Contents

Who are DWRM?

DWRM is a social enterprise which offers a clear pathway to rehabilitation through experience-led consultancy, advocacy and administration, facilitating Further and Higher Education in prison. We also offer specialist 'Through the Gate' services to enable people released from prison to achieve academic success, embark on a career and achieve a pro-social lifestyle.

The lived experience and voice of people who have spent time in prison informs and drives our work, which has a strong academic basis. Our team of researchers was assembled based on our relevant experience of the criminal justice system, as prisoners and practitioners. We offer an independent and open approach, which is free from bias. This unique blend of lived experience combined with professional and academic expertise placed us in a strong position to support this inspection process.

Having personal experience of the challenges facing people on release from prison, we are keen to support any process that aims to effect change in this area. We want to know that the people coming after us will have a better experience. We understand that in many cases a positive relationship with the Offender Management unit can mean the difference between success and failure. Relationship building is a two-way process, and we recognise a requirement for a balance between control and support within the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) framework.

Professionally, our vision aspires to outstanding outcomes for people leaving prison, recognising the beneficial impact this has on the whole of society. Central to this is the bridge between prison and community, with the role of OMiC being a critical aspect of successful release. We welcomed this opportunity to speak directly to people before and after their release from prison and are delighted to present an analysis of our findings from the feedback gathered from our interviews with people in prison, and to interpret our wider findings against the feedback received.

We hope to contribute to improved ways of working, which will be better for both staff and prisoners, and which also have the potential to deliver a more positive longer term social impact. Doing this work well will lead to fewer victims and reduced social harm, because when people receive the right support, they are more likely to desist from future offending.

Summary of findings

Being part of this Joint Thematic Inspection has been a challenging process. For our team to go back into prisons, sometimes for the first time since their own release, and to hear from people who are often in despair has required a huge emotional commitment. However, during the inspection, we have become even more convinced of the value of our work and particularly our selection of academics who were able to relate on such a personal level to the participants we spoke to. We set out to give a voice to those who feel unheard, and we recognise the sentiment of many participants:

> *"I would just like to not be forgotten."*

Our detailed analysis of the interview transcripts and of the questionnaire responses has produced a report which we feel reflects the views of everyone we spoke to. We have summarised three key themes

- The Prisoner Voice - people in prison have a voice and it needs to be heard throughout their sentence, incorporating sentence planning, risk reduction strategy and post-release arrangements.
- Creating and Building Identities - most people in prison do not want to be stuck in a cycle of offending. They want help and support to emerge from prison with the ability to take an active part in society and enjoy a range of identities of which they can be proud.
- One Size Does Not Fit All – a rigid model does not recognise the diversity of our prison population and does not allow the flexibility that is required for OMiC to be successful.

Of course, the ultimate goal is to release people safely back into society. Our report provides an insight into the thoughts and experiences of 100 men and women who are preparing for their release from prison. We hope that this report will contribute to some changes in practice that will offer greater hope and aspiration to them and to the thousands of others who will approach this milestone in the coming months and years.

Desistance Theory

Throughout this report, we draw on research from respected academics, which is best summarised in an Insights report titled "How and why people stop offending: discovering desistance" by Fergus McNeill, Stephen Farrall, Claire Lightowler and Shadd Maruna. (2012)

The key points from this report are replicated here:

- *Better understandings of how and why people stop offending (the desistance process) offer the prospect of developing better criminal justice practices, processes and institutions.*
- *By focusing on positive human change and development, research about desistance resists the negative labelling of people on the basis of their past behaviours and the unintended consequences that such labelling can produce.*
- *Evidence about the process of desistance has led some to identify a range of principles for criminal justice practice, including:*
    - *being realistic about the complexity and difficulty of the process*
    - *individualising support for change*
    - *building and sustaining hope*
    - *recognising and developing people's strengths*
    - *respecting and fostering agency (or self-determination)*
    - *working with and through relationships (both personal and professional)*
    - *developing social as well as human capital*
    - *recognising and celebrating progress*

Given that one of the aims of criminal justice is to reduce crime and given that the vast majority of those people who start to offend eventually cease, understanding how and why people desist (and why it takes some longer than others), has obvious importance.

Maruna (2001) identified that 'to desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves' (2001: 7). This draws on his finding that individuals who were able to desist from crime had high levels of self-efficacy, meaning that they saw themselves in control of their futures and had a clear sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. They also found a way to 'make sense' out of their past lives and even find some redeeming value in lives that had often been spent in and out of prisons and jails.

Farrall (2002) found that successful desistance was the product of individual motivation, social and personal contexts, probation supervision and the meanings which people hold about their lives and their behaviours

Who did we speak to?

