



Her Majesty's  
Inspectorate of  
Probation

## The role of community hubs in helping to deliver probation services and support desistance

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HM Inspectorate of Probation

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HMI Probation is committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth offending services. Our *Research & Analysis Bulletins* are aimed at all those with an interest in the quality of these services, presenting key findings to assist with informed debate and help drive improvement where it is required. The findings are used within HMI Probation to develop our inspection programmes, guidance and position statements.

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## Executive summary

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### Context

Community hubs offer a multi-agency approach to supporting low to medium risk of serious harm service users on probation, with a number of agencies working together to provide joined up services in one location. Within these hubs, those under supervision are potentially able to access a range of services, facilities and opportunities within a community setting, addressing the problems they face.



### Approach

The findings are based upon analysis of data from research fieldwork across six different types of community hub. Data were collected in two primary ways:

- (i) interviews/focus groups with hub workers, strategic managers and service users; and
- (ii) observational data collection which focused on the environment and layout of the hubs.

### Key findings and implications

Community hubs are viewed positively by staff and service users, with thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealing a number of potential benefits:

- Hubs are seen to contribute to desistance from offending, personal wellbeing and compliance with supervision.
- Hubs can provide practical and social opportunities to support desistance in its three forms: primary/behavioural, secondary/identity and tertiary/belonging.
- The six community hubs all provide or can access services which, to varying degrees, address key offending-related needs such as accommodation, substance misuse, domestic abuse, employment and training.

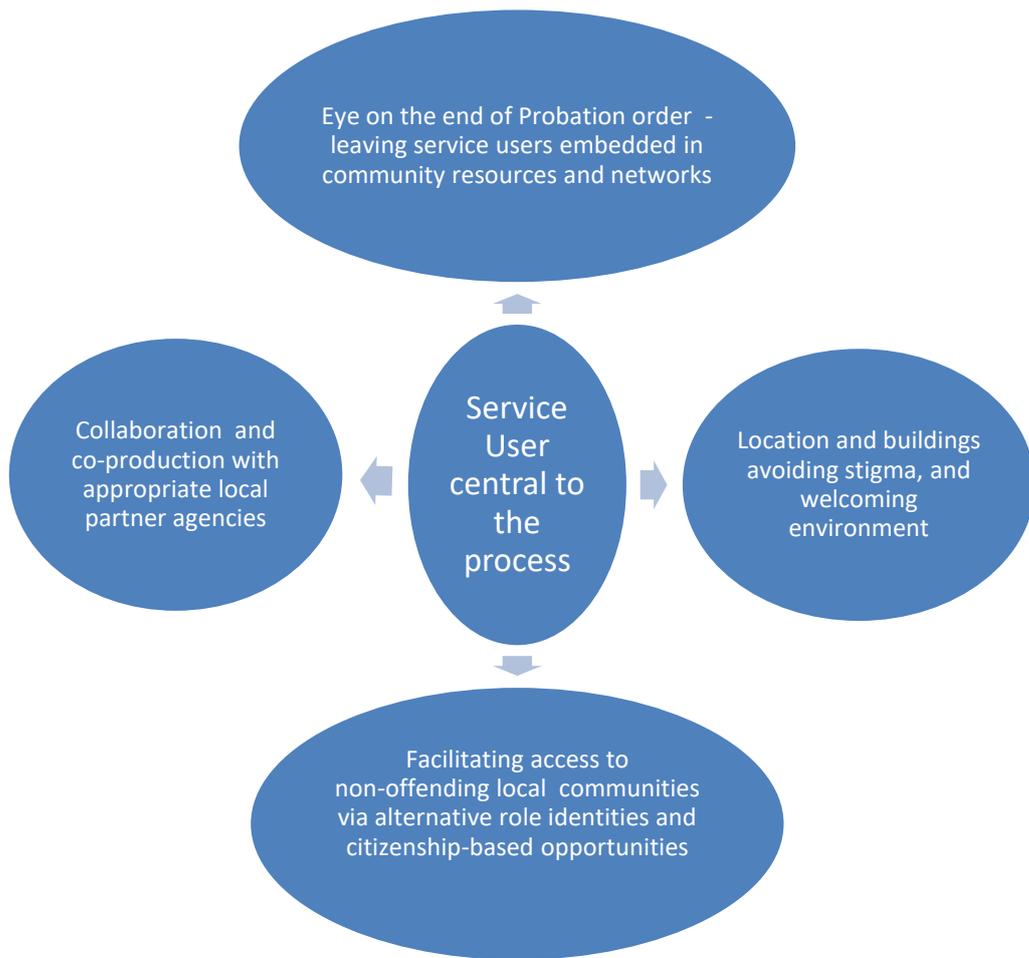
- The hubs provide opportunities to develop/rebuild community and family relationships which are vital in developing a non-criminal identity and lifestyle.
- Hubs are welcoming and non-stigmatising environments compared to 'traditional' probation offices.

A number of challenges to working in community hubs are also identified:

- It is felt that there is a lack of awareness of community hub services and benefits by those probation staff with little experience of the approach.
- Attention needs to be given to managing the risks of some service users in those sites with fewer security measures.
- Attention also needs to be given to striking the right balance between statutory enforcement and providing care and support.

Recommendations to commissioners of services include the following:

- Adopting a broad approach to service provision by forging partnerships with all key local agencies.
- Being responsive to the organisational and cultural differences between partners and ensuring mutual understanding and buy-in from the outset.
- Putting individual service users at the centre of service provision and delivery by involving them in planning and developing community hubs.
- Considering how the physical layout and location of the hub will affect service users in terms of avoiding stigmatisation and being as supportive as possible.



# 1. Introduction

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Community hubs are a growing phenomenon in the field of probation, many having been introduced by Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) following the implementation of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms in 2014 (Ministry of Justice, 2013).

There is no agreed definition of a 'community hub' (Dominey, 2018). That said, they tend to address drug and alcohol use, housing, mental health, education and employment, with the overarching rationale being that people who use the hub can benefit from a multi-agency approach while meeting the requirements of their court order or prison licence. The person on probation can often attend beyond the period of their statutory supervision to access the resources at the community hub. Thus, hubs serve as a place and space in which agencies (including the CRC) can pool resources to provide a holistic service (Dominey, 2018).

The lack of a clear definition means it is necessary to consider the structure and governance of a hub in order to make sense of how it works, what it is intended to achieve, and how successful it is in doing so. Hubs can be 'specialist', by supporting a particular group, or they can be more 'generic' by providing a service to everyone living in that community. There are several models of governance for the delivery of the community hubs. To illustrate how community hubs function, Gardner (2016) identifies six different sub-types (see Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1: Community hub sub-types**

Community Hub	• Premises provided by a third party, as part of a wider community offer, for a wide range of probation service users.
Hybrid hub	• Premises provided by a third party, as part of a wider community offer, where a small sub office to house probation staff is also provided on site.
Specialist hub	• Premises provided by a third party, as part of a wider community offer, for a particular group of probation service users, for example Women, ethnic minorities, or a particular need for example, drug and alcohol use or ETE.
Pop-up community hub	• A non-permanent base, set up as a temporary solution, to respond to a particular need for a given period of time, in a community setting.
Co-locations	• Where employability and justice teams share premises, which in itself is the beginnings of a community hub, that can be built on to encourage other organisations to provide services from, in future.
Reporting centre	• Although technically not a hub, main premises provided by third party (for example a police station) where probation service users report, rather than travelling further. Over time may move or evolve into a community hub.

As these sub-types illustrate, use of community hubs by probation can include:

- signposting service users to the services of the hubs
- probation staff working out of the hub in a probation designated space
- visiting their service users at the hub
- coordinating the services provided
- being co-located in the hub with partner agencies, and/or
- using the hub as a reporting centre.

Hubs do not have to serve exclusively those individuals under statutory supervision by probation services. In some instances, the community hub provides services to both the public and probation service users. The hubs represent a problem-solving approach to the provision of criminal justice interventions at a localised level.

There are several rationales for introducing community hubs in the post-*Transforming Rehabilitation* probation landscape. On the one hand, they can enable probation providers to deliver a service without the need for expensive service user facing offices and interview rooms, thus continuing a longstanding trend in probation of estate rationalisation (Bottoms, 2008). This model of working enables, or perhaps necessitates, a greater level of 'agile working' within probation which 'is about bringing people, processes, connectivity and technology, time and place together to find the most appropriate and effective way of working to carry out a particular task (The Agile Organisation, 2012a; 2012b).

On the other hand, community hubs can be used to improve communication between providers and their partners, thus enhancing probation providers' access to the communities they serve, reversing the trend of retreating from communities as observed by Bottoms (2008). There is an argument that moving probation supervision from probation offices to community hubs can reduce the labelling effect and improve the chances of the person on probation moving on from an 'offender identity' (Ellis, 2017; Maruna and Lebel, 2009). Ultimately, community hubs can be seen to have the potential to support social reintegration (McNeill et al., 2012).

## 1.1 Research aims

The research findings presented in this report provide insight into whether the community hubs approach is a safe and effective way of working with those on probation, meeting their diverse needs. The report helps to develop the evidence base supporting the standards framework for inspecting probation services, which includes a specific key question on probation premises.

### Inspection standards

The inspections of probation services undertaken by HMI Probation are underpinned by standards which are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. In developing the standards, the Inspectorate worked constructively with providers and others to build a common view of high-quality probation services and what should be expected.

