from the beginning to end of the sentence. We found little evidence of the anticipated creativity or innovation in the new services being delivered by the CRCs.

The minimum contractual requirement is to complete and review resettlement plans for all prisoners, and this is the main driver for the activity of the CRCs. We found no evidence that payment by results was in anyway incentivising the work when compared with the direct contractual requirements. This was not altogether surprising given the comparative limited weight of payment by results and the time lag before the reoffending outcome data becomes available. In addition, the achievement of reduced reoffending is not wholly within the control of the CRC, unlike the completion of mandatory processes as part of the 'fee-for-service'.

The absence of common resettlement targets for prisons, CRCs and the NPS meant that there could not be a 'whole system approach' to the resettlement of offenders.

The needs of individual prisoners were not properly identified and planned for

Most prisoners serving short sentences had multiple and complex needs. Basic custody screenings, completed at the start of sentence by HM Prison staff, drew only upon what the prisoner had said and were a wholly inadequate basis for resettlement planning. The National Offender Management Service guidance for completion of these initial screenings did not promote depth or quality. Resettlement plans, completed by CRC staff within five days of the screening, did not robustly address the most urgent resettlement needs. In too many cases, resettlement planning consisted of no more than referrals to other agencies, recorded as completed once an email had been sent. Prisoners had not been involved with setting objectives or given a copy of their plan. The emphasis on completing processes led to adverse behaviours such as the creation and review of a resettlement plan on the same day, and copying initial plans with only minimal update.

Not enough was being done to help prisoners to get ready for release or to manage risks

Too many prisoners reached their release date without their immediate resettlement needs having been met, or even recognised. Some CRC senior managers reported

difficulties recruiting organisations to provide resettlement services in the supply chains. The need to replace organisations in their supply chains had also been disruptive to the resettlement of prisoners.

Not enough assistance was given to prisoners to resolve debts. Too many prisoners were released without any accommodation. None of the prisoners had been helped into employment by Through the Gate services and we did not see examples of handover to specialist education or training resources in the community. The low number of mentors available did not match the early promise of CRC contract bids, or the numbers of prisoners who might have benefited from this type of support on release.

Work at the low level of intensity that we found was unlikely to achieve the aim of resettlement and reduced reoffending. We were further concerned that the risks of harm presented to others by prisoners were not always recognised. Where they were known, CRC responsible officers did too little to manage risk of harm, which meant that victims were not always protected, particularly in cases of domestic abuse.

The level of communication between staff in prisons and the community was poor and there was very little continuity between services in prison and in the community.

Prospects after release

None of the CRCs we visited were able to provide us with any information on the outcomes they had achieved for prisoners receiving Through the Gate services. Our sample showed concerning rates of reoffending and recall to prison and unsatisfactory initial outcomes for basic needs such as being in settled accommodation.

The picture was more positive for women with more services available to help them than men. Overall, however, many responsible officers conveyed a lack of hope and an almost fatalistic acceptance of the likelihood of failure. This did not bode well for the released prisoner or the wider community.

NB: Throughout this report all names referred to in practice examples have been amended to protect the individual's identity.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Justice and National Offender Management Service should:

- consider whether the current arrangement of paying a 'fee-for-service' and payment by results is having the desired effect on service provision
- review the contractual requirements so that they better incentivise CRCs to develop their approach to the successful resettlement of prisoners, for example:
 - ▶ review the payments for Through the Gate services so that release planning for prisoners is given due weight
 - ▶ introduce measures based on service quality in addition to simply completing processes
 - ▶ promote a 'whole system approach' to resettlement by the introduction of common resettlement targets for prisons, CRCs and the NPS.

The National Offender Management Service should:

- undertake a fundamental review of the basic custody screening so that it provides an assessment of both the needs of the prisoner and any risk of harm that they present to others
- require CRC resettlement staff in prison to complete the basic custody screening in order to provide continuity between the initial screening and subsequent resettlement plan
- promote closer working between CRCs, prison staff and NPS responsible officers so that there is continuity of resettlement support, effective public protection and oversight throughout the sentence
- facilitate effective resettlement and public protection work by developing IT systems that allow information to be exchanged between CRCs, the NPS and prison case management systems.

HM Prisons should:

- make sure that all agencies working within the prison use the National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS) to record information about prisoners
- make sure that population management does not interfere with resettlement planning.

Community Rehabilitation Companies should:

- develop and implement effective resettlement services to meet the requirements of accommodation, employment, finance, benefit and debt
- utilise other available services within resettlement prisons when undertaking pre-release activities, for example mental health support and education and training provided by other commissioned services

- make available full and detailed information about Through the Gate services to all prisoners and prison staff, and to staff in CRCs and the NPS in the community
- make sure that prisoners receiving short sentences are assigned to a responsible officer without delay
- engage meaningfully with the prisoner by involving them in drawing up and reviewing resettlement plans. These should be based upon their individual needs, the actions required to promote resettlement and reduce their likelihood of reoffending and causing harm to others.

The National Probation Service should:

- make sure that prisoners receiving short sentences are assigned a responsible officer without delay
- make sure that all responsible officers have full information about the range of Through the Gate services available in all resettlement prisons within their area.

Context

Transforming Rehabilitation

Until 2014, probation services in England and Wales were delivered by local Probation Trusts. Prisoners who received sentences of a year or more were supervised on release by probation staff, but those receiving shorter sentences were not supervised or offered assistance after their release.

Reoffending rates for released prisoners were high. It was recognised that issues including homelessness, unemployment, mental health and substance misuse lead to reoffending. Reoffending rates were highest for those serving short custodial sentences, and in 2014 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) introduced new arrangements to support their rehabilitation. The *Offender Rehabilitation Act* of that year provided for a minimum of 12 months statutory supervision for all released prisoners sentenced to more than one day in prison – some 50,000 people each year, and an estimated 25% increase in the number in receipt of probation services annually.

The numbers are substantial, and the challenge more sizeable still, as prisoners serving sentences of less than a year tend to have multiple and complex needs. Many have very long records of convictions, and also long histories of disengagement with a range of statutory services.

At the same time, other components of the government's wider *Transforming Rehabilitation* strategy aimed to reduce reoffending rates by opening up the probation market to new providers, and encouraging innovation and creativity. A new National Probation Service (NPS) and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) were set up on 01 June 2014. Cases allocated to the NPS included high risk of serious harm offenders and those subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). CRCs were to manage most other medium and low risk of serious harm offenders, and were to be given: 'flexibility to do what works and freedom from bureaucracy' (MoJ, 2013).

The prison estate was re-organised in November 2014, with 89 of the 120 prisons in England and Wales designated as resettlement prisons. All female prisons were so designated. The aim is for 80% of prisoners to be moved to a resettlement prison local to their home area at least three months before release. Prison staff are expected to screen all new prisoners for their resettlement needs within 72 hours of being received into custody, wherever they are placed. The CRC are responsible for Through the Gate services within designated resettlement prisons from the time a prisoner is received into prison.

Through the Gate

Transforming Rehabilitation provides for a nationwide 'through the prison gate' resettlement service. Most offenders were to be given continuous support by a single provider (the local CRC) from custody into the community. In effect, the CRC steps through the prison gate while the prisoner is in custody, to prepare the prisoner for release and provide assistance to reduce the risk of reoffending, and then supports the individual upon and post-release, thereby providing a seamless resettlement service.

There are certain key tasks for the CRCs delivering resettlement services (NOMS, 2015). They must:

- prepare a resettlement plan, within five working days of the screening being completed by prison staff
- help prisoners to find accommodation
- help prisoners retain employment held pre-custody and gain employment or training opportunities post-release
- provide help with finance, benefits and debt
- provide support for victims of domestic abuse and sex workers
- undertake pre-release coordination.

Resettlement services are to be available to all prisoners in resettlement prisons, irrespective of their home area, their sentence status, or whether their cases are managed in the community by a CRC or the NPS. CRCs are contracted to produce resettlement plans for all eligible prisoners, and to offer resettlement services to all. CRCs can choose whether to deliver Through the Gate services 'in house' using directly employed staff, or to sub-contract delivery to other organisations and set up a supply chain.

The CRC contracts are managed by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). CRCs are paid a 'fee-for-service' to provide Through the Gate resettlement services in all resettlement prisons, from 01 May 2015, and will also receive additional payment by results, triggered by reductions in reoffending after two years. Data on reoffending will not emerge until late 2017, allowing time for a one year follow-up period and a further period for offences to be proven in court.

Why a thematic inspection now?

The introduction of Through the Gate services came with high strategic aspirations, to bring down reoffending rates. It has brought about major changes in the work of prisons and probation services. HMI Probation and HMI Prisons have key roles to inspect the effectiveness of the new arrangements. Early indications from both probation and prison inspections raised concerns about the quality and extent of actual provision.

A phased approach to this inspection is planned. For the first phase we have focused on prisoners serving sentences of less than 12 months, given the high rates of reoffending for this group and the government's policy aspirations.

What works to reduce reoffending?

Much research has been conducted to try to answer this question. The process by which people with long criminal histories move away from offending, is commonly understood as a journey. Motivation to make necessary life changes can ebb and flow. Expectations of change have to be set over the long-term. People who have committed offences need to create new lives for themselves. They need to find a way of integrating into communities that may have previously been hostile to them. It is unrealistic to expect it to be an easy process for the individuals. Those supporting

them through this process of change also need to be persistent, hopeful, flexible, and realistic (McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

It is often said that there is a process of natural maturation by which many offenders learn to stop offending. Life events such as forming a long-term relationship, becoming a parent, or gaining employment are often cited as having a positive influence on reducing offending. But none of these factors on their own or together guarantee an end to offending.