We were asked to speak to 100 people (89 men and 11 women) across 8 prisons during April and May 2022 to establish their personal experiences of Offender Management. The age and ethnic background of the participants reflected that of the wider prison population. DWRM and Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prison and Probation team visited eight prisons: Aylesbury, Ashfield, Brixton, Cardiff, Highpoint, Lancaster Farms, Low Newton and Manchester.

Of the 100 participants identified:

- we spoke to 72 in person during our prison visits (72%)
- 9 people declined to participate in the inspection (9%)
- 19 had already been released by the time of our visit (19%)
- DWRM subsequently arranged to speak to these prisoners after their release into the community, bringing our total participation rate to 91%.
- We also received survey forms from 67 of the 72 people we spoke to in prisons (93%).

In phase one of this joint thematic inspection, we set out to capture the 'in custody' experiences of people in prison, who are also those considered 'hardest to reach' and with differing levels of complexity. To reach a point whereby we could accurately analyse the data collected and produce consistent findings, we needed to create a sample set of participants which met with all the necessary inclusion criteria. We also considered the breakdown of the overall prison population as well as allowing for the effects of Covid on the estates' ability to deliver effective regimes, programmes and resettlement work.

Therefore, the inclusion criteria incorporated factors such as sentence length, risk level (i.e. risk of harm and likelihood of reoffending), and the date of release – to track individuals' transitions or reintegration. We wanted to maintain a reasonably accurate representation of the variations in demographics across the prison estate, but inevitably the practical challenges of working in prisons means some people are not fully represented.

The selection of the participants was determined by the inclusion criteria and the availability of participants in the prisons to be inspected, therefore it was not possible to match the demographics of the sample to those of the overall prison population. This has restricted the extent to which the demographic information provided could be factored into the analysis.

Using a combination of quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) data collection, we were able to seek and capture the experiences and views of those currently under OMiC management and supervision. The reason for both forms of data collection was to be able to produce generalisable data (quantitative) and to give a real voice (qualitative) to those who actually live through the challenges of navigating a prison sentence and how that is felt, improved and or hindered by the application of the OMiC model.

The way that we refer to people in this report varies depending on the context.

- 'Participants' means the people we spoke to during our interviews.
- 'Individuals' recognises that each person has a different experience that might not reflect the wider context.
- 'People in prison' or 'prisoners' acknowledges the collective identity and experience of people serving a custodial sentence.

Quotes in italics represent verbatim comments from participants, transcribed from our interviews. These are interspersed throughout the report to illustrate the points being made. Each section begins with a quote from the Desistance Theory report (McNeill et al, 2012) which we felt was relevant to our findings.

What did we find?

Quality of service

> **Desistance, for people who have been involved in persistent offending, is a difficult and complex process, and one that is likely to involve lapses and relapses. There is value, therefore, in criminal justice supervision being realistic about these difficulties and to find ways to manage setbacks and difficulties constructively. It may take considerable time for supervision and support to**

exercise a positive effect (Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Weaver and McNeill, 2007).

A number of the participants we spoke to shared very similar views about what support they needed and what a high-quality service should look like. They want a straightforward process with clear expectations about the frequency of meetings with staff. Most people we spoke to expressed a need and desire to play an active role in their own sentences, from sentence planning to jointly deciding what is best for them.

An overriding theme is the concern that prisoners do not want to be 'rehabilitated' to any version of their former selves but wanted to create, take on and maintain new identities - new versions of themselves. We heard from people who had been fortunate enough to have an OMiC team – in part or in full – who have enabled or challenged them to take an active role in their own lives. They have very positive experiences of this and could recognise the impact this had:

> *"… she sees things different, she thinks that I can actually change my life around and she believes in me and that actually makes me believe in myself"*

Too many of the people we spoke to did not understand the roles of Prison Offender Manager (POM), Community Offender Manager (COM) and Key Worker (KW) or understand what was meant by these terms. For those who were able to identify their OMiC team it was using older labels such as "my OMU", "my probation" and most reported minimal contact with these staff.

> *"I didn't know what you meant by the terms POM & COM, I just kind of worked it out... it was the first time I have heard either term – 15 months post-sentence"*

In some instances, there is a disconnect between the staff delivering OMIC and the individuals subject to it. If at the start of a sentence there is no formal OMIC introduction (induction), there is no chance for necessary understanding of what these terms mean, and their significance, to be imbedded within the individual.

We also understood from those we interviewed that to deliver a more high-quality service there needs to be flexibility in delivery and one which is more suited to the individuals' needs.