The specific key question on probation premises is as follows:

#### ***1.4.2 Do the premises and offices enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all service users?***

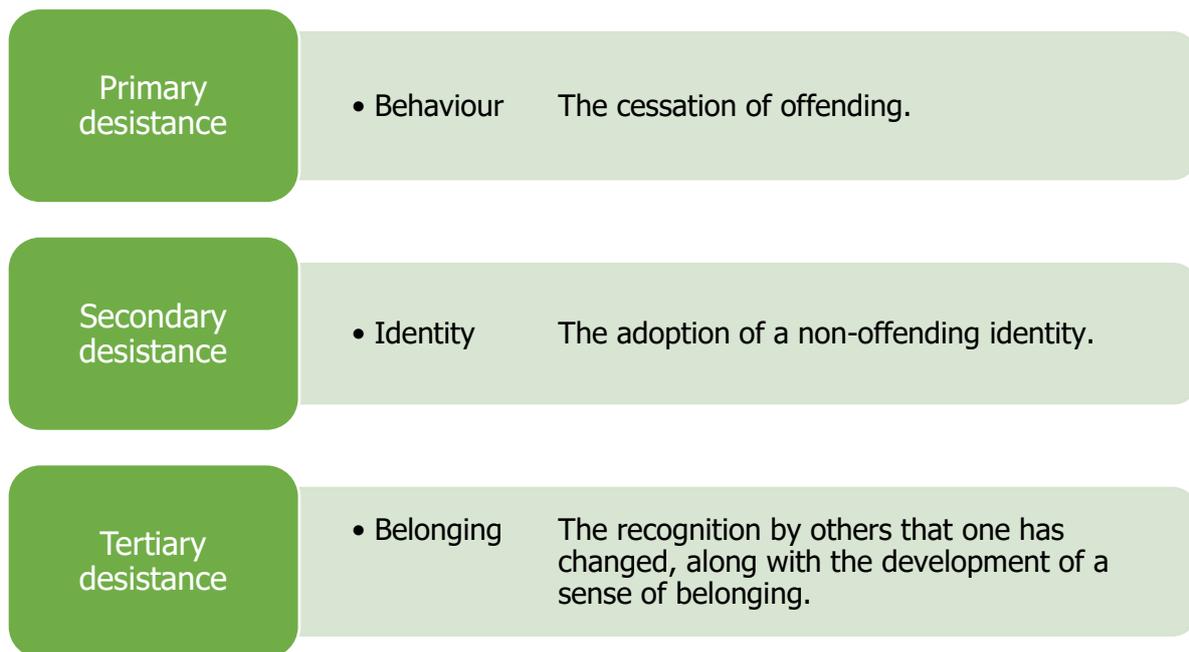
- a) Are the premises and offices sufficiently accessible to staff and service users?
- b) Do the premises and offices support the delivery of appropriate personalised work and the effective engagement of service users?
- c) Do the premises and offices provide a safe environment for working with service users?

The main aims of the research were to:

- provide evidence of the effectiveness of community hubs in addressing factors linked to offending and desistance;
- explore whether community hubs meet the diverse needs of a range of probation service users; and
- establish those factors which enable or act as a barrier to successful service delivery within community hubs.

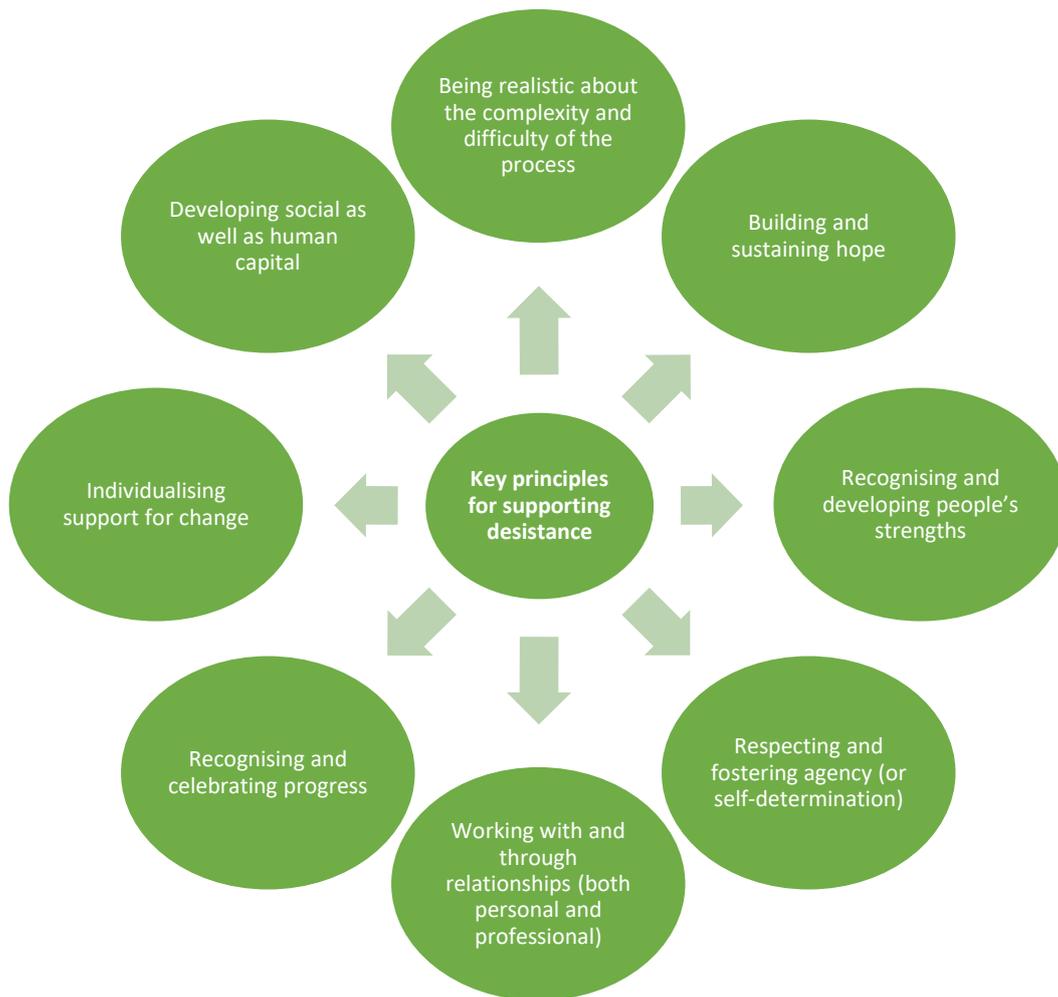
The first aim focuses on the links to desistance. Rather than seeing people who have offended as having deficits which need to be 'treated', desistance theories position the desister themselves front and centre in the process of desistance. As set out in Figure 2 below, 'desistance' has been described as involving three stages (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016).

**Figure 2: The three stages of desistance**



Desistance theories accept that the process of desistance is neither a quick nor easy process and the analogy of a journey is often adopted to illustrate the complexities of desisting (Phillips, 2017). Although the desistance studies were initially more about understanding the process of desistance than about generating policy, there have been calls for this now considerable body of evidence to be translated into policy which can be implemented in the criminal justice system (McNeill, 2006). This is not to say that probation can 'cause' desistance: there are too many factors at play for this to be the case. Rather, probation is seen to have a role in supporting desistance (King, 2013). This study makes use of theories of desistance in order to analyse and further understand the way in which hub-based probation practice might support desistance. In particular, we make use of McNeill et al.'s (2012, p. 2) review of research on desistance and probation to explore the ways in which practice in community hubs adheres to the eight key principles of desistance focused practice (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Key principles for supporting desistance**



## 2. Findings

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The primary aim of the research was to build upon an initial survey of CRCs (completed by HMI Probation)<sup>1</sup> through interviews, focus groups and observational data. It was thus a mixed methodology approach, seeking to gain a deeper understanding of what hubs do, how they work and what they achieve.<sup>2</sup> The five key research questions were as follows:

1. To what extent can the six community hub sites selected for this study be described as providing a suitable environment to deliver probation services (i.e. safe, inclusive, accessible, confidential etc.)?
2. To what extent and in what ways do the six community hubs address factors linked to offending and desistance?
3. To what extent and in what ways are the needs of a diverse range of service users being met by the community hubs (for example women, older adults, ethnic minorities, LGBT+, military veterans, audio-impaired/differently-abled)? What strategies/environmental factors can be identified as working most effectively with regard to ensuring diversity within this delivery model?
4. What are the critical success factors and areas of good practice for the community hub delivery model within the probation landscape?
5. What are the identifiable weaknesses or barriers to the community hub delivery model within the probation landscape?

In order to address questions around the ways and extent to which each site supported social capital building to aid desistance, the 'six key social capital building component' model (Albertson and Hall, 2019) was used to record this data qualitatively using an observation template for each site visit. The model encapsulates a range of facilitated stages through which an individual service user can be encouraged to progress from being an isolated individual to a community member who engages in civic and democratic processes in their community.

Tertiary desistance literature prioritises opportunities to gain a sense of social inclusion, acceptance, belonging and participation, ideally both within one's own community and wider society, embodying concepts of citizenship, social justice, integration and solidarity (Maruna, 2012; McNeill, 2014; Fox, 2015). Thus, we asked how community hubs enable the following activities which can lead to tertiary desistance (Albertson and Hall, 2019; Albertson et al., 2015):

- opportunities to associate/visit hub (over and above their appointment with their probation/responsible officer)
- opportunities to access/participate in hub-based awareness-raising activities
- participation in hub-based social events and group-based tasks
- opportunities to engage in reciprocative and generative activities as hub members
- participation in wider local community events as hub members, and/or

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex B for an overview of findings from this survey.

<sup>2</sup> See Annex A for further information on the methodology employed.

- opportunities to participate in formal civic, governance/decision-influencing settings).