There needs also to be a change in the way the individual views him or herself; and that change in self-perception is just as strong an influence on maintaining relationships or employment as vice versa (McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

Many factors in the lives and circumstances of individuals who have committed offences can influence their progress. Established, static factors such as the number and type of previous offences that the individual has committed, and previous life experiences can predict how likely an individual is to offend again. Those with high numbers of previous convictions, a long period of offending, a history of acquisitive offending (burglary and theft), and poor childhood experiences (including having been in care) are generally more likely to reoffend.

Other factors (such as substance misuse, poor educational attainment, unemployment and homelessness) correlate with a raised likelihood of reoffending, but they are not static. Instead, they can be influenced by any services available to offenders (MoJ, 2014) and can change over time.

There is a complex interplay between these factors and reductions in offending rates.

In this thematic inspection, we recognise that for prisoners to move away from offending, they first have to resettle in the community. Once they have settled, they are more likely to take the next steps to change their long-term behaviour. A review of the international literature identified the following features of effective transition from prison to the community: 'early contact with prisoners during the period of custody; involving prisoners in support plans and programmes aimed at meeting their needs; consistency in support/key workers thereby allowing a trusting relationship to develop between the prisoner and worker; flexibility in work practices allowing workers to respond to issues as they occur; maintaining support on release; and linking prisoners into community-based services.' (Malloch et al., 2013). We see resettlement as the process of managing the transition between prison and the community; from a life in prison with a bed, and regular meals, to something similar or better in the community. We consider that the minimum requirements for resettlement are:

- a safe place to sleep, from the day of release
- access to enough money to meet basic needs including food, clothing, and transport
- a sense of hope for the future
- active links into services that can assist them with other needs, for example substance misuse and mental health services.

Research suggests that to support individuals to turn away from crime (McNeill and Weaver 2010), one must be realistic: it takes time to change entrenched behaviours and relapses should be expected and managed. Building positive

working relationships with offenders makes it more likely that they will be influenced to change, together with recognition and reward for steps taken to move away from offending. The research also suggests that tailoring approaches to fit the individual, understanding social contexts, and developing new networks of support to reintegrate the individual into the community are likely to increase effectiveness.

1. What do prisoners need to help them resettle?

This chapter explains the main resettlement needs of the prisoners in our sample and describes how well these needs were recognised and planned for in prison.

Key findings

As expected, these prisoners serving short sentences have multiple and complex needs. Basic custody screenings are wholly inadequate as a basis for resettlement planning. Resettlement plans do not address the most urgent resettlement needs. Reviews of resettlement plans are perfunctory and do not improve outcomes for the prisoner. The division of the work between prison and CRC staff was a barrier to effective planning.

How were resettlement needs identified and planned for?

All new prisoners received into custody should receive a screening of their resettlement needs. This is a document prepared electronically by prison staff. NOMS guidance states: 'The Basic Custody Screening is designed to promptly identify the prisoner's needs, but it is not an assessment. The Basic Custody Screening is a tool used to ask simple questions to prisoners on reception into custody so that key issues can be identified and prioritised in a resettlement plan and to ensure that the offender can be managed in custody⁴.' Prisons have a performance target for screenings to be completed within 72 hours of the prisoner first being received into custody. This may be when prisoners are remanded in custody prior to sentence; or at the start of a custodial sentence; or when they are recalled to prison for breaching their licence. Screenings record whether prisoners say they have any difficulties in the following areas:

- accommodation
- education, training and employment (ETE)
- health (including misuse of drugs and alcohol)
- drugs and alcohol
- finance, benefit and debt
- children and families
- attitudes, thinking and behaviour
- being a victim of domestic abuse
- being a sex worker.

Once the screening has been completed, CRC staff prepare a resettlement plan within five days. The purpose is: 'to build on resettlement needs identified in the screening' (NOMS, 2015) and to record what action should be taken to meet those needs. The resettlement plan will identify which of the mandatory resettlement services provided by the CRC are required: employment retention/brokerage, and assistance with accommodation, finance and debts. This must also include, where identified, support for prisoners who have previously been sex workers or victims of domestic abuse. The resettlement plan will also identify referrals to be made to other providers in the prison or community for example substance misuse and education services. The resettlement plan is completed on the final page of the screening document. If CRC staff identify any issues that have not already been picked up by the screening, they can add lines to the resettlement plan to describe and address

4 NOMS Oasys Guidance - Basic Custody Screening Manual v2 December 2014

them. The IT system does not allow them to update or change information that has previously been entered on the screening. This makes the screenings and plans very difficult to read to obtain clear information about the current needs of a prisoner and what is going to be done to assist them.

It is expected that resettlement plans are reviewed as the release date approaches, usually within the prisoner's last 12 weeks.

What needs did the prisoners have?

To judge this, inspectors looked at the information that would have been accessible to CRC resettlement staff in the prison in the early days of a sentence. This included any information available on OASys (the offender assessment system), and on the prison case record system (NOMIS). We found that more detailed information, including previous convictions was difficult to access. We also took into account the prisoner's perspective, as recorded on the screenings, and from our interviews. It was no surprise that the prisoners in the case sample had multiple and complex needs. Just over half of the cases had been under active supervision in the community immediately prior to going to prison, so should have had up to date information on OASys. The most common needs we discovered were related to accommodation, mental health, finance, benefits and debts, domestic abuse (being perpetrator or victim) and abuse of drugs and alcohol. Over two-thirds of the prisoners in the sample were serving sentences for offences that were not of a violent or sexual nature. They had on average committed 33 previous offences, and 42% had received at least one previous short custodial sentence since the *Offender Rehabilitation Act* was enacted in February 2015.

How well were the needs of prisoners identified?

Prison staff told us they had very little time to complete screenings. NOMS guidance states that the average time needed to complete a screening is 20 minutes. In most cases officers entered information straight onto a computer during a brief interview with the prisoner. Screenings had been completed in over 90% of the cases we inspected. Few prison staff looked for other information that might be available about the prisoners on NOMIS or OASys. No routine checks were made of previous convictions, or other information about previous behaviour or risk of harm the prisoner might present to other people. This meant that the information entered on the screenings was based purely on what the prisoner had said. When we looked at the screenings in detail, we found less than half (40%) of needs were adequately described. Screenings either failed to record a need that was obvious, or noted it as a need without explaining why. In male prisons, staff told us they found it very difficult to enquire about history of domestic abuse or having been a sex worker in the limited time they had available. The guidance from NOMS was frequently quoted to us by prison staff, so we could understand why they were preparing screenings in the way we saw. Many of the screenings we saw did not form an adequate basis upon which the CRC could create a good enough resettlement plan. The target to complete screenings within 72 hours hindered a fuller review of the prisoner's history.

Quote from a prison officer:

“Screenings are quick but not quality. They are meant to be based on what the prisoner says and we are not expected to put anything else in. We often have ten or more to do in a day.”

The quality of the screenings was poor, overall. The impact of NOMS guidance on the quality of the screenings was serious. The group of short sentence prisoners we were looking at were not covered by any other sentence planning arrangements. In these circumstances, screenings and resettlement plans are the only planning documents to manage their sentence and prepare them for release. We thought these documents should be completed as assessments, and should use all available information and analyse that information where needed. This is a systemic failing in the design of resettlement planning.

How good are the resettlement plans?

Many of the CRC staff we spoke to criticised the quality of the screenings prepared on reception. They routinely re-interviewed prisoners, going over all the areas that should have been covered at the screening stage, to make sure they had identified all the areas where help was needed. They were frustrated by what they saw as duplication of effort. Because the IT system does not allow them to update the screening section of the form, they had to record any additional information on the resettlement plan section. This made it hard to distinguish additional factual information and analysis, from any actions that needed to be taken. The fact that two different members of staff, one from the prison and one from the CRC, were involved in the process was unhelpful.

Where any specific need had been identified for a prisoner, we expected the resettlement plan to set out clearly what action should be taken to achieve a positive outcome. We found this had been done well enough for 38% of individual needs. So even if a particular need had been missed in the screening, it was sometimes covered in the resettlement plan.

Most of the resettlement plans we saw identified actions to be dealt with by referrals to other agencies. It was routine for actions identified on resettlement plans to be marked as completed once a referral had been sent off. This was misleading and often gave the impression that more was being done than was actually the case.

We were concerned to find that few prisoners had received paper copies of their resettlement plans, and many told us they did not know who was doing what to help them.

We looked at how well resettlement plans were reviewed as the prisoner approached release. We hoped that plans were adjusted to fit changing circumstances. CRC staff in prisons told us they were under considerable pressure to complete reviews of plans as the prisoner approached their release date. This is required to meet contractual targets. The electronic systems showed that almost all (89%) plans had been reviewed when the timescale required it.

When we looked at these ‘reviews’, however, we found that many were simply copies

of the original plans, with little or no new information recorded. Some cases had a review completed on the same day as the original plan, while others had several reviews completed on the same day. We did not fully understand why this was done, and it gave a misleading impression of the actual volume of work.

Only 28% of reviews updated the original plan well enough. Where actions on plans had involved referrals to other organisations, it was not routine to seek updates from those organisations about work that had been done. Many of the reviews were described by resettlement staff as 'virtual'. We found this meant they were completed without any involvement of prisoners, who were not told about any changes to the original plan. This is poor practice. We did not see any evidence of effective quality assurance of screenings, plans or reviews.