## 2.1 The research sites

We conducted research in each of Gardner's six 'types' of community hub (see Figure 1). They were split between rural (Sites 1 and 5), city centre (Site 2, 3 and 4) and large towns (Site 6).

**Site 1** (example of hybrid hub) is in a rural setting – a small town in Wales – based in a building run by G4S who successfully bid for Welsh Government funding to deliver the infrastructure (building, ICT and appointment management) for the hub. Agencies work inside the hub, currently at no cost. Probation service users can access any other service delivering from the hub. There is no general public access to this hub unless they have an appointment with a service that works from the hub.

**Site 2** (example of community hub) is in the centre of a city in the South West of England, run by the local Community Voluntary Services (CVS) which had successfully bid collaboratively for a Public Health England capital grant to redevelop the building into a wellbeing hub. The CVS Trustee Board manages the hub independently and agencies pay a fee to have office and computer space in the hub. The fees are based on a sliding income-related matrix. Probation service users have access to all the other services available in the community hub along with members of the general public. This hub has an open public space.

**Site 3** (example of specialist hub) is based in a women's centre in the centre of a northern city. The centre is run and managed by a voluntary sector organisation which provides services to women regardless of their probation status. The CRC has use of an office in the centre five days per week. CRC service users have access to their probation worker plus two dedicated 'CRC workers' who are employed by the voluntary organisation. Service users can access any service delivered within the centre although they sometimes need to be referred in. Any woman can access the hub. The hub is in the city centre (unlike the CRC office) within easy reach of transport hubs and other services such as housing offices and the courts.

**Site 4** (example of co-located services), situated in a northern city, is run and managed by the local CRC. A women's project (located on another floor of the building) comes into the hub space to deliver CRC commissioned mandatory probation training sessions. Probation service users can access additional services delivered upstairs by the women's project. There is no general public access to this hub.

**Site 5** (example of reporting centre) is based outside a prison in the north west of England. It is run and managed by the local CRC. The 'Through the Gate hub' is used by men leaving the Category C men's prison which is in a rural location. The hub office is based outside the prison in a 'porta cabin' and part of the 'Through the Gate' provision. There is no general access to the hub for the public, although, due to the release times of the prisoners not being clear, people waiting to collect someone being released occasionally use the hub if the visitor centre is closed. The hub does not provide any therapeutic courses or services in the building. It provides a brokerage service, signposting and referring service users into support in the community. Attendance at the 'discharge hub' on release counts as the first

probation appointment and is at the end of the 12 week 'Through the Gate' service provided by the Integrated Through the Gate team.

**Site 6** (example of pop-up community hub) serves a large town in the south of England. It is run and managed by a local CRC. It is used by men and women on statutory supervision by probation. The premises are rented from a local church. The hub is located in a city, near a train and bus station. The hub provides a space for probation staff and support agencies to set up a desk in a room to see people on probation from the local area. A separate room in the same building is then used for group inductions for people who have recently received a community sentence from court. The hub does not provide any therapeutic courses on the premises; for example, a service user attends at a separate location for drug and alcohol support. However, other agencies present in the hub work with the service users on individual issues.

Across the six sites, we conducted 74 interviews and spoke to 78 workers (the CRC staff in Site 3 were interviewed as a focus group). We conducted 38 interviews with service users and undertook seven interviews with people in management or strategic positions.

## 2.2 Addressing criminogenic factors

All of the probation services delivered from the six hub sites had formal links to services in place to address the following offending-related needs:

- housing and homelessness
- substance misuse
- domestic abuse
- employment and training.

Situating the probation services within the community hub meant that service users had options and opportunities to participate in strengths-based, not just deficit-based initiatives. This often included routes into forms of community membership with no connection to probation.

## 2.3 Facilitating desistance

In order to identify the ways in which hub-based probation work can facilitate desistance over and above the work that occurs in more traditional probation offices, we analysed the interview transcripts using McNeill et al.'s (2012) eight principles of desistance-focused practice. This section, therefore, is structured according to these principles.

It is interesting to note that when analysing the transcripts each principle is evident, although some were more prominent than others. For example, there are many more examples of hub-based probation delivery providing individualised support for change than examples of hubs recognising and celebrating success. It is also worth noting that Site 5 – the discharge hub – had a much more limited focus on secondary and tertiary desistance than the other more community-based hubs. This is probably because Site 5's main focus is primary desistance – getting people into a situation, immediately post-release, where they have the basics in place (such as a charged mobile, bus fare, a benefit claim and housing) to get them through the first month or so of their time back in the community. The other hubs were more focused on the longer-term development and consolidation of a crime-free life in the community.

### 2.3.1 Being realistic about the complexity and difficulty of the process

Desistance is not an event, it is rather a process. Moreover, lapses and relapses are almost inevitable in someone's journey to a non-offending lifestyle and identity in the community. This was captured by a female service user:

*"I've done drugs here for four years now. I came off the crack for eight years, eight to ten years, and then I relapsed four years ago. This is through my ex-partner. I relapsed four years ago, so I've been on and off the drugs for four years and I just know too many people, so I find it really hard".* (Service User, Site 6)

Practitioners note that the hub allows flexibility about how they could engage with service users. This is important given that service users often lead chaotic lives, come from difficult backgrounds which leave them with vulnerabilities; especially, but not exclusively, women:

*"Like I say, they're a bit more needy and they want more and they could be more complex sometimes and things like childcare responsibilities. A lot of them are single parents so that presents barriers and financial issues".* (CRC Staff, Site 4)

*"I mean most of mine are still stuck on the first stage crisis but with the other resources I would hope that eventually they may move down..."* (National Probation Service (NPS) staff, Site 2)

These difficulties, staff suggested, manifested in terms of struggling to attend appointments at set times. In these circumstances, the open-door policy associated with hub-based work is a real benefit because it allows some leeway towards attendance that is otherwise unavailable in more traditional offices. In the hubs where each service user has a responsible officer employed by probation as well as a key worker employed by the hub it means that if the service user only saw the keyworker this can count as attending. This reduces the need for initiating breach proceedings and enables service users to engage with services which suit their needs. It also means that probation staff can fulfil risk assessment and supervision duties, while also meeting the needs of service users and fulfilling responsibilities around safeguarding and safety:

*"She's really vulnerable but she never comes in on her appointments but knows where the office is ... and she can come in whenever, even if it's just to get some clothes or use the washing machine or whatever. That's really useful... from a risk point of view and checking her safety".* (CRC staff, Site 3)

Service users also acknowledged the difficulties in the desistance process. Accessing probation through a hub helps them to overcome issues such as isolation, developing more pro-social relationships and spending time in healthier environments:

*"Yeah, I went to [my probation officer] and said just throw everything at me, I want it, I need it. Because otherwise I sit at home on my own with nothing but the telly on and my thoughts and it makes me worse. I need to get out. Even, I just come and sit here for the day and don't do anything, it's being around different people and it's a really healthy atmosphere here".* (Service user, Site 3)

This flexibility means that when someone does relapse, the hub is in a strong position to respond appropriately with the services required by the individual. The fact that the hubs we visited have a mixture of services provided by statutory and third sector agencies means that non-compliance is less of a barrier to accessing support. The nature of engagement in the hub means that setbacks and difficulties can be managed more effectively:

*"I mean we're holistic and you are a little bit slightly more lenient a little bit with women because obviously they're more complex ... but at the same time it's still remembering with women as well you are on probation and these are the conditions, especially with my ladies, the conditions of your licence and stuff like that is a lot more stricter but it does seem to help a little bit more but, yeah, it's still having that in the background that you've still got integration". (CRC staff, Site 4)*

The accessibility and convenience of the wide range of hub services makes a difference to this service user's motivation to engage in the process of desistance:

*"So, I wouldn't go out of my way to – like I wouldn't come to probation then I've got to go and see National Careers and walk another mile after probation to see National – I wouldn't do it, I would just think 'Oh, f\*\*\* that, I ain't going to see National Careers now' but having it all under one roof – it's the two birds with one stone scenario. As simple as that. I could resolve anything under this roof". (Service user, Site 6)*

All sites recognised the complexity and difficulty of the desistance process by offering a range of services and activities external to probation. As a result of community hubs operating independently to probation, the resources and supports offered remain available to assist with lapses and setbacks after probation involvement. Sites 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 all offer other services to varying degrees, allowing individuals to access and engage with a number of resources all under one roof. Those sites who achieve this particularly well not only offer services linked to the criminogenic needs of individuals (housing, employment, education and financial advice) but offer a range of meaningful activities such as breakfast clubs (Site 3), mindfulness (Site 3) and music groups (Sites 1 and 2).

While Site 5 advertises a number of resources, these are all external to the discharge hub. This is however in line with the purpose of Site 5, where the primary purpose is to support individuals on the day of release.