Case example - when needs are not picked up, help is not given:

Jim has a long history of drug related offending, money problems and homelessness. Despite this, the screening identifies no areas of concern. The resettlement worker does not create a plan, but makes a note that he may be going to his friend's address, and plans to make a Jobseekers Allowance claim. No action had been taken to check those three days before his release.

Case example – when needs are known but not dealt with:

The screening for Joe was undertaken when he was on remand. He was found guilty and could not return to his previous address where the offences took place. In the four months between his conviction and release there were five reviews of the resettlement plan. His homelessness was not recognised until a week before his release.

Five of the prisoners in our case sample from one prison were moved to a different prison in the last few weeks before release. Prison staff told us that the moves were due to population pressures. Through the Gate services in the receiving prison were delivered by the same CRC, but this was an unhelpful disruption to the continuity of work on their resettlement plans.

2. What help do prisoners get to prepare them for release?

This chapter describes the services that are in place to help prisoners get ready for release. It comments on the effectiveness of those services.

Key findings

Not enough help was given to prisoners who had nowhere to live on release. Not enough assistance was given to prisoners to resolve debts. Not enough links were made with other prison activities to prepare prisoners to enter employment or training on release.

How is help offered to prisoners?

The core resettlement services that CRCs should be providing in prisons are help with accommodation, finance, benefit and debt and employment. They should also provide support for prisoners who have experienced domestic abuse or who have been sex workers. Services could be delivered directly by the CRC or by organisations in their supply chains. When undertaking pre-release activity the CRC is also expected to utilise services offered by other providers within resettlement prisons (for example mental and physical health, substance misuse, education).

Where prisoners were referred to other organisations to meet their needs, we found very little record was kept of the content of these referrals. Most referrals were brief emails, which conveyed little information about the prisoner's particular history and circumstances, including any risk of harm to others. It seemed that this was left to the specialist staff to discover, even though many of those questions had already been asked and answered as part of the preparation of a resettlement plan. Referrals should be tracked, to keep the prisoner, and other staff in the prison and community informed of progress. We did not see many examples where resettlement workers followed up the outcome of referrals.

Helping prisoners secure accommodation:

Over two-thirds of prisoners needed help with accommodation. This is a crucial issue to be addressed, to give stability and security at the vulnerable time of release. While CRCs are not expected to provide accommodation themselves, they should have in place a range of advice and assistance to make sure that prisoners have somewhere to live when released. We saw good work with a few prisoners who had existing tenancies, to keep them open for release. The largest number needed help to find somewhere new to live. We recognised that finding accommodation for prisoners is a very difficult task, particularly in London and in more rural areas, where the available options are extremely limited.

Even in areas with a better supply of rented housing, many prisoners found this difficult to access. Unless they can prove that they are vulnerable upon release then prisoners would not have a 'priority need' under homelessness legislation, so can expect very little assistance from the local authority. We were told that the availability of hostel-type accommodation had been reducing. The reasons for that were not clear. In all four prisons, we were told that it was very difficult to secure any accommodation before the prisoner was released.

While we accepted that the reality of the situation was difficult, we did not find that enough was done to address accommodation needs. Prisoners did not know who would help them, what that help would consist of, and when they would know what had been done. Many of the referrals made were standard applications to

local housing departments. These had little likelihood of any accommodation being secured before release. Prisoners released to areas not covered by the specific CRC in the prison received even less help.

We did not see any innovative work by CRCs to make access to accommodation easier. Some bids that CRCs made before getting their contracts proposed schemes such as funding rent deposits or other short-term assistance, but we did not see this in operation. If they had been available, it might have allayed some of the worries we heard from prisoners approaching release. These three case examples, one from each of the male prisons we inspected, illustrate the limitations of the services in place for homeless prisoners. In all of these cases the services in place and the outcomes for prisoners were poor.

Case example - no accommodation could be found:

Raymond's accommodation need was recognised, and he was referred to the CRC housing provider. They provided him with contact information for a completely unsuitable rough sleepers' project, which comprised of mattresses on empty office floors. The inspector was told that most people walk away from this provision and then cannot access it again. Despite this, the action in relation to accommodation was marked as completed.

Case example - accommodation only found after release:

Gareth had been referred to the CRC housing service while in prison as he was due to be released to no fixed abode. Someone did come to speak to him, but there was no follow up from the Through the Gate team as to what had happened with this referral. This meant that Gareth was released with nowhere to sleep. His community based CRC officer had to make referrals after release to find him suitable supported accommodation.

Case example - no local services are available to help:

The screening stated Dean would be of no fixed abode on release but did not take the information from a recent OASys about his last eviction for threatening behaviour and drug use. The resettlement plan states: 'I have completed the appropriate paperwork and will pass this on to my colleague to commence intervention work'. The plan was reviewed twice, with no update to the action and no comments to explain what work had been done. The last review, four weeks before release, notes: 'not a priority need so no homelessness application made and multi-agency referrals not currently being accepted'.

In HMP New Hall, the resettlement workers offered a more comprehensive service. We could not be sure whether this was because women were more likely to be recognised as vulnerable and given higher priority by housing providers in the community, or that there was generally a better supply of accommodation in West Yorkshire. This case illustrates good practice.

Case example - accommodation found before release:

When she first came to prison, Dawn said she intended to return to live with her partner. She then recognised that he was too controlling, and decided she needed independent accommodation on release. Much work was done by St Giles Trust to help with this, and private rented accommodation was found for her.

A recent joint inspection report by HMI Prisons and HMI Probation highlighted the importance of family relationships in helping prisoners resettle (HMI Prisons 2014). We did not see any examples of resettlement workers in prison negotiating for prisoners to return to live with family members after release. In most cases where no accommodation had been found pre-release, the responsible officer in the community picked up this task after release. The exception was in Cumbria and Lancashire, where if Shelter workers in HMP Preston had not been able to find accommodation, they transferred the case to community workers who then took responsibility for helping them to find accommodation. This was good practice.

Finance, benefits and debt:

Many of the prisoners we met had arrived in prison with financial difficulties. These included court fines, rent arrears, mobile phone contracts, and other debts. Some prisoners did not have their own bank accounts or the proof of identity they would need to set one up. If work could be done while in custody to address these problems, we thought releases would be likely to go more smoothly, increasing the likelihood of successful resettlement. We saw a wide variation in the services available here.

We saw a few examples of good work where debts and other financial liabilities were recognised, and letters were sent on behalf of the prisoner to try to resolve them. In one prison, a booklet was given to prisoners to show them how to write their own letters. While welcome, we thought that was unlikely to be effective for most prisoners.

Case example - not enough help given to assist with debts:

Rashid had been advised to claim Jobseekers Allowance, and that was the only action set out in the resettlement plan related to finance, benefits and debts. He told the inspector he had significant debts, but had received no advice in respect of or addressing these, beyond a leaflet being provided. The leaflet does provide templates and advice, but requires the prisoner to have the initiative and literacy skills to follow through. We did not think this was sufficient to address his problems.

Many prisoners had outstanding fines, and it is possible for prisoners to make applications to the court to have these fines 'lodged', so that they have days added to their sentence in lieu of paying the fines on release. We heard conflicting advice given to prisoners about lodging fines. In some prisons no assistance was available to do this. In others prisoners were told, wrongly, that if they applied to have fines lodged they would not be eligible to apply for early release on Home Detention Curfew (HDC). Unsurprisingly, this discouraged some prisoners from applying.

Some prisoners do not have their own bank accounts, and this can cause real problems claiming benefits when they are released. We expected that all the prisons we visited would be able to arrange bank accounts where needed. We saw some cases where this was recognised and assistance was given, and others where this need was not identified and resolved.

Case example - no bank account set up:

It was clear Sadie did not have a bank account, and she had struggled to get a claim for Universal Credit set up when last released. No effort was made to set up a bank account during her sentence.

The majority of prisoners would be making claims for benefits after their release from prison. Jobcentre Plus staff are available in prisons to start this process off, and to make sure that prisoners who will be unemployed on release are enabled to enter the 'Work Programme' immediately on release. We expected that CRC staff would support prisoners to make use of this opportunity, and some did. Claims for Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit could not be started while in custody. The consequence was that some prisoners knew they would face a delay before receiving benefits following release, and would be dependent upon family and friends, or charity, in the interim.

Education, training and employment (ETE):

CRCs in prison are contracted to deliver employment resettlement services. While undertaking pre-release activity they are expected to utilise the services of other providers within resettlement prisons, including education and training.

The prisoners we met were a long way from being ready to enter employment. Other problems needed to be dealt with first, such as substance misuse, behaviour or mental health problems. In many cases they had been receiving Employment and Support Allowance before they came into prison so were not currently 'available for work'.

Case example - helping with job search:

A CRC worker in HMP Preston assisted prisoners to prepare CVs, to set up email accounts, and to register for online job searches. She then emailed their CVs to them, so that they could update and use them after release.

In HMP New Hall a number of external employers were working in the prison. Two of the women we met had been offered job opportunities on release, and CRC staff passed information about that on to responsible officers in the community. Sadly, neither of those offers were taken up after release. In another prison, a prisoner was pleased to tell us that he had regained a fork lift licence while he had been in custody. The CRC, however, were unaware of that, so did not tell his responsible officer.