### **2.3.2 Building and sustaining hope**

People are more likely to desist when they have 'feelings of hope and self-efficacy, and a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives' (Maruna and Mann, 2019, p. 7). Practitioners told us that delivery through the hubs was less stigmatising than through the traditional probation office. This less stigmatised identity enables service users to adopt a more positive, hopeful, outlook on life and the future:

*"Looking at the door you don't know. People could be coming for counselling, people could be coming for probation, drug, alcohol, they could be coming in for training. ... There's no stigma then whereas if they came to [colleague]'s office in [town] or our other office, straightaway, oh, he's on probation or she's on*

*probation. What's she done then? You know. All that's gone away here, there's none of that". (CRC staff, Site 1)*

Indeed, this is seen as a real strength of hub-based delivery as it holds the potential to *'remove that label and of them thinking very much of themselves as an offender and trying to just have them engage as a woman in that group'* (CRC staff, Site 3). This is also reflected in service users' accounts of engaging with the hubs:

*"I don't feel such a stigma coming here as I did going to probation in [city] because, like I said, people just assume you're there because you are a criminal and basically yes, I am here for a criminal purpose but I'm not actually a criminal. People just assume, so it's not so suspect, if you know what I mean". (Service user, Site 1)*

*"You don't get a sticker going 'you're on probation'." (Service user, Site 1)*

Hubs also help build hope because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the delivery model:

*"I can get off from seeing [my probation officer] and go and see the careers woman. I usually get up and bounce around the whole room, like go and see them all and try and achieve something, whether it be a job search or I've got issues with housing or something like that... When they are all there, like all the networks are there. So life can't touch me at the moment". (Service user, Site 6)*

Another key feature of hub delivery is the emphasis on group work over one-to-one work, as well as the ability to socialise with other people who may or may not be in similar situations. For service users, this is a particular strength. A female service user described a 'Resilient women's group' which enabled her to feel more empowered:

*"The whole kind of group is set up for empowerment, I suppose. That is kind of what most people, I feel, think that they feel when they're in the group because they feel valued and they feel important and they feel empowered to kind of speak up about things or they know who to go to, the people that work here are good at being able to kind of pinpoint you in to another direction if you need to because obviously there are so many services here that sometimes you just need to be said 'Well actually, we can help with that' but you just need to ...our own housing or the ...team or whatever". (Service user, Site 2)*

Similarly, this service user describes the way in which the social nature of the hubs helps them with difficult thoughts and feelings:

*"Reassurance. Basically sorting out, thinking of a way of describing it, destructive behaviour, or destructive thought patterns and trying to sort bits out. So, there's also the fact that you're not on your own because everybody turns round and uses it. So, you're not just on a one to one. Sometimes there are groups that you can get into so, for me, because I suffer from social anxiety, that also helps me to turn round and come out of myself and actually speak more". (Service user, Site 2)*

Furthermore, Sites 2, 3 and 5 display inspirational quotes and artwork, some of which have been created by service users, on the walls of the community/discharge hub. These are visible from the communal areas of the hub, imparting messages of hope.

The hubs we visited sustain that sense of hope by having arrangements in place that mean that service users can continue accessing the hub even after the period of probation supervision is terminated:

*"A lot of people volunteer while they're still linked to probation. It's obviously based on risk, what they've done. I've had someone who's been with me as a client and then started here as a volunteer. They've finished their probation order and they still stayed here as a volunteer because it opens opportunities for them then. Because when they're working here as a volunteer, it's not probation they're working for, it's for CVS - and CVS all the time have got different courses running. So, it just helps people build their confidence up with people". (CRC staff, Site 2)*

*"I've got a woman who was really isolated and I didn't think she was going to attend at all, but she managed to come to some groups and it was lunch club that got her to attend group. Her order is now finished, but she still comes and attends lunch group every Friday. Maybe not every Friday, but twice a month at least, because then she knows if her mental health deteriorates or she's feeling lonely, she can just come back to the centre for some more support because she's kept in contact that way". (CRC staff, Site 3)*

Sites 2, 3 and 4 have volunteers who were previously on probation, and Sites 3 and 6 also have individuals undertaking unpaid work. Volunteers are able to form working relationships with service users and demonstrate 'visible desistance', creating new identities based around their volunteering roles.

All of the hubs we visited are able to build and sustain hope through both the physical environment as well as through the social nature of the hubs. There is a very strong belief in the destigmatising effect of delivering probation in a building which is also used by people who are not on probation.

### **2.3.3 Recognising and developing people's strengths**

The community hubs we visited all place a heavy emphasis on the development of human capital. Hubs provide varied and flexible group activities – where group leaders will gradually hand over appropriate responsibilities to service users (for example choice of session activity, deciding who they want to come and talk to the group, or helping to lead or organise sessions). Examples of this include a breakfast and lunch club run by previous service users (Site 3) and a community café run within the hub (Site 2).

Furthermore, hubs provide peer mentoring and volunteering training and roles. Site 4 supports volunteers with lived experience of the criminal justice system to run introductory sessions for new hub users. Site 5 signposts service users on the Through the Gate 12-week programme to access mentoring services in the community. Site 6 signposts people to volunteering and mentoring opportunities. Staff within the hubs at Sites 2, 3 and 4 encourage service users, if appropriate, to consider volunteering within the hub.

Sites 1, 2, 3 and 4 run groups aimed at encouraging service users to recognise and develop their own strengths. Examples of these include 'Positive You', aimed at building self-esteem and confidence, and 'Pathways to Employment', offering CV and interview support (Site 4). Many of the discussions we had with practitioners, strategic leads and service users focused on the sheer range of opportunities for skills and personal development through the hub

Importantly, these opportunities seem to be available to those who need and want to access them so that they can identify their own strengths and build upon them:

*"I've done a couple of mindfulness courses. ... So, with mindfulness courses ... and that kind of thing, and if I did have any panic attacks, I could calm myself down by using certain things that they taught me, like breathing exercise, that kind of thing". (Service user, Site 2)*

*"All those criminogenic needs. They're all here and as I say that can either be from counselling to group work, to the practical stuff of accommodation, getting better accommodation, looking at your employment prospects because women come in, they go, 'I've got no skills' and you think well no, you have because you're running a house, you've done this and you've done that. Everything's here to feed them into and we usually start with the likes of one-to-one and then maybe groups". (CRC staff, Site 2)*

#### **2.3.4 Respecting and fostering agency (or self-determination)**

Probation work is challenging when it comes to fostering agency because the very nature of being under statutory – involuntary – supervision limits one's agency. Some service users express this view:

*"It doesn't bother me. I've got to come here whatever happens". (Service user, Site 1)*

Interviewer: *"What are the consequences if you don't come here?"*

Service user: *"I go back to court. I'm in breach". (Service user, Site 6)*

That said, hub-based delivery allows for some self-determination, even within the confines of mandatory attendance. For example, some sites give service users the choice of where their probation appointment would take place. In Site 2, service users have the choice of sitting in the communal café, in a meeting pod, or in the other meeting style spaces available to choose from. This enables service users to use their agency, choosing a meeting location they felt most comfortable in.

Notwithstanding the fact that some engagement is, and must be, coerced because of the nature of being under probation supervision, accessing probation in a hub can be seen to, inherently, foster agency because it allows people to decide, for themselves, what they want to do once in the hub:

*"As long as I want to change my life, which I do, the ball's in my court". (Service user, Site 4)*

*"I always feel really good. I know it sounds really stupid because a lot of people probably don't think it but I really enjoy coming along for the appointments. I feel like I'm doing something. I've committed a crime which obviously I don't feel*

*very good about but coming here and trying to sort out the error of my ways and also improve myself, it makes me feel better as a person. I always go away feeling happier and lifted and with a sense of achievement". (Service user, Site 2)*

Being in a hub gives probation clients some degree of control over how they deal with the issues in their life which contributed to their offending and provides access to support which helps them develop both human and social capital.

### **2.3.5 Working with and through relationships (both personal and professional)**

It is accepted that a good relationship between the person on probation and their probation worker is a factor in facilitating desistance. Moreover, family relationships and ties have been described as the golden thread that should run through criminal justice interventions as good family support can facilitate the development of a non-offending lifestyle and identity (Farmer Review, 2017). Hubs provide the opportunity for service users to experience a different relational experience, not necessarily based on their offending history, but their skills, passions and interests.

Staff spent a great deal of time talking about how being in a hub has improved the relationships they have with their clients. All sites allow service users to meet with their probation worker in a less formal environment, conducive to fostering trustworthy working relationships in which the service user felt comfortable and at ease. Meeting rooms, or meeting pods, are well decorated with comfortable chairs and coffee tables. The environment is seen as key to facilitating more productive relationships:

*"I think the environment. ... I think it makes them feel more valued. Hopefully it's quite a calm environment. They don't feel, certainly with the traditional probation office, you go in and you're really, because some of them don't like to think that they're like the person sitting next to them who's a proper offender and they're not. You've got a mix of people in the waiting room. We don't keep them waiting in the waiting room that long. They can see if we're in because it's all open. As soon as you go into the probation office, there's just a screen and you speak through a little hole in the screen". (CRC staff, Site 1)*

*"Also building up a relationship with an individual, it's a more relaxed environment. It's not more relaxed in what we're discussing but it feels more relaxed". (CRC staff, Site 3)*

Hubs are also well positioned to facilitate the creation of mutually supportive relationships between service users in a social environment.

*"But I've met people in that room [waiting room] and I don't know where the foodbank is and they do, so then we get together. Now a couple of us are boxing down the beach, because we were in a bad place the year we got out and yeah, like four or five of us box under the pier like three times a week in the evenings". (Service user, Site 6)*

In addition, the hubs are designed to encourage family relationships, through (i) the design of the building and (ii) the co-location of services.

Hubs with spacious and welcoming communal areas (Sites 1, 2 and 3) enable service users to bring family with them. Sites 2 and 3 encourage families to socialise in the communal areas. Site 5 has tea and coffee making facilities and a small waiting area where family members can wait or even join the induction.