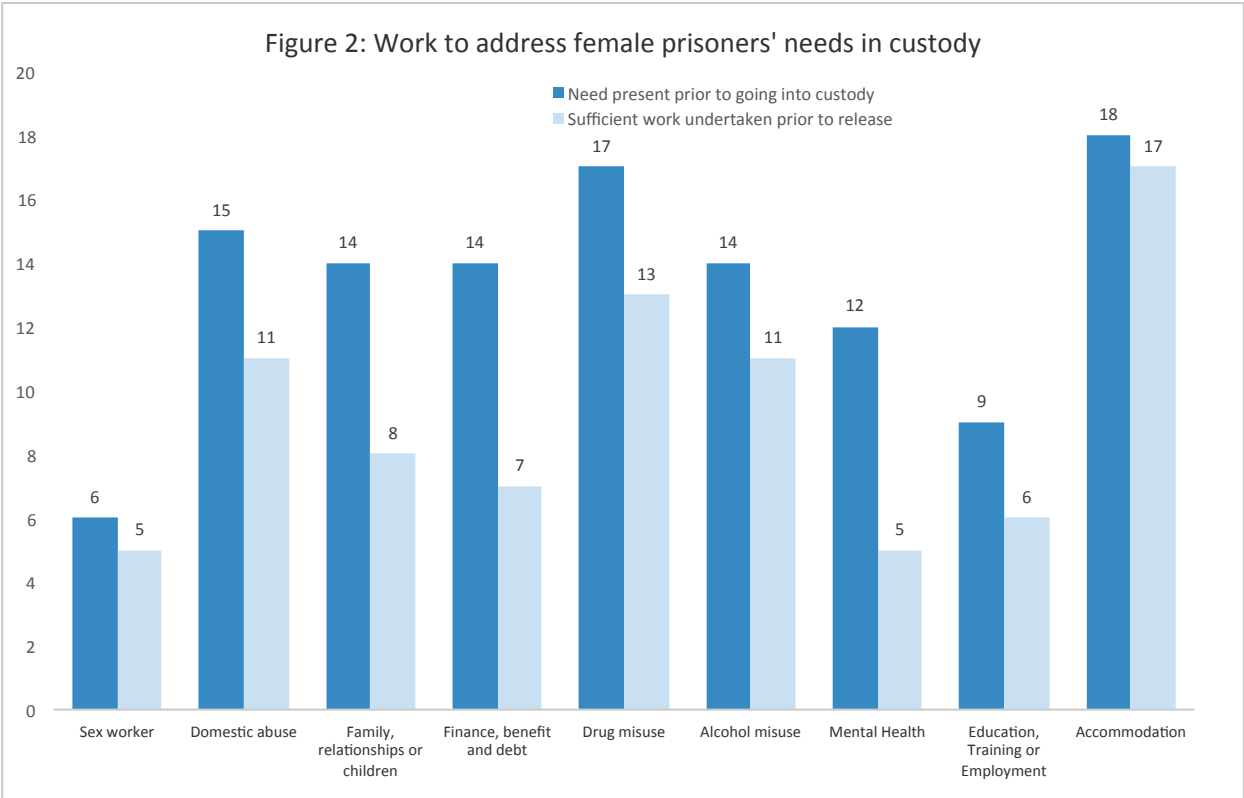
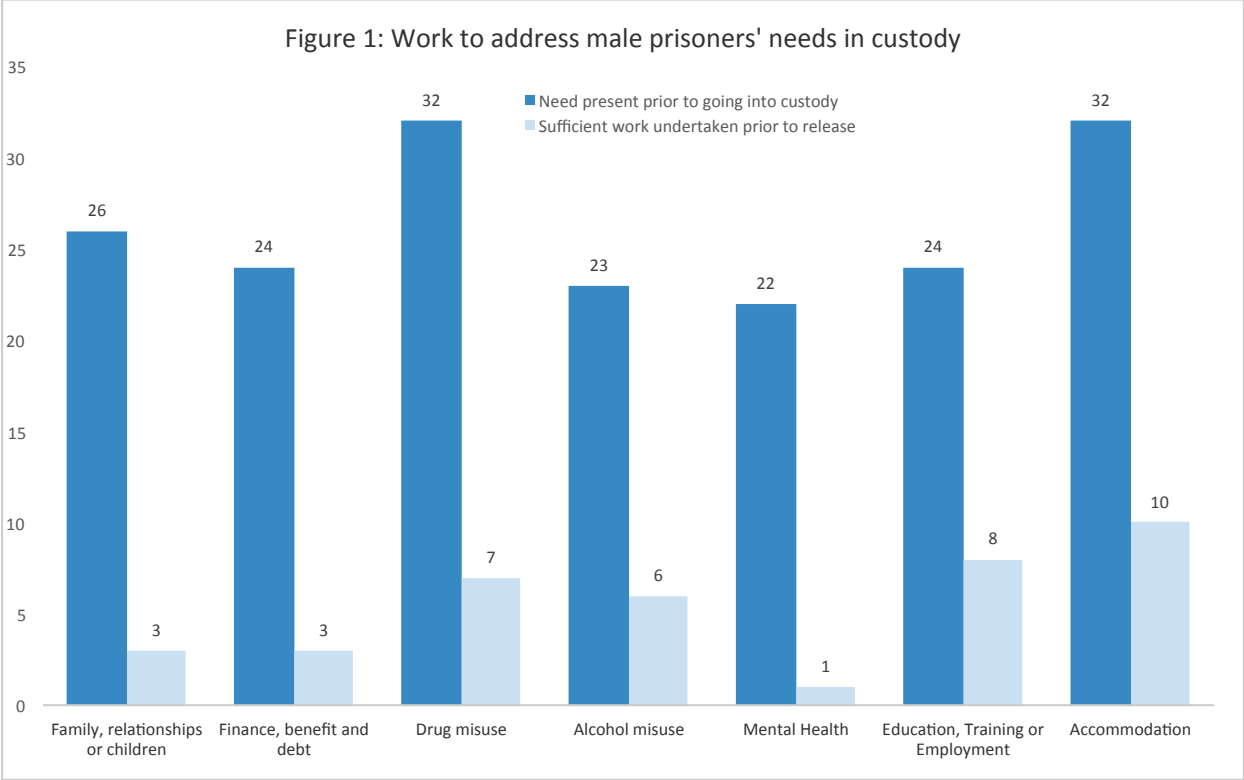
We did not find CRCs promoting links to local colleges or education providers, for the prisoners where this would have been appropriate. We did not see examples of handover to specialist ETE staff in the community. Most prisoners were involved in work or education as part of their prison day. As a minimum, we hoped that CRC staff would find out what work or education the prisoner had been doing during their sentence, and share that with the responsible officer so that these could be developed on release. We did not find that being done.

Services for women prisoners:

Although the number of cases we looked at was small, we did find that there were better services in place for women than for men. There were more external agencies working in HMP New Hall than in the male prisons, which contributed to our findings. In the cases we saw, women prisoners were more likely than men to have had their needs met at the point of release. We could not be sure about the extent to which this was attributable to the quality of CRC resettlement services in HMP New Hall, or the better overall provision for women in that area. As more women's prisons are visited during future Through the Gate inspections a clearer picture will emerge.

Summary: What help was needed and what help was given?

The following charts, Figure 1: Work to address male offenders needs in custody, and Figure 2: Work to address female offenders needs in custody show the needs presented by prisoners prior to going into custody and the sufficiency of work undertaken to address those needs, before release.



3. What are the outcomes for prisoners at the point of release?

This chapter explains how well pre-release resettlement services put into place what is needed to help prisoners settle back into the community.

Key findings

Too many prisoners reach their release date without their immediate resettlement needs having been recognised or met. Too many prisoners were released without any accommodation. None of the prisoners had been helped into employment or training after release.

Where did prisoners live after release?

Of the prisoners we spoke to, many told us that finding somewhere to live on release was their greatest worry. We found that too little assistance was given to prisoners who had nowhere to live on release. The majority of prisoners, who did not have accommodation to return to, were released to temporary addresses identified without the assistance of the Through the Gate team. Nine men and three women were released to no fixed abode.

The charts below, Figure 3: Accommodation status for male offenders upon release and Figure 4: Accommodation status for female offenders upon release, illustrate our findings.

Figure 3: Accommodation status for male prisoners upon release

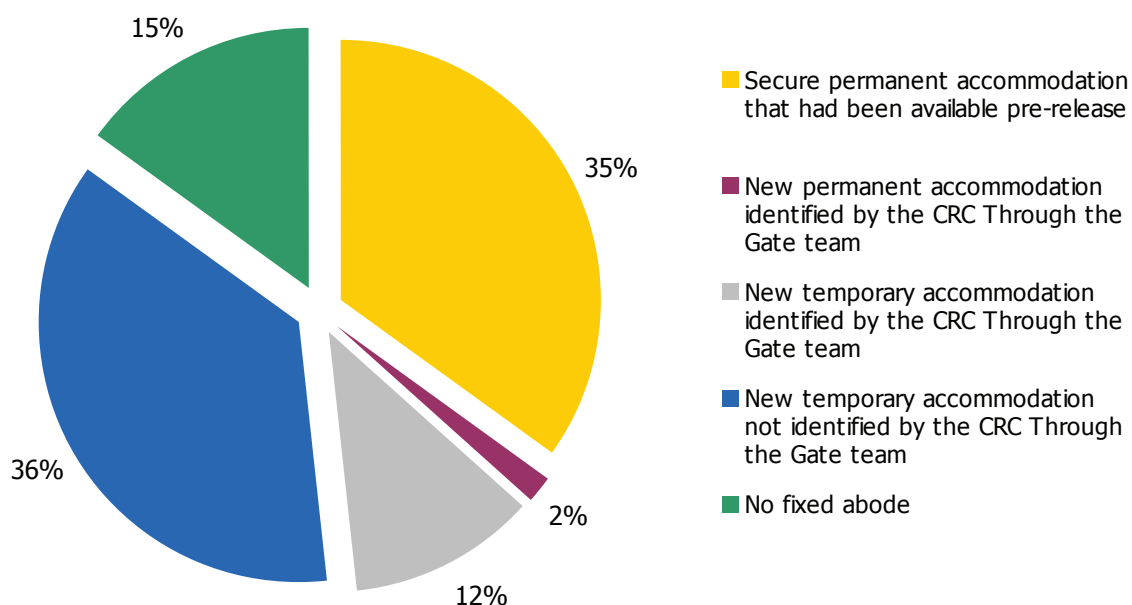
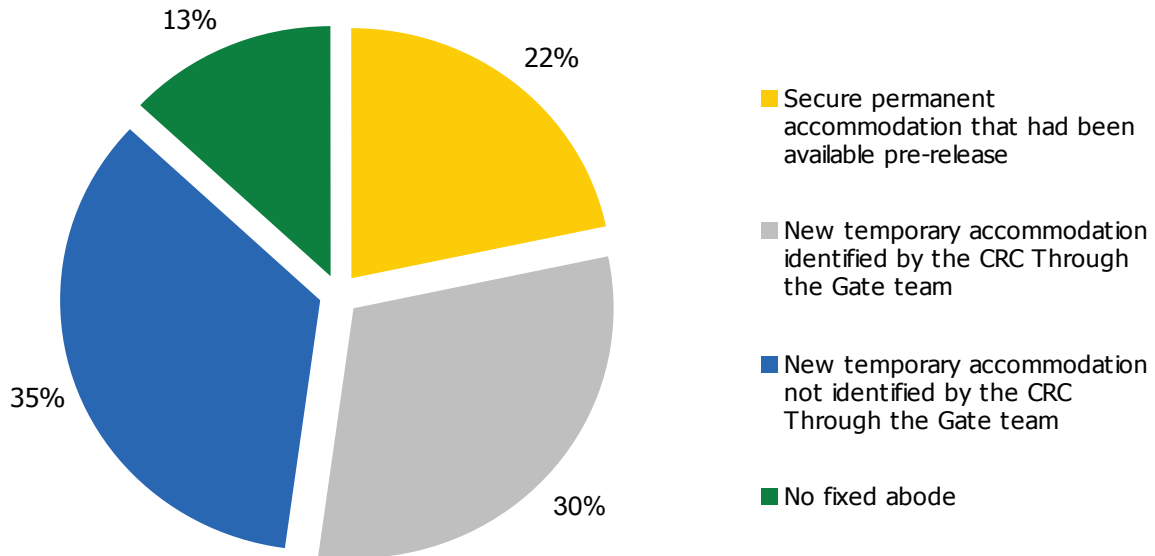


Figure 4: Accommodation status for female prisoners upon release



Even in the last few days of their sentences, many of the prisoners that we spoke to were not clear about what help, if any, they would get to find somewhere to live. In one prison, some prisoners were only told on the morning of their release whether any accommodation had been found for them.

Even where there were good outcomes, such as contact with a landlord ensuring that a previous tenancy was kept open, that information was not passed back to the prisoner. For many prisoners, when they reported to their responsible officers in the community on the day of release, their worries about where they would live overwhelmed any other issues that needed to be dealt with. Responsible officers felt they were left to pick up the pieces after Through the Gate services had failed. They often did not have confidence in the reliability of information from the prison CRC team. For a service that was meant to be 'seamless', that was very disappointing.

In two areas we found slightly better outcomes, for different reasons:

In Cumbria and Lancashire, Through the Gate services in the prison were delivered by Shelter, via a subcontract arrangement with the CRC. As previously noted, if they identified a prisoner who was going to be homeless on release, they arranged for a Shelter worker to meet the prisoner on the day of release to focus on securing accommodation, so the responsible officer could concentrate on supervising the licence.

In West Yorkshire, Through the Gate staff referred many prisoners to outside organisations which appeared more able to secure accommodation for prisoners. These included drug treatment services, and West Yorkshire Finding Independence (WY-FI), a lottery funded project doing assertive outreach work with the most disadvantaged and disengaged people in the area.

Case example – a previous tenancy is maintained:

Rose had previously been living in a council flat. While she had been in prison a previous partner had broken in and caused damage. The CRC staff arranged for repairs to be done, so that the property was safe for her to return to.

Case example - no accommodation was found until after release:

Robert is a 48 year old man with serious health problems. Before going into prison he had been living in temporary accommodation, and he did not know if he could go back there or not. His need for accommodation was flagged up soon after he arrived in prison, but nothing was done to check whether his previous address was still available. He was released homeless. His responsible officer then referred him to a community organisation, who found him hostel accommodation.

Case example - unsuitable accommodation because no alternative is available:

Liam is a volatile young man, with a history of violent behaviour related to his drinking and drug use. When he went to prison it was recognised that he could be homeless on release. No detail was recorded about his previous behaviour. His mother was reluctant to have him back home because of his violence to her in the past. Through the Gate staff were doing a lot of work to try to find him accommodation but nothing was found pre-release. There was a discussion about giving him a tent. The responsible officer eventually allowed him to stay with his mother as long as he is abstinent from drugs and alcohol. This is unsatisfactory as it put her at some risk of harm from him.

What was the employment situation for released prisoners?

None of the prisoners we met were assisted into employment or training via the Through the Gate arrangements. For many with more pressing problems, the prospect of immediately entering employment or training may have been unrealistic. It was still disappointing that little thought was given to the possibility of future training for these or other prisoners, as a stepping stone to a more productive life after release.

The following charts, Figure 5: Employment/training status for male offenders upon release and Figure 6: Employment/training status for female offenders upon release, illustrate our findings.

Figure 5: Employment status for male prisoners upon release

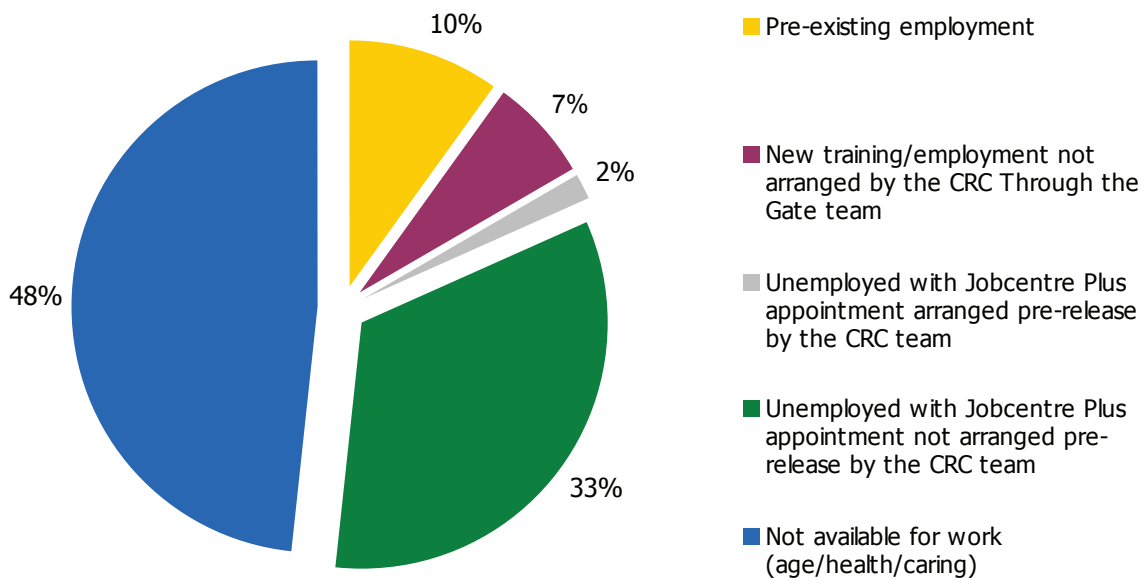
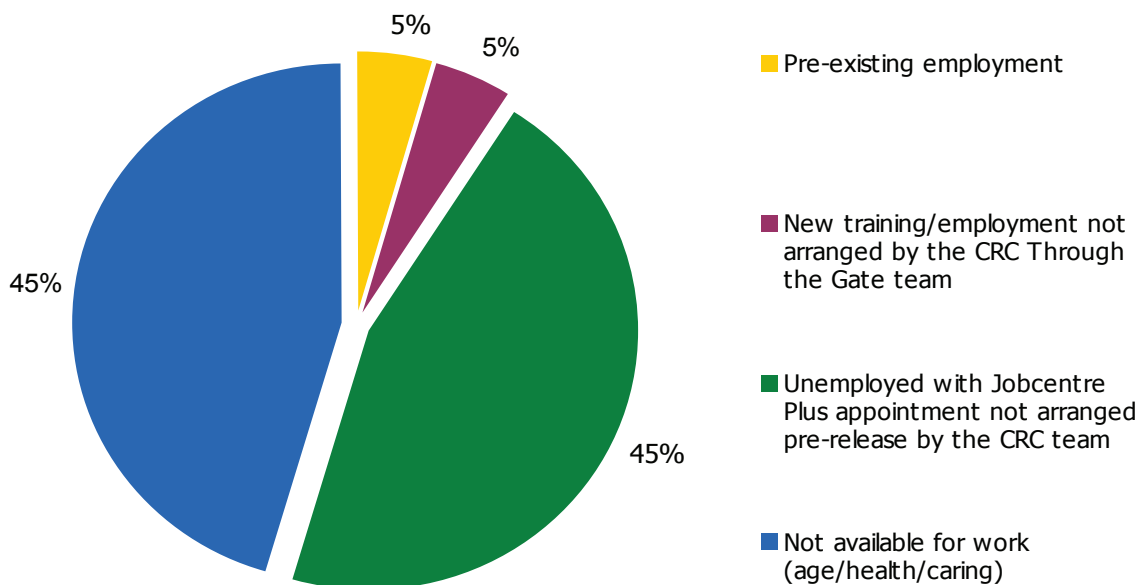


Figure 6: Employment status for female prisoners upon release



Was a mentor available at the point of release?