Service users also recognised the potential for hubs to enable more interaction between family members and probation:

*"Well, it's important to me because this was my first time offending so all of this stuff is really new to me and to my family and there's lots of things that both me and my family don't understand so I said to my dad the other day when I was trying to explain about what I was doing, I said well why don't you just come along with me? Because I knew it's such a big space here and I know that you've got those booths as well I thought, well, I know my dad could come along and have a chat as well and kind of be involved which is obviously really important to me to be able to bring him along so that he can understand it". (Service user, Site 2)*

Also in Site 2, the hub facilitates a drama group; one of the service users got involved and his family came to watch him:

*"But his mum and sister, who I have also worked with, mum unfortunately as a result of him and his sister's offending, they came to watch and they both cried. They were just so emotional". (CRC staff, Site 2)*

### **2.3.6 Recognising and celebrating progress**

This theme was not as evident as the other seven principles of desistance focused practice. Beyond some community hubs providing certificates for those completing training, none of the hubs have formal processes for recognising and celebrating progress. However, the hubs do facilitate this in more informal ways:

*"[Name] came up to see CAB, Citizens Advice and he waved, I say, oh, hiya. He said I've got a baby, so I came around talking to the baby. I said, do you know what, you're doing a really – because he's a single dad now, I said you're doing a really good job, look at him, I'm really proud of you. He was like, you know. Because they'd never had it. All they've been told is you're rubbish, you'll never make anything, you're not going to be anything but he is, he's a single dad to a one year old baby". (CRC staff, Site 1)*

Designated welcome teams employed by the hub, located in Sites 1 and 2, become familiar with service users, offering a friendly welcome to the hub upon arrival. The ethos of both welcome teams is an important aspect of the hub model and through building working relationships with service users, the welcome teams are also able to recognise positive potential and the development of service users.

Sites 1 and 3 both host annual open days which celebrate the progress of service users. Site 1's open day is combined with a Christmas event in which service users can bring along family and friends. The event is also attended by the town mayor, showing local support for the hub. Site 3's annual event hosts an array of external speakers, alongside family and

friends, providing staff, service users, family and friends the opportunity to celebrate progress of service users.

There is scope for this principle to be strengthened by providing monthly or annual awards and celebration events based, for example, on attendance, engagement and outcomes for group activities.

### **2.3.7 Individualising support for change**

Hubs must accommodate issues of identity and diversity and acknowledge that there is no one-size-fits-all model for supporting desistance. Thus, Site 1 offers specialist support for those with eye-degenerative disorders; Site 2 offers specialised support for veterans; Site 3 offers specialist support for refugees; and Site 4 has a trilingual volunteer who is able to support foreign nationals. While Site 5 does not run groups or activities within the discharge hub, focus groups are run within the prison with people with protected characteristics prior to release to ensure their needs are being met.

Service users across all sites are asked by probation if they need other support, and they then assist individuals to access this support if necessary. This approach recognises the importance of person-centred support, specific to the needs of the service user:

*"I've always accessed probation through the hub, but I also use it for a drug and alcohol service and a mental health service". (Service user, Site 2)*

*"It's really good. Like I've been struggling with mental health for a number of years and I have been trying my hardest on my own without any support to try and get the support and it's kind of weird how after something terrible happened... then this past month I've been able to get the support around mental health that I need addressing and I really like this place. It's just a pity, just a shame I had to go through trouble to get here". (Service user, site 3)*

Indeed, the main way in which hubs can provide individualised support for change comes through the presence of a range of services based in the building and the improved referral processes that arise as a result:

*"The beauty of this is, opposed to how it used to be, someone could say to me, 'Right. I'm going out of here. I'll go up to the Citizens Advice Bureau,' or 'I'll go and see someone about the finances,' or 'I'll go to Housing,' or 'I'll go to the surgery' and they walk out the door and they walk in the opposite direction... Where here, I say, 'I will go and get someone for you. Let's book an appointment now.' So, the compliance and engagement interaction is so much quicker and so much more effective. Also, with the hubs, the clientele we get here, often we might see someone for a period of time, they've disengaged, but often we'll see them outside so we can just call them in. They may very well have forgotten appointments, so it's much easier to maintain the level of compliance and the whole system is better and more effective". (CRC staff, Site 2)*

*"I think the biggest thing is timeliness, so being able to refer someone quickly and knowledge of what is in the community because you've got partners working out of the building that you become familiar with and signposting because in a generic office you can refer in obviously and make calls but, again, it's making a*

*call, it's not that personal touch. So I think for me it's doing things quite quickly and the familiarity of staff with other staff in other agencies speeds up the process". (CRC staff, Site 1)*

Sites 1, 2 and 3 all provide a wide range of services which support service users with needs that are much broader than simply 'criminogenic' – offending-related – needs, yet the probation staff tend to ensure that people are accessing the services they most need. Thus, one might characterise the way in which hubs provide individualised support for change as 'holistic but targeted'.

Site 5 primarily provides services that target criminogenic needs, such as, housing or employment, rather than providing support associated with broader desistance-focused outcomes.

### **2.3.8 Developing social as well as human capital**

The development of social capital is critical to desistance because it links people into the broader community. In order to make sense of the ways in which hubs can facilitate desistance, we have drawn on Albertson and Hall's (2019) six-stage model of social capital building. This model encapsulates a range of facilitated stages through which an individual service user can be encouraged to progress from being an isolated individual to a community member who engages in civic and democratic processes in their community.

**Stage one:** The first step in this process is the way in which hubs can facilitate regular opportunities to associate with/visit the hub over and above their appointment with their probation/responsible officer. Sites 1, 2 and 3 all enable this as probation services are situated in permanent hubs which serve a community broader than the probation caseload. Thus, people can attend groups in the hubs over and above the requirements of their order.

**Stage two:** Social capital building can also be enhanced through opportunities to access/participate in hub-based awareness-raising activities which enable service users to represent communities not associated with their offending, but positive community roles. Again, Sites 1, 2 and 3 enable this.

**Stage three:** Participation in hub-based social events and group-based tasks, encapsulated by social capital building stage three, is facilitated by Sites 1, 2 and 3 through a range of activities available to people regardless of their probation status, increasing wider social network building opportunities to aid separation from their stigmatised identity.

**Stage four:** Opportunities for engaging in reciprocal and generative activities as Hub members are critical in terms of linking people with others from the wider community, as indicated in social capital building stage four. Again, Sites 1, 2 and 3 all facilitate this; for example, Site 2 has a horticultural club enabling people to develop skills but also make friends.

**Stage five:** Involvement in activities in the hubs also meant that service users could participate in wider local community events as 'hub members' rather than probation clients, as highlighted in social capital building stage five where it is important to facilitate service users' identity within a community as representing others rather than simply themselves.

**Stage six:** Crucially, some of the sites provide opportunities for service users to participate in formal civic, governance/decision-influencing settings, thus facilitating generativity (making a positive contribution to society), as identified in the final stage of the social

capital building model. For example, in Site 1, a service user has set up a group which is open to all members of the community to attend. Also in Site 1, an ex-probation service user has started up a social innovation project selling reduced priced coffee and tea in the public space in the hub four days a week.

For many of the service users, especially in Sites 1, 2 and 3, the main advantages to hub-based delivery are the opportunities to interact with a range of people with whom they would not ordinarily come into contact:

*"As part of the Managing Anxiety group, that's open to probation and non-probation women, and as part of that they're building their skills, building their confidence and their self-esteem. Usually, towards the end, they go out on a day trip as a group and I think that helps them in terms of being able to communicate with others. And they have the breakfast club and the lunch club where you can just drop in, mix with different people. ... I've had someone who was completely isolated, who came to the breakfast club. She was supported initially and I think the first couple of times she went she just didn't speak to anyone, she just sat in a corner. But then as she became more used to the different people, the volunteers would make an effort and check in with her, see how she was, and her confidence and communication with the others gradually increased and she became much more comfortable being around groups of people". (CRC staff, Site 3)*

### **2.3.9 Summary**

It is clear from our data that delivering probation in hub environments can help with the side of probation which is most explicitly focused on desistance – the relational, strengths-based and individualised aspect of practice. However, the arguments presented here are not strong enough to say that hubs are the most important factor in desistance as outcomes were beyond the scope of this research.

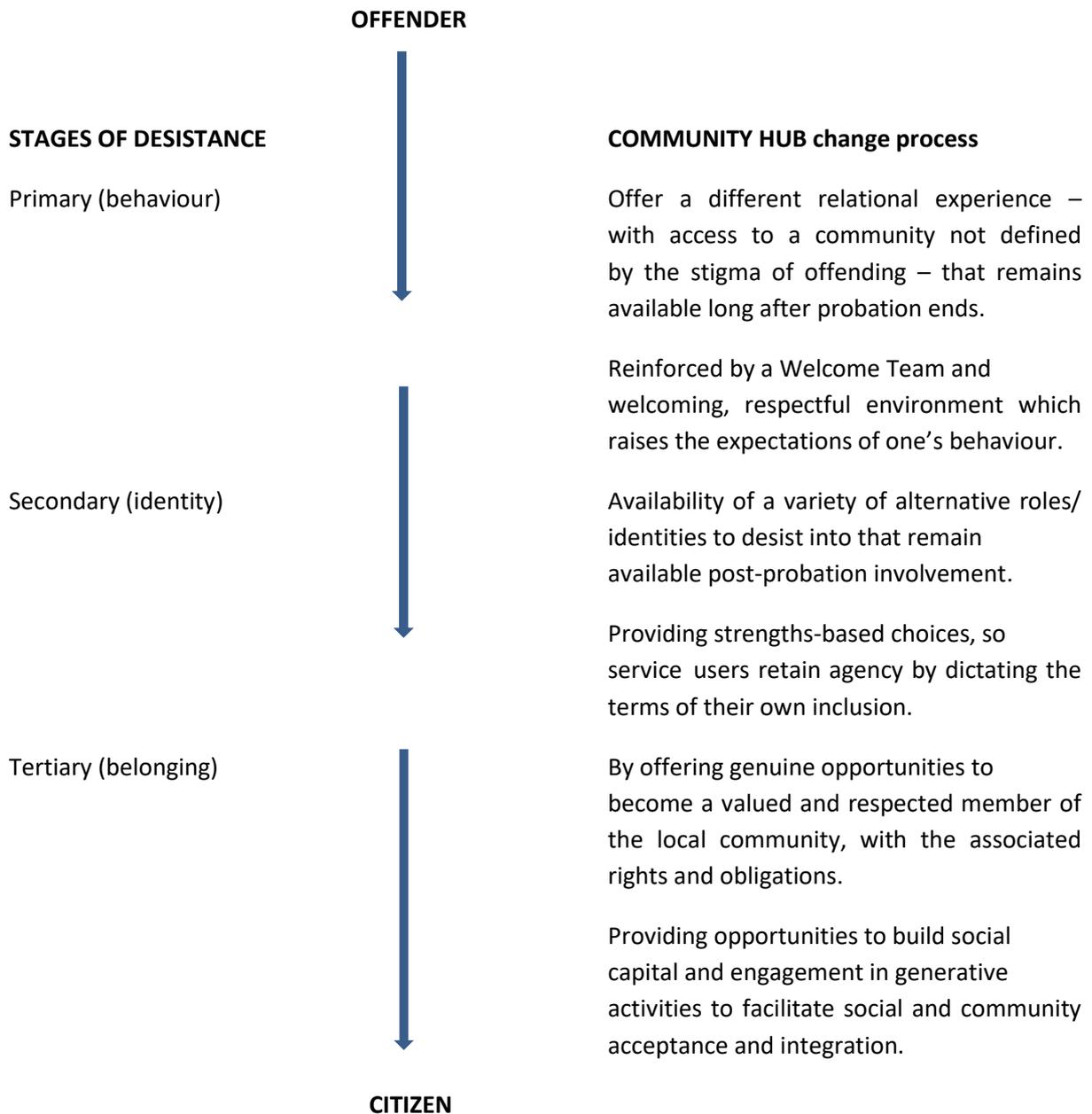
That said, we would argue that hubs can and do provide very useful contexts in which to deliver work which supports desistance, hence we would argue that hub-based work supports the facilitation of desistance. Key aspects of this support are as follows:

- The provision of access to a community of belonging that distances people from the stigma of the offender label.
- Ensuring the availability of a wide range of alternative pro-social identities/roles for people to desist into, ensuring service users retain agency.
- Providing service users access to meaningful generative community activities as hooks for change (Giordano et al., 2007) and 'the formation of an identity through participating in a new practice or community' (Wenger, 1998, cited in Tett et al., 2012: 181)
- Providing opportunities for service users to identify themselves as active citizens in their community with sustainable links, social networks and ensuring support avenues are available to them to assist with any lapses or setbacks after their order has been completed.

The role of community hubs in supporting desistance can also be considered in relation to the three stages of desistance: primary (behaviour); secondary (identity); and tertiary

(belonging). Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the change process across these stages.

**Figure 4: The role of community hubs in supporting change across the stages of desistance**



## 2.4 Additional benefits

Many of the benefits to hub-based probation practice have been discussed in relation to the way in which it can facilitate desistance. Some additional benefits, identified through the interviews, are set out in this section.

### 2.4.1 Improved compliance

Compliance in probation is critical to success; without a basic level of compliance, probation staff cannot begin to engage clients, support them in addressing their criminogenic needs and support their desistance. The staff that we spoke to all feel that hub-based delivery improves levels of compliance. This is partly because service users are more motivated to attend the hub because there are more services available. Consequently, compliance is improved because a probation worker is more likely to 'bump into' a client attending the hub for a reason other than attending probation. In the words of one staff member, clients are more likely to attend 'probation by mistake' when accessing probation in a hub. The hubs are also seen to improve compliance because of their location. This means that, again in the words of a member of staff, service users have 'no excuse' for not attending:

*"There's no excuse. They ring me, I've got no money, 'then walk'"* (CRC staff, Site 1)

### 2.4.2 Staff wellbeing

Probation work can take its toll on practitioners because the work is hard, emotionally draining and caseloads are high (Phillips et al., 2016). The staff that we spoke to consider hub-based delivery work to be beneficial in this respect. Firstly, they comment on how the physical environment – the fact that buildings are well maintained, bright and airy – makes them feel more valued. Secondly, the co-location and multi-disciplinary nature of hubs means that staff seek support from a range of other members of staff.

### 2.4.3 Serving the local community

One of the benefits of hub-based delivery for staff is the idea that being in a hub reconnects probation with the community it serves. There is a strong feeling that the hub is there for the local community:

*"I think it is about probation being visible in communities, not just to the service user but to their friends, their families, it's about us meeting people where they are, breaking down barriers in terms of, you know, being in the locality, being visible and breaking down those barriers".* (CRC Staff, Site 1)

In Site 2, staff talked about how being in a hub means that they are in a much better position to benefit from activities and developments in the wider community:

*"They're not put on for us, for probation, they're put on for the community, but we are able to push people forward into these programmes and these events".* (CRC staff, Site 2)

#### 2.4.4 Diversity

In terms of physical disabilities, staff at all six sites highlighted the practical accommodation of specific requirements, for example:

*"Of course, we've got the lift and we had somebody who was visually impaired and we managed that all fine so, yeah". (Strategic staff, Site 1)*

In relation to further issues of diversity, for example older adults, ethnic minorities, and women, the provision is always open and accommodating, but not always directly aligned to the profile of the local community:

*"I would say that we do not support the BME community in the way that we would like. I mean, diversity in the South West isn't huge in parts anyway, however we do have, we have a big Chinese population for example and we do a lot of work with [the community service] across the road so we're growing and building that". (Strategic staff, Site 2)*

There are gaps in provision but staff are normally able to highlight an alternative. For example, in Site 3 the hub does not have specific support for minority ethnic women but staff are able to identify a separate service to which they can refer people. Where there are gaps in provision that cannot be met, this is normally due to resources external to probation and the hub. The most common gaps in provision are for housing and mental health services.

#### 2.4.5 Reciprocal learning

The co-location element of hub-based delivery work is beneficial in terms of improving the skills and knowledge base of practitioners:

*"I think the pool of knowledge as well just from the staff is fantastic because you can quickly ask a question for somebody who's in the office at the time. If you've got someone coming in and you're like, 'I'm a bit worried about this' or 'I'm not sure about what medication or is she attending an appointment' or that type of thing, because the people are in the office you can quickly get an answer which gives a better service to people coming in as well because you've got that information and there's no sort of, 'I'll ring and find out', you can just nip out". (CRC staff, Site 3)*

Co-location improves the relationships between professionals in different services and encourages joint learning and better access to services.

## 2.5 Challenges

With any model of delivery come challenges. While we have already outlined some of the challenges to using hubs to facilitate desistance, in this section we highlight some key challenges related to hub-based probation practice.

### 2.5.1 Delivering hub-based and non-hub-based work

Probation staff often have mixed caseloads with clients who are seen in the hub and others at the traditional probation office. Often those staff who work across several sites are unaware of all the services in the hub:

*"I don't really know much about what else happens here, apart from what I deliver and who else is here on the day that I'm here". (CRC staff, Site 1)*

Considering a significant benefit to hub-based delivery is being able to refer people into other services that are co-located, this is something that needs to be borne in mind when implementing hub delivery. Importantly, we saw evidence that hub-based work was not given the priority that it perhaps deserved in terms of resources and staffing.

### 2.5.2 Risk posed by and faced by service users

Hubs can be beneficial in terms of managing risk as people can be referred into services quickly and intelligence can be shared easily between professionals when someone is at risk of reoffending. However, the risk posed by people on probation attending hubs was a common theme amongst the staff we spoke to.

*"there are no children here whereas we have worked out of other premises for example old churches where maybe there is a baby and toddler group running on a certain day so we've got to always make sure that each case is risk assessed and risk is dynamic. So we may have an incident where two service users were arguing in reception, it got quite heated so we have intervened and those service users no longer come into the community hub because we have to be respectful of the other partners working out of here as well". (CRC Staff, Site 1)*

There were also situations where those attending the hub were unhappy about a probation worker's decision:

*"I would say though that also does come with its own problems sometimes if you have a particularly volatile female or who has an alcohol problem or who is unhappy with one of us for a decision that's made or something, that can sometimes have its own limitations as well. They'll come in to the women's centre where there's women who are vulnerable who aren't on a probation order and they're really angry, could be kicking off. It can be hard". (CRC staff, Site 3)*

This appeared to be particularly the case in Site 3 where the women attending the centre would not be on probation but might still be classed as vulnerable. Staff in Site 3 raised concerns about the lack of security measures, such as panic alarms, which are present in the probation office.

### 2.5.3 Expectations of hub-based work, and having the right staff

There was a lot of discussion amongst staff about the challenges of hub-based work in relation to cultural clashes within probation as well as between probation and non-probation organisations. These clashes revolved around conceptions of the nature of 'proper' probation work, as well as around the nature of voluntary engagement.