The use of mentors was much talked about prior to the roll out of CRCs, and many CRCs made mention of these in their bids for the contracts. We were hoping to see mentors made available to work with some of the most entrenched offenders, alongside statutory services. We were very disappointed with what we saw.

In total seven women and three men had been put in touch with mentors. In only one case was the mentor commissioned via Through the Gate services.

Mentors for women:

Seven women had been assigned mentors, though none of these mentors were funded or arranged through the CRC. Some were provided by the WY-FI project, (see above). We were impressed by the efforts their mentors made to get to know women before release, and their intensive follow-up after release. They offered women a high level of practical support, and this encouraged them to comply with their licences. We also saw two cases of women in West Yorkshire who had been allocated mentors via the local drug treatment services. Again, those mentors seemed to add value and increase compliance.

Case example - excellent support from a mentor leads to good early outcomes:

Linda was allocated a mentor through the WY-FI project. The mentor picked her up from prison and took her to appointments regarding alcohol support, housing and with her responsible officer. Through the Gate workers found her temporary accommodation for the first few nights, and introduced her to the Together Women Project, which has a women's centre in her home area. She is living in a shared house, and her alcohol use has reduced. Her benefit claim has now been processed and she seems to be stable. This has allowed her to have long-needed dental work done, and that has improved her self-esteem. Her previous pattern was of almost immediate relapse on leaving custody. She has now been released for six weeks, and is still doing well. Her responsible officer described this case as an excellent example of how Through the Gate services can work.

Mentors for men:

Just three of the men we looked at had mentors allocated to them. In two cases the mentors had been put in place through CRC arrangements, and the third man had been allocated a mentor through a local scheme for prolific offenders. When we asked why other cases had not been allocated mentors, we were told that mentors are scarce or not available. In one area we were told that a high level of motivation is expected from the prisoner before they are accepted onto the mentoring scheme, which seemed to misunderstand what mentors could offer.

Case example – some support from a mentor but this may be withdrawn:

Because there were concerns about the stability of Ian's accommodation, Shelter arranged a mentor who went to see him in custody and confirmed that his room was still available on release. They picked him up from custody, took him to the appointment with the CRC, and gave him general help and practical support. Over the last couple of weeks he has been failing appointments. The responsible officer does not know why he is disengaging, but is worried that Shelter will suspend him from the mentor scheme because of his non-attendance.

Prisoners with additional needs:

We would expect all services delivered by CRCs to make reasonable adjustments for prisoners who had any additional needs. In the cases we looked at, there were 5 prisoners who did not speak English as a first language, 6 who appeared to have adult social care needs, 9 with disabilities and 34 with mental health problems. We could not assure ourselves that all of these factors had been identified by resettlement staff or responsible officers. Even when factors had been identified, services were not adjusted to meet individual needs.

Access to telephone interpreting services in prisons were very limited, which impacted on the quality of plans prepared for prisoners who did not have a good understanding of English. We saw one case where the prisoner appeared to have cognitive impairment, and prison records described his behaviour on the wing as 'odd'. He had apparently declined Through the Gate services, but no one appeared to have thought about his needs, or considered referring him for an adult social care assessment. Similarly, we were not confident that mental health and disability issues were fully taken into account in the Through the Gate work done with prisoners.

4. A seamless transition into the community?

This chapter describes the extent to which there is continuity between services in prison and the community.

Key findings

The level of communication between staff in prisons and the community was poor. Prisoners had little sense of involvement in plans for their resettlement. There was very little integration between services in prison and in the community.

We thought it would be impractical in most cases for the same CRC staff members to be working with a prisoner before and after release. We thought 'seamlessness' could best be achieved by full communication between all those working with the prisoner before release and all those working after release. We hoped to see the prisoner at the heart of communication.

What information was there about Through the Gate services?

We expected to find that prisoners, prison staff and responsible officers knew what services were available. We asked to see any publicity information that CRCs had produced about Through the Gate services. What we saw was of variable quality, and was often not available where needed in prisons. We were not able to find this information on CRC websites.

The role of the responsible officer:

At the point a prisoner is sentenced, a decision is made by the NPS about whether the case will be allocated to the CRC or to the NPS. An email is meant to be sent to the prison to confirm which agency the case has been allocated to, but allocation to a team or individual responsible officer in the community happens later. As CRC staff in prisons do not routinely have access to the information systems used by probation staff in the community, it can be difficult for them to find out who is the responsible officer in the community. We saw some cases where the responsible officer was only allocated towards the end of the custodial part of the sentence.

For cases allocated to the NPS, we found that most responsible officers were clear about their roles. As cases allocated to the NPS have higher risks of causing serious harm, this was reassuring. CRC resettlement staff in prisons recognised that NPS staff would take a lead on managing risk of harm.

Where cases were allocated to the CRC in the community, there was much less clarity about the role of the responsible officer. In one area staff told us they were given no time allowance to work with prisoners before release. In another area we were told that high workloads meant that there was no time to think about cases in prison, even if they had wanted to. West Yorkshire CRC had a policy which expected the responsible officer in the community to make contact with the CRC resettlement staff in the prison and take part in a three-way meeting before release, and we saw evidence of this happening at HMP New Hall.

How good is communication inside the prison?

The main electronic information system inside prisons is NOMIS, and this is accessible to most prison based staff. We hoped that CRC staff would use NOMIS

for their day-to-day recording of work undertaken with prisoners, so that everyone else in the prison would know what was happening, and the prisoner could be kept informed. We were disappointed that this was not the case. Many CRC staff, including those working for supply chain organisations, kept their own records which were not accessible to others. This meant that queries raised by prisoners or others could not be answered. We noted that arrangements were significantly better in HMP New Hall.

In the prison, the offender management unit is responsible for tasks such as processing HDC applications and agreeing licence conditions with responsible officers. This was done by completely separate processes to work being done by resettlement staff, and in some cases led to confusion where an address might have been given for HDC purposes but that was not known to Through the Gate staff.

The level of communication with prisoners was poor; from both staff in the prison and responsible officers in the community. Prisoners did not feel they had any real involvement in the planning for their release. This meant that opportunities that could have been used to build motivation were missed.

How good is communication between prison and community?

Most NPS responsible officers communicated when necessary with resettlement staff in prisons, but we did not see many CRC responsible officers doing the same. Responsible officers in the community were not clear about the range of services that should be provided by the CRC in the prison, so did not make requests for services to be delivered, for example in setting up bank accounts. They also found it confusing that in different prisons the services were different, even if they were provided by the same CRC. One responsible officer described having received an email from a prison we did not visit, which explained the services that were on offer and giving contact details for the resettlement staff. She thought that would be very helpful if it was done in every prison, and we agreed.

We hoped that as part of 'release coordination' the CRC would gather relevant information from the prison and pass that on to the responsible officer. This could include information about work or training undertaken, behaviour in prison, and engagement with other agencies such as substance misuse services. It could also include information about appointments arranged in the community to follow drug treatment or start benefits claims. This was not often done and we thought that was a missed opportunity. At the point of release, most CRC resettlement staff assumed that responsible officers would read the final resettlement plan review to find out all the information they needed, and saw no need for any additional communication. The reviews we saw of resettlement plans were not adequate, so responsible officers were not always receiving the information they needed to start off their supervision. We saw some examples, mostly in London, where an email was sent to the responsible officer to set out everything that had happened in prison, and we thought that was good practice.

None of the services we saw could be described as 'seamless'.

Case example – late allocation of a responsible officer:

The resettlement worker sent an email to the NPS about a homeless sex offender, asking to discuss the resettlement plan. The response from the NPS was: “thanks info will go onto system and he should be allocated closer to release date”. Little further work was done by the community NPS before his release.

Case example - poor communication between organisations and with the prisoner:

Victor had recently been interviewed by his responsible officer via video-link. She had not been told he was on the drug resettlement unit, and that he was doing well there. He had seen a resettlement worker once. He thought they were referring him to mental health and arranging for his fines to be lodged, but he had heard nothing back from them, and was due for release imminently.

5. Keeping the public and victims safe

This chapter explains the contribution we would expect of Through the Gate staff and others, including responsible officers in the community, to keeping existing victims and others safe.

Key findings

Public protection work around short sentence prisoners is weak, and this is a systemic problem. Risks of harm presented by prisoners are not always recognised. Victims are not always protected. Responsible officers in the CRC do not do enough to manage risk of harm in short sentence prison cases.

What we would expect:

Public protection is the responsibility of all agencies: the NPS at the court stage, all staff working in prisons including resettlement staff, and responsible officers in the community. Through the Gate services are provided by CRCs to all prisoners, irrespective of whether they are managed by a CRC in the community or the NPS.

Most NPS cases are categorised as posing a high risk of harm to others or are managed through MAPPA arrangements, so there are clear public protection issues. Many of the CRC cases have histories of violence and domestic abuse, so there are public protection issues here as well. We expected Through the Gate services to take into account any history the prisoner had of causing serious harm to others. We expected them to do this by making sure that everyone working with the prisoner was fully aware of any potential they had to cause harm to others, and by working on resettlement plans that would minimise any risk of harm to others in the future.