Probation workers talked about how their colleagues in traditional probation offices were often cynical about the hub:

*"One of our colleagues said on Tuesday see you tomorrow. I said oh, you won't see me, have a nice day. Oh, yeah, that's right, sunning yourself with your suntan cream sitting on a roof". (CRC staff, Site 1)*

*"I think staff in the generic office are missing out a little bit. I do think that. And for me I suppose it's the old style of working. I know senior officers have said to me, oh, we used to have washing machines in our old probation offices, it's that befriend, advise, assist approach, core values. I think there's always been a drive away from that or professional and ... risk management and that is so appropriate and that's so necessary but it's that human touch as well". (CRC staff, Site 1)*

In Site 3, staff talked about the longstanding tension between care and control in probation work whereby, on the one hand, they are responsible for delivering the punishment handed down by the court, while at the same offering support and facilitating desistance. This was particularly pertinent when it came to using hubs as unpaid work sites:

*"think that's one of the conflicts about it because we're asking them to come to appointments, they have to, it's part of their sentence alongside this holistic approach that everything else is there... We have a difficult job because I think about desistance, building up a relationship and being able to access services at the centre when we've finished with our order, that's hard because it's how you get that balance right between you've got to come here because I say and I'm going to breach you if you don't because court's told you and after we want you to access this and feel it's a positive place and use the centre, it's a difficult balancing act". (CRC staff, Site 3)*

Different cultural expectations are also evident in suggestions on how to overcome these challenges. For example, one member of staff talked about how hub-based delivery was contingent upon good teamwork and implied that it was different in more traditional probation offices:

*"We support each other. I think also you've got to have a team dynamic where they support each other. You can't have a team of individuals. You've got to support and help each other. You can't be, 'That's not my job. You've got to do it. That's not my job, I'm not doing that.' That wouldn't work". (CRC staff, Site 2)*

Consequently, service users and workers stressed the need for having the right staff, implying that it takes a certain type of person to work in a hub environment:

*"Good staff. Staff who care, who want to be in the role and I know that that's not always the case because when [Name]'s been here he's said that there are some hubs, they're dragging people in there kicking and screaming because they really don't want to go and work in a hub and I'm like, why not? What is there not to love? You're almost your own boss, do you know what I mean? So, yeah, it's got to be, like I said, good staff, caring staff". (CRC staff, Site 1)*

## **2.6 What should a hub look like and why? Design and location**

One of the main features which distinguishes hub-based delivery from 'traditional' probation delivery is the building in which it is situated. Notwithstanding the fact that hubs involve a much wider range of services and agencies, the hubs we visited were all, to varying degrees, purpose built or at least designed as community hubs. As a result, the physical environment came up frequently in our discussions with practitioners and service users.

We have already mentioned the way in which the environment is seen by both staff and service users to facilitate better relationships between one another. The building can also play a role in destigmatising the process of being on probation for those accessing the hubs. The internal design of the building is important to this too. For example, in both Sites 1 and 2 the welcome team discreetly identify what service people require and point them in the right direction. There is no need for others in the hub to know why individuals are there.

*"It's less enforcement centred. You go back to the probation office, you walk through the door there, it's a bit like banks used to be, there's a counter, a perspex screen from the top of the counter to the ceiling, microphones and all that. So, here we don't have any of that, it's just you walk in, your meeter and greeter will see people, sit them down and, if they want probation, we're here to help". (CRC staff, Site 2)*

Even in Site 4 where probation has its own separate area in the building, the environment is considered very important:

*"I think it's a lot easier for the women to adapt to that, especially the women who are coming out of prison, it's much more user friendly. We've got an open reception, it's more welcoming. Probation offices can be very male dominated anyway. It's all behind screens, we have turnstiles getting in and out of probation which in itself is a barrier, just going through the turnstiles, they don't work halfway through, they stop, so it's all the uncomfortableness for the women going in to those centres where here it's an open reception, you're greeted well, you can make a cup of tea, it's just got a nicer feeling to it really". (CRC staff, Site 4)*

Service users and workers suggest that the design of the building – the openness, cleanliness and well-kept nature of the buildings – all convey a sense of respect which does not occur in more traditional offices and we noted this in our own observations. The hubs are a far cry from what one normally associates with the environment in a probation office.



Indeed, a welcoming reception area appears critically important in terms of hub design because it means service users can be welcomed and directed towards the right place but also because it manages some of the problems of hub-based delivery, as described below:

*"Some days are very chaotic because they don't have a receptionist, so when somebody buzzes the front door to come in, whoever answers the buzzer who asks the name-, for example, if they're for probation, they'll telephone through and say, 'Oh your appointment's here,' or if somebody's downstairs or a volunteer's downstairs or another member of staff, they'll ask who it is and if they're being seen to and if they say they're here for so and so, then you could have three or four members of staff coming to tell you that there's one appointment there. Or it could be that chaotic that one member of staff or two members of staff have failed to tell us somebody's there. So, they could be sat there waiting and then you get a text message saying, 'I'm sat downstairs. Where are you?'"* (CRC staff, Site 3)

In addition to the physical environment of the hub, service users and workers also talked about the location of the hub. Site 4 is situated out of the city centre. On the one hand this could be seen as a negative because it is harder to reach by public transport. However, the fact that it is not at the probation office which everyone knew about means that service users feel less shame attending. As one responsible officer told us, this is appreciated by service users:

*"'You know what? I'm so made up to be coming here now,' she said, 'rather than do that walk of shame.' And I said, 'What do you mean walk of shame?' So, she*

*said, 'I always used to feel like it was the walk of shame going to Probation'.*  
(CRC staff, Site 4)

Hub 3 is city centre based but, again, is in a building that is not associated with probation more broadly. The city centre location is seen as a real advantage:

CRC staff: *"It's city centre, so yes. Most people that we support live in and around the area".*

Interviewer: *"And do you think that's beneficial then for their engagement in turning up to appointments?"*

CRC staff: *"I do because the amount of women who say, 'It's two buses up to [X] Road. You've no chance of getting me up there.' That's the difference. [The city centre] is one bus journey away".*

While the environment in which hub-based work tends to be delivered is viewed positively by the majority of service users and workers, some drawbacks are highlighted. The hubs all allow, to varying degrees, service users to drop in as and when they want to (in addition to attending at certain times). On the whole this is seen positively as it enables a more flexible approach to compliance. However, it also creates challenges because it increases the likelihood of staff members being interrupted:

*"It all kicks off in here sometimes. And so, when you have deadlines, and our caseloads have been so high, and you've got reports to write and you've got to concentrate and you're continually interrupted, 'so and so's here for food bank,' or, 'so and so's here. He says he's on probation. He doesn't know where he's got to be. Can you look him up?'"* (CRC staff, Site 2)

*"It can be helpful but it can also be very frustrating because they don't always get that, 'why can't I see you right now because I'm here and I didn't come in yesterday but I'm here now' and you've got your diary to keep and you've got other things to do and that can be a challenge but then if they've been in and they've done something I would usually just count that because if it was a difference between sending somebody a breach letter or not then I'd rather just say that they've been in".* (CRC staff, Site 3)

### 3. Conclusion

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The hubs we visited all added value to probation work, with clear distinctions from delivery in traditional offices. On the whole, although to varying degrees, they connected service users to a wide range of services, groups and individuals. Moreover, they did so in a timelier manner than is usually possible within traditional probation work. Hub-based probation work can be seen to be particularly beneficial in terms of facilitating long-term desistance because it aligns well with the seven dimensions of 'intermediate outcomes' (see Figure 5). These, in turn, can provide a means with which to measure progress on the desistance journey (Wong, 2019, p. 7).

**Figure 5: Intermediate outcomes**



The main implication, therefore, from this study is that hub-based delivery is beneficial because it can address service users' criminogenic needs, develop and rebuild community and family relationships, and potentially support sustained behaviour change. Staff can also benefit from the co-location and multi-disciplinary nature of hubs, as they can seek immediate support from a range of other members of staff. We thus suggest that those responsible for designing probation services, as they embark on another period of structural reform, pay careful attention to the potential benefits of hub-based delivery for both service users and staff.

This is not to say that hub-based probation delivery comes without challenges and our findings also highlight some of the work required of leaders and commissioners to get organisations and all practitioners on board, both in terms of cultural change as well as in terms of practicalities. Critical success factors are as follows:

## Operational vision: a different way of working (cultural change)

We have alluded to some of the cultural difficulties associated with hub-based working and this should not be underestimated. As such, commissioning needs to start with getting everybody on board:

*"Collaboration and co-production, like a garden – needs constant tending – as it is human beings that make it work". (Strategic staff, Site 2)*

This does not only mean having buy-in from people from within probation but also from all relevant agencies as it is only in this way that the appropriate services will be delivered:

*"Just make sure you've got everybody, you've done your strategic planning first and you've got everybody on board who needs to be because otherwise what will happen is, as we've seen in some of ours, your officers will just end up running around and doing everything". (Strategic staff, Site 5)*

All service users and workers stressed the need for hubs to have the right services in place. Thus, they need to be based around local need and availability: there is no 'one size fits all' approach to what services should be available. In the words of one strategic lead in Site 3: "The key to it working is **partnerships**. We're partnered with everybody across [the city], whether it be health, criminal justice, substance misuse, therapy". This approach is underpinned by the belief that desistance cannot be achieved alone and that hubs enable a link between being on probation and being in the community, enabling sustained behaviour change.

One strategic lead talked about how they had more work to do in terms of winning 'the hearts and minds' of staff:

*"So, for us where you've got staff and managers in particular in leadership that are open-minded about actually being probation in that broader context rather than just managing an offender but that broader context of desistance and developing social capital [then] I think they [will] work really, really well... I think where you have perhaps more traditional approaches to probation delivery, community hubs are probably less effective." (Strategic staff, Site 1)*

## Putting the whole person at the centre of the process

Another strong theme to emerge was the importance of putting the individual person on probation at the heart of decisions around the services to be commissioned, encompassing their everyday needs and longer-term aspirations.