The NPS are expected to complete risk assessments at the point of cases being allocated to the CRC, but where these are not completed on OASys they are not accessible to staff working in prison. Resettlement staff working for CRCs in prison did not have routine access to previous convictions. They were also not involved in the process of communication between prison staff and responsible officers in the community, to set licence conditions before release.

The largest risk of harm factor was around domestic abuse, where 35% of the male prisoners had been identified as presenting a risk of harm to previous or current partners, or other family members. Many of the prisoners were subject to restraining orders to prevent contact with named individuals. A few had committed sexual offences, and were subject to registration requirements in the community. Prisons are expected to enter information on NOMIS about restraining orders, restrictions on child contact, and other known behaviour of concern, and generally do this within the first week after a prisoner arrives. HM Prison staff were generally good at identifying those prisoners posing a risk of harm. This information, however, had often not been passed to the CRC.

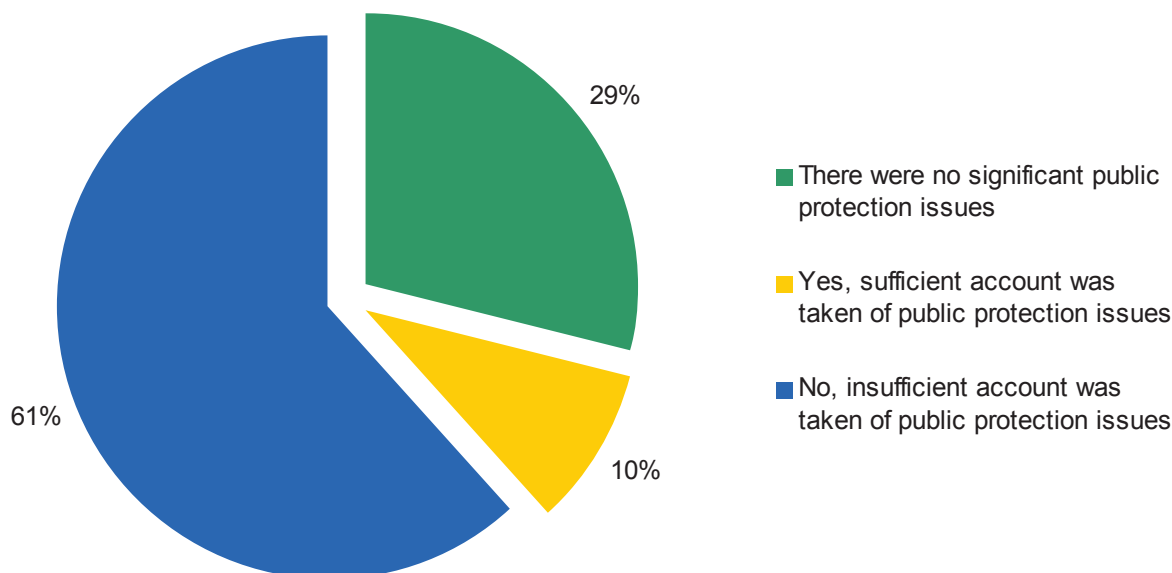
We would also expect responsible officers in the community to be aware of the potential to cause harm, and to take an active role to provide that information to prison staff and to set up release arrangements that minimised risk of harm to others. Resettlement staff were not always involved in risk management meetings in prisons.

Was enough account taken of public protection issues?

Our inspection found that insufficient account was taken of public protection issues by the CRCs (including supply chain organisations). Even where inspectors found

that good quality previous information would have been available to resettlement workers, it was ignored in the delivery of many Through the Gate services. Figure 7, below illustrates our findings:

Figure 7: Did the CRC (including any supply chain organisations) identify, and respond reasonably to, any public protection issues in the case?



At the screening stage, there is a place on the basic custody screening tool to summarise any known concerns about risk of serious harm, but this section of the document was not being used because of the NOMS guidance (as outlined in chapter 2). So for example, a screening could state that a prisoner has an address to return to, without it being recognised that it was the address of a partner where a restraining order was in place. Resettlement plans were not explicit about any risks of harm that might exist, and how these were to be taken into account. So even if it was recognised that accommodation needed to be found, plans did not describe how accommodation referrals needed to take into account where any victims lived. When referrals were made to other agencies we could not see evidence that they had been told about key risk factors, so that they could play a part in keeping others safe.

We did not see any evidence of priority being given to providing a service to prisoners whose behaviour was likely to cause harm in the future. We saw a particularly concerning case of a registered sex offender released without any accommodation (see below practice example). CRC responsible officers in the community appeared to give very little thought to prisoners until they were on the brink of release. Even in cases where there were multiple reconvictions for breaches of restraining orders, we saw almost no attempt to understand why these breaches were happening and what they could do to intervene. Where we did see good practice, it was mainly due to the efforts of staff in the community, not from Through the Gate staff in prison. Where the work we saw was less good, this was a shared responsibility between CRC and NPS staff in the community and Through the Gate staff in prison.

Four case examples illustrate these points.

Case example – good public protection work from a CRC responsible officer in Lancashire

Christopher is a man in his fifties with a long history of offences against a family member, including multiple breaches of a restraining order. On his previous release from prison, he had breached the restraining order very quickly. His responsible officer in the community contacted his landlord and arranged for his accommodation to be maintained. She also arranged for a mentor to get to know him before release. The mentor picked him up from prison on his day of release and drove him to his accommodation in a nearby town. This removed the temptation for him to turn up at his relative's door again. This was solid public protection work from a CRC responsible officer, but some of this work should have been done by CRC resettlement staff in prison

Case example - no action at all to manage clear risks

Imran is a man in his sixties, who had served many short prison sentence for breaching a restraining order in place to protect his disabled ex-wife from his violence. When we met him we were concerned about his understanding of his situation, and we wondered if his mental capacity had been checked. We were so worried about the absence of any release planning, that we asked a senior manager in the CRC to take some action in the case. The responsible officer did try to contact someone in the prison, but they were not successful, and no accommodation was found for Imran. He was recalled shortly after release, having been found once again at his ex-wife's address. The responsible officer had never actually met Imran, and did not seem to recognise that the cycle of 'nothing happening' was about to start again. The inspector noted: "If this offender is to be changed he needs intensive help, possibly of the psychiatric variety, and I am not optimistic that this will happen."

Case example – no priority for high risk prisoners:

Barry told us: "I need help with accommodation, I was on the street before I came here, I stole and was in breach of my sex offender registration. Someone came to me in the cell and gave me some forms to fill in which I did. I hope they will come up with something but I don't know if they will." No accommodation was found for him. After release, Barry attended for his initial appointment and has since disappeared. Recall has been requested and he has a warrant out for his arrest.

Case example - information not used to assess and manage risks: Murray had committed two burglaries and had been found to be in possession of a knife. The CRC in the community had previously assessed him as low risk of harm, but this did not take into account the implications of carrying a knife. We did not know if a report had been presented at court, or if a risk assessment had been completed by the NPS before the case was allocated to the CRC. No one in the CRC had reviewed the risk assessment. Michael told inspectors that he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. There was a good history of his mental health on the screening but no plan was made to address it while in custody. No information was given to the responsible officer about treatment Murray had received in custody, including a recent hospital admission.

Murray was released to his mother's address - described as 'a drug den'. CRC records are contradictory - indicating that the address would not have been considered suitable, but also noting that he has 'settled accommodation with family and friends'. There appeared to have been no communication between prison and community CRC staff. The accommodation was unsuitable and the issue should have been addressed when he was in prison. Clear arrangements should have been put in place to manage his transfer from mental health services in prison to the community, and this did not happen.

6. What happens to prisoners after release?

This chapter describes what happened to the prisoners we looked at in the first few weeks after release. We explain that many have been charged with new offences or recalled to prison.

Key findings

The rates of reoffending and recall to prison were high. Services were not delivered in a way that recognised and responded to the needs and behaviour of short sentence prisoners. Through the Gate services are not making a difference to resettlement or levels of offending.

Did prisoners comply with supervision after release?

All prisoners in the sample were subject to a total of 12 months supervision after release. This commenced with a licence period, during which they could potentially be recalled to prison for breaching the conditions of the licence. The licence is followed by a period of post-sentence supervision (PSS) with fewer conditions, and breaches of PSS have to be prosecuted in the magistrates' court. The length of the licence is calculated as half of the total length of the custodial sentence. PSS then tops up the licence, to give a total period of supervision of a year from the date of release.

When we spoke to responsible officers we heard almost no evidence of thought about the best approaches with this group of prisoners, either to encourage them to keep to the terms of their licences, or to help them reduce their levels of offending. Responses to failed appointments were often mechanistic and did not recognise the need to work hard to increase the motivation of these offenders. Many responsible officers conveyed a lack of hope and a lack of flexibility. There was an almost fatalistic acceptance of the likelihood of failure. A single case stood out:

Quote: CRC responsible officer:

“Glenn served several short prison sentences for theft. He was released on licence, but committed further thefts from shops shortly after his release. He was sentenced to further custody. I thought something needed to be done to help him break this cycle, and so I went to the prison to visit him.”

How well were licences enforced?

Many of the cases in our sample had a long history of breaches of previous licences or community sentences. We expected that they might not comply very well with their licences and PSS. We completed our follow-up in the community no more than six weeks after the release dates of the prisoners. We were disappointed to find that one-quarter of the prisoners had already been recalled to prison, in connection with alleged new offences, and/or for not keeping appointments under their licences. We noted that a further five prisoners had been charged or convicted of new offences but had not been recalled.

Recall to prison is a serious sanction, in terms of the cost to the public purse, the impact on prison overcrowding and the disruption to resettlement. We expect to see a balanced approach to recall, with recall being reserved for cases where there has

been a complete breakdown of supervision, or where a return to prison is necessary to protect the public or prevent reoffending. In most cases, the recall period for licences is a standard 14 days.

We saw a mixed picture of decision making in relation to recall. Some staff told us they had little guidance about how to decide when recall was necessary. In a few cases we were concerned that recall action was taken when the offender had been charged with low value theft offences. This left the courts with little option other than to impose further custodial sentences. We saw other examples of balanced decision-making, where the overall level of compliance and other issues such as mental health concerns were taken into account before making a decision whether or not to recall.

In our sample, a higher proportion of NPS cases were recalled than CRC cases, and it was not a surprise that a higher proportion of prisoners released without an address were recalled. We did not see any cases where we judged recall action should have been taken and had not.

Did mentors make a difference?

Only ten of the prisoners we looked at had been allocated mentors, so it is hard to draw strong conclusions about their impact. Some of the prisoners with mentors had been recalled or had reoffended, but we saw some examples of promising practice, where we thought it likely that a mentor had brought about a greater level of cooperation with supervision than we would have anticipated. In those cases the mentors were not commissioned by CRCs, but worked for other community organisations.

These non-CRC mentors appeared willing to work with the least motivated offenders, and to have a high level of flexibility and persistence. They provided a combination of intense practical support, alongside encouraging the offenders to comply with other agencies, such as probation and drug treatment services. Conversely, in one of the cases allocated a CRC mentor, we were told that the offender had failed to attend two appointments, and that the service was likely to be removed due to the offender's lack of motivation. That appeared to be a consequence of the contract for mentors being based on the level of face-to-face contact.

7. The strategic vision - how are the services designed and evaluated?

This chapter describes the differences between early strategic visions and the services we actually saw being delivered.

Key findings

Plans set out in bids have not been delivered. There is little evidence of creativity or innovation. Contractual incentives are not driving improvements in outcomes.

Through the Gate services had been in place for almost a year at the time of our fieldwork. To set up and deliver a service sufficiently intensive to meet the needs of this difficult group of prisoners, would be complex and expensive. The strategic vision did not include joined-up IT, or information sharing between community probation services, prisons and resettlement staff.

The *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme created the opportunity to introduce new ways of working with short sentence prisoners, to divert them from reoffending. When CRCs put in bids for the contracts, they had to say how they would do this. Many of the new services that were proposed in the bids for contracts had promise, but had not been implemented.

All four of the CRCs we inspected, had proposed to introduce mentor schemes, which would have offered intensive support to the prisoners in greatest need of this. The bids set out how CRCs would identify and prioritise prisoners for mentoring, and described the kind of activity that mentors would undertake. None of the CRCs we visited were providing mentoring that reflected what had been proposed in their bids. The low number of mentors available did not match the numbers of prisoners who might have benefited from this type of support on release. Other services that were proposed but not delivered included rent deposit schemes to help prisoners secure tenancies on release.

There were no contractual incentives to deliver intensive or bespoke services. The minimum contractual requirement is to complete and review resettlement plans for all prisoners, and this is the main driver for the activity of the CRCs. The resulting workload for resettlement workers meant that they spent very little time working with individual prisoners, or doing work on their behalf. In some prisons, resettlement workers had little knowledge of the communities the prisoners were going to be released into.

Some of the CRCs had arranged for voluntary sector organisations to complete resettlement plans, but the focus on achieving tight contractual targets hindered any hoped-for innovation. It is our judgement that work at the low level of intensity we found is unlikely to achieve the aim of resettlement and reduced reoffending.

There is an element of payment by results in the funding of the CRC, although, this was distant, and not influencing actively the development of services. We saw little evidence that new ways of working with this difficult group of prisoners had been introduced. The services we saw did not take into account research about what might help repeat offenders stop offending (McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

When we spoke to CRC senior managers some told us that they had needed to replace organisations in their supply chains, and this disrupted the services that were available to prisoners. We were told that recruitment of organisations to provide resettlement services in the supply chains had been more difficult and had taken longer than anticipated. Senior managers were aware of some of the shortcomings in services and were working to make improvements.

None of the CRCs we visited were able to provide us with any information on the outcomes they had achieved for prisoners receiving Through the Gate services. We hoped they would have been using this information to improve their services but they told us it was too early to be able to do that. Prison managers commented that they were not routinely given information about outcomes for prisoners. Given the extent of changes in services and the lack of comparable data, it is not possible to corroborate this.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary

CRC staff	Includes staff directly employed by the CRC and also those working for organisations in the supply chain.
ETE	Education, training and employment: work to improve an individual's learning, and to increase their employment prospects.
HDC	Home Detention Curfew. Prisoners can apply for early release, and if successful are subject to an electronically monitored curfew.
HMI Prisons	HM Inspectorate of Prisons.
HMI Probation	HM Inspectorate of Probation.
Licence	This is a period of supervision immediately following release from custody. Any breaches can lead to a recall to prison.
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements: where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage offenders who pose a higher risk of harm to others.
NDelius	The Case management system used by probation services in the community.
NOMIS	National Offender Management Information System (used in prisons to record information about prisoners).
NOMS	National Offender Management Service: the single agency responsible for both prisons and probation services.
NPS	National Probation Service
OASys	Offender Assessment System: the nationally designed and prescribed framework for both probation and prisons to assess offenders.
<i>Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014</i>	Implemented in February 2015, and applying to offences committed on or after that date, the <i>Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014</i> (ORA) is the Act of Parliament that accompanies the <i>Transforming Rehabilitation</i> programme.
PSS	Post Sentence Supervision: this is a period of supervision following the end of a licence, any breaches are enforced by the magistrates court.
Risk of harm to others	This is the term generally used by HMI Probation to describe work to protect the public, primarily using restrictive interventions, to keep to a minimum the individual's opportunity to behave in a way that is a risk of harm to others.
Responsible Officer	This is the term used for the worker (previously referred to as an offender manager) who holds lead responsibility for managing a specific case.
<i>Transforming Rehabilitation</i>	The government's programme for how offenders are managed in England and Wales from June 2014.

Appendix 2: Inspection methodology

Inspection of work in custody

During April 2016, inspectors visited four designated resettlement prisons; HMP Birmingham, HMP New Hall, HMP Preston and HMP Wandsworth. All four prisons have a local function, so receive newly sentenced prisoners from local courts. One prison, HMP New Hall, is for women. Most prisoners serving sentences of less than 12 months remain in these prisons until their release. In each prison, resettlement services were delivered by a single CRC with responsibility for the local Contract Package Area. The CRCs were owned by four different organisations:

Prison	CRC	CRC owner
HMP Wandsworth	London	MCT Novo
HMP Preston	Cumbria and Lancashire	Sodexo
HMP Birmingham	Staffordshire and West Midlands	Reducing Reoffending Partnership
HMP New Hall	West Yorkshire	Purple Futures

In each prison, inspectors looked at up to 20 cases of prisoners serving sentences of less than 12 months. At each site, the cases were selected from the next 50 prisoners, sentenced to less than 12 months, who were due to be released after a specified date, excluding prisoners awaiting deportation and those belonging to a different CRC. While the final samples may not be fully representative of all the eligible cases, we tried to make sure that the proportions matched in terms of diversity characteristics and whether a CRC or NPS case. The average sentence length for the sample was 25 weeks, with 3 cases sentenced to less than 12 weeks.

All prisoners were approaching their release dates at the time we visited, so we expected them to have received any necessary resettlement services. We inspected the screenings and resettlement plans that had been completed. We considered what services had been provided for those prisoners, to get them ready for their release.

Findings from our inspection of cases were supported and verified through a number of other methods. We interviewed prisoners to find out what help they thought they needed, and what they had received. In each location, we met with prison offender supervisors, prison managers, staff working for the CRCs or supply chain organisations, and senior managers from the CRCs, to understand their roles and priorities. We also asked for information from the CRCs about their models of delivery, supply chains, and publicity material in connection with their Through the Gate services.

Inspection of work in the community

During June 2016, inspectors visited four community probation teams to follow up the cases which we had inspected in prisons. We spoke to the responsible officers allocated to the cases we had inspected. Where possible we made telephone contact with the prisoners we had already met in the prisons. We also inspected a total of 25 additional cases, released from the prisons we had visited. This was to see how much information about services in prison was accessible after a prisoner had been released. We met with groups of responsible officers from CRCs and the NPS, and with middle managers from both organisations. In some places we visited other organisations working with released prisoners. We found that 15 of the cases we had inspected in prisons were not actually released when we expected, for example, because they had been deported. We excluded these cases from our final sample.

We inspected:

- 61 cases in prison and the community
- 25 cases in the community only
- 68 cases were managed in the community by CRCs and 18 by the NPS
- a total of 62 were male
- a total of 24 were female.

We spoke to:

- 40 prisoners while they were in custody
- 8 offenders after they had been released from custody
- responsible officers (CRC and NPS) for 58 cases.

Appendix 3: Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who took part in this inspection; the Governors and staff of the prisons we visited, the managers and staff of the Community Rehabilitation Companies and National Probation Services and the men and women involved in the criminal justice system who told us of their experiences.

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Appendix 5: Role of the inspectorates and code of practice

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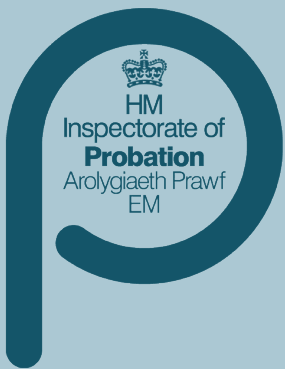
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ISBN: 978-1-84099-765-1