*"So people moved out of their little silos to realise that actually the success of their client or their service user is born by all of us working together". (Strategic staff, Site 2)*

*"Include service users (they are the experts) – what they want and what they need and where the Hub should be". (CRC staff, Site 4)*

*"You need people, experts by experience or lived experience to be in the room from the beginning and part of that co-design process and co-production". (Strategic staff, Site 2)*

## **Beginning with the end of the probation order in mind – having an exit strategy**

One of the key benefits to hub-based working for staff and service users is the potential to link people into services which they could access once their sentences were complete. As such, we would argue that a successful hub is one which starts with the idea of going 'beyond the order' and that this principle should be pivotal to any commissioning decisions.

*"It's key to commissioning: An exit strategy". (Strategic staff, Site 4)*

*"Thinking about after the sentence is finished – right at the beginning of it. Lots of the people we see are very isolated and don't belong to any community". (CRC staff, Site 2)*

## **The significance of location, buildings and environment**

We reiterate the need to consider how the physical environment and location can support probation being less stigmatising and more effective in terms of supporting whole community engagement and better relationships between people on probation and important people in their lives.

## **Facilitating access to non-offending community membership**

We have seen the way in which delivering probation in hubs benefits from being part of the community it also serves. But it also helps people be part of the community during and after their sentence.

*"[It] doesn't stop at the door, it's part of the wider community (...) not just the people who use the services but local businesses and the community more widely". (Strategic staff, Site 2)*

*"Our guys live in a community and we should be encouraging them to be better members of that community – client-based – you connect them... These things wouldn't happen if you just saw your probation officer". (Strategic staff, Site 2)*

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## Annex A: Methodology

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The primary aim of the research was to build upon the initial survey of CRCs (see Annex B) through interviews, focus groups and observational data. It was thus a mixed methodology approach, seeking to gain a deeper understanding of what hubs do, how they work and what they achieve.

### Recruitment and site selection

In order to identify which community hubs to use as research sites, we reviewed the findings from the survey of CRCs. The survey results allowed us to ascertain what services are provided by hubs and which service users are 'targeted'. The survey results also provided useful information on which groups are provided with specialist services such as women, ethnic minorities or younger clients. Exploring the community hubs which work with these groups would allow us to explore the ways in which the hubs do, or do not, facilitate desistance for these different groups. We were also mindful of the breadth of hubs in terms of governance models and location, and, in order to get a broad picture of hub-based delivery, we decided to capture a range of different types of hub rather than focus on one.

The survey results were useful in terms of identifying which CRCs provided services to different hubs and thus provided an initial point of contact when identifying potential research sites. That said, this was complicated by the fact that different hubs provide different services to different groups in very different contexts. Thus, there was considerable risk that the research sites would be spread too thinly across a range of models, preventing the identification of overall findings. That said, one aim of this research was to explore differences between hubs and so we decided to aim for a range of hub types, using Gardner's model as a guide. In the end we conducted research in each of Gardner's six 'types' of community hub. They were split between rural (Sites 1 and 5), city centre (Site 2, 3 and 4) and large towns (Site 6). Two sites were in the south of England (Sites 2 and 6), one was in Wales (Site 1), and three were in the north of England (Sites 3, 4 and 5).

### Data collection

We aimed to undertake fieldwork at each of the six sites over three days, although this was not always possible. Due to practical constraints, some were visited on consecutive days while others were not. One member of the research team visited all six research sites and was accompanied by another member of the research team on each visit. Adopting this approach ensured consistency of data collection across all six sites.

Data were collected in two primary ways: interviews/focus groups and observational data collection which focused on the environment and layout of the hub. In order to get a broad range of perspectives and experiences, we spoke to service users, frontline staff, managers and, where relevant, volunteers. The interviews were semi-structured in nature in order to enable consistency across the researchers and sites but also allowing for flexibility when needed.

The first contact and site visit was spent building rapport with staff members at each of the community hubs. Providing additional copies of the information sheet also enabled staff to provide service users with details of the research prior to meeting with the researchers. All

researchers carried out interviews with service users and staff members. Following the interviews, all service users and workers were provided with a copy of the debrief sheet.

Over the three-day site visit, researchers spent time familiarising themselves with the community hub, spending time interacting with staff, volunteers and service users. This enabled the researchers to become familiar with how the community hub was run as well as the services, groups and activities delivered. This knowledge contributed to the completion of the observational element of the research. Photos of the community hub space, including the interior and exterior, were taken to accompany the ethnography notes. These were shared with other members of the research team to aid the team’s understanding of the community hubs they had not visited.

### Sample

Across the six sites, we conducted 74 interviews and spoke to 78 members of staff (the CRC staff in Site 3 were interviewed as a focus group). We conducted 38 interviews with service users and undertook seven interviews with people in management or strategic positions. A full breakdown of these interviews is set out in Table A1 below.

**Table A1: Number of interviews by site and respondent**

Site	Number of days spent in/visiting the hub	Number of interviews				Total
		Probation staff	Service users	Senior managers / strategic leads	Voluntary sector	
<b>1</b>	6 (2 people for three days)	4	7	1	1	13
<b>2</b>	6 (2 people for three days)	4	12	2	3	21
<b>3</b>	5 (2 people; 1 for two days and 1 for three days)	2	6	1	3	12
<b>4</b>	6 (2 people for three days)	6	3	1	1	11
<b>5</b>	6 (2 people for three days)	2	3	2	0	7
<b>6</b>	4 (2 people for two days)	3	7	0	0	10
<b>All</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>74</b>

N.B. Some of the interviews were undertaken with more than one person in a focus group style setting. The figures above report on the number of interviews, rather than interviewees.

## **Analysis**

Following completion of data collection across all six sites, the audio files from interviews were transcribed and analysed in light of McNeill et al.'s (2012, p.2) review of research on desistance and probation to explore the ways in which practice in community hubs adhered to the eight key principles of desistance focused practice (see Figure 3 in the main body of the report). Likewise, the ethnographic information recorded from each of the six sites was analysed in light of these eight key principles. This ensured consistency across the analysis of each sub component of data collection.

## **Limitations**

Disaggregating hub-based work from 'traditional' probation delivery is difficult. We know that effective probation work relies on the relationship between the officer and the client as well as on what Dowden and Andrews (2004) call core correctional practices. Thus, while service users spoke highly of their experiences of accessing probation in a hub, it is hard to know the extent to which the relational aspect of probation practice might have been more important than the fact that the service was being received in a hub.

In some respects this is linked to a second limitation; that we have not looked at outcomes. The quotes presented in this report are people's perceptions about what is good, challenging and critical to hub-based probation practice, albeit incorporating a range of perspectives and experiences. It may be that reoffending rates (and other desistance related outcomes) are higher or lower for people accessing hub provision; further evaluation needs to be undertaken to ascertain this. That said, there is value in delivering probation in a way which people perceive as more positive even if it does not result in reduced reoffending. The impact that this can have in terms of enhanced legitimacy could prove invaluable should that person come into contact with probation further down the line.

Similarly, we have not looked at the financial side of costs – although it is reasonable to accept that hub work is less expensive than traditional delivery; CRC strategic leads also suggest that it is less expensive. Nevertheless, in order to fully assess this, it would be necessary to conduct a cost-benefit analysis taking into account outcomes when compared to traditional delivery.

## Annex B: Findings from CRC survey

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A link to a web-based survey was sent by email to the Chief Executives of the 21 CRCs. At the time of the survey, these CRCs were owned by eight different companies.<sup>3</sup> Seven responses from across four owners were received – a limited response and thus the findings should be treated with caution.

### Number of community hubs

The number of hubs identified by the respondents varied considerably, with the fewest in Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire, and the most in Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, where 18 hubs were identified.

**Table B1: Number of hubs identified in survey responses**

CRC area	Owner	Community hubs
Durham Tees Valley	ARCC	>5
Humberside, Lincolnshire & North Yorkshire	Purple Futures	2
West Yorkshire		4
Cheshire & Greater Manchester		>5
Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset & Wiltshire	Working Links	9
Dorset, Devon & Cornwall		18
Kent, Surrey & Sussex (KSS)	Seetec	3

### Strengths and benefits

Across the seven CRC areas, the following strengths and benefits of community hubs, for staff and/or service users, were identified:

- Making referrals to partner agencies is much easier and swifter due to co-location. Co-location promotes social capital and facilitates closer working relationships between agencies and CRC staff.
- Service users can receive direct and prompt support from other services.
- Sharing spaces with other agencies enables costs to be shared.
- For service users, being able to meet with probation staff and agencies in a community setting can be less intimidating, and the more informal environment can promote engagement. In addition, the other events taking place at the hub can reduce stigma associated with attending a probation appointment.
- The often more convenient locations of community hubs can promote compliance in attending appointments.
- Service users can sometimes continue to use hub services after statutory supervision ended.

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<sup>3</sup> There are now seven companies, with Seetec running the services in those areas previously managed by Working Links.

- Women only spaces can be seen as essential for providing safe and secure environments to address specific women's issues.

### **Weakness and barriers**

Respondents also highlighted some weakness and barriers to working within community hubs:

- Not all premises are suitable for delivering probation services. Lack of availability of private offices can lead to difficulties in holding confidential conversations.
- Health and safety considerations, such as fire safety or the risk of harm that some service users may pose, need to be addressed when using rented community buildings.
- Broader-based community hubs can be overwhelming to some service users.
- Conversely, specialist hubs (such as homelessness or substance misuse) may be off-putting for those who do not require these services.
- Due to austerity cut-backs, it can be challenging to get buy-in from some agencies.
- In some rural areas, it can be difficult to secure a range of agencies or to find a suitable location to meet.
- Hubs need sufficient footfall to be economically viable and to make participation worthwhile for partner agencies. Some respondents reported that the NPS/CRC split had reduced footfall when the respective services were located separately.