We looked at the individual elements which make up the OMiC delivery, firstly considering the role of *key work*. The key work scheme started in 2018, almost a full 2 years before start of Covid. However, what we have heard is that no one really knew what key work was, how it differed from the previous model based upon 'personal officers', and what to expect from the new model. From the people we interviewed we understood that OMiC was brought in quietly and when asked if they were aware of when the OMiC model came into effect, the only tangible identifying marker was the change in label from personal officer to key worker. This did not allow for a unified launch and therefore both staff and prisoners were, for the most part, unaware OMiC was in existence.

> *"I was allocated someone but I've never met him, never had a meeting with him at all and I've been here a year"*

Covid then brought the implementation of OMiC to a standstill in its original form, rendering an unclear and, in some cases confusing, model that is somewhat defunct. 'Learned helplessness' (Seligman, 2011)was a term we came across, in reference to some members of staff, whereby "it [OMiC workloads] all seems too difficult, so we'll blame something for not doing anything." However, there are other factors highlighted by Covid which added to the inconsistencies of the service. A model which is designed to adequately cater for all the people under its remit, for the most part does not, at least in its current form. When we did hear about good practice, this was not consistently demonstrated across the prison or the wider estate.

> *"When I said I was blessed with my OMU worker...me mam has the total opposite, it depends who you get."*
>
> *"I work on information, it's part of my make-up"*

If Governors must cut their cloths according to the resources they have, ensuring that those under their care are fully informed from the start will create several savings, for the individuals (feelings of isolation, unimportance), for the staff (best use of time, recognition of work) and for the regimes. Most of the people we interviewed stated that they either did not know who their key worker was, that they didn't have regular contact with their key worker or that their key worker only did welfare checks on them:

> *"My key worker - I don't really know who she is now, the ones before, cos they are officers they would rather sit in the office drinking coffee and vaping than do something that benefits you. So like if I ask her to print out my account status so I can ask my family to send me money, they'll do it but it will be 6 hours later or the next day – when they feel like it but then I miss a week's money"*

However, there are instances of good practice whereby people have good or excellent relationships with their key workers. We can see the benefits of good key worker engagement, how it can be best utilised and the ways in which this can supplement and effectively bring cohesion to the OMiC supervision team in challenging situations.

> *"My key worker takes care of day-to-day stuff he's been as good as gold, he sends emails and stuff that ain't been replied to… I was told my COM's name yesterday by my POM who I saw for the first time yesterday"*

15. How often have you seen your key worker in the last 6 months ?

not at all	19
1-2 times	16
3-6 times	16
7-12 times	8
more than 12 times	8

Extract of data from questionnaire, showing the number of responses

People would like to be able to meet regularly with their key worker (it being consistent, and the key worker not being taken from their allocated key working slots for operational reasons), and be able to contact their POM and see them face-to-face on a consistent basis, and contact their COM via phone.

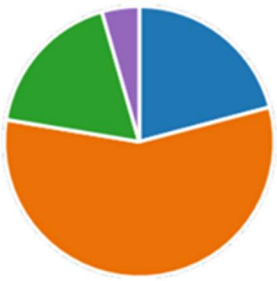
> *"If there was a place on this wing where we could go for probation, OMU, if we could bypass all the bullshit with the apps. If there was an actual office where we could go and talk to someone face to face, that would make your jobs and our lives so much easier cos we could get a response straightaway and we wouldn't need to talk through doors"*

Prison Offender Managers (POMs), have a vital role to play within OMiC delivery, as the person with the most involvement in producing a sentence plan. Their role can be felt as supportive or conversely punitive, by an individual. This will depend on several factors which all result from the way the POM chooses to engage with the individual. Firstly, taking the time to engage with the person in prison, and then doing so on a consistent basis (which is not necessarily about frequency, just reliability and consistency); ensuring that engagements are balanced by both highlighting and acknowledging what is positive (which can be done by keeping abreast of any positives entries i.e., achievements, completed courses, new jobs or positions secured etc.) as well as challenging any negative behaviours (alongside taking the time to get the individual's versions of events and being mindful of any punishments already incurred so as not to create a feeling of more punishment and or admonishment) And finally, ensuring that everything that happens, where possible is done 'with' as opposed, 'to' the person in prison, and explaining processes to them, where this is not.

People in prison stated that when they have a good relationship with their POM, they find it easier to accept what they have to say, especially when it feels negative. Disappointing news is always easier to take when delivered by someone who is respected and viewed as sincere and empathetic. The way in which setbacks and difficult decision-making is felt will rest largely on the person delivering it. It therefore follows that a little time spent building social capital with the people they manage will make a relationship feel caring as opposed to unsympathetic. Understanding the value of a good POM – prisoner relationship was something which people in prison stated most of their POMs seemed to lack the time, motivation or ability to establish.

8. How often have you seen your POM in the last 6 months ?

not at all	14
1-2 times	38
3-6 times	12
7-12 times	0
more than 12 times	3



We understand from people in prison, that COMs should make initial contact with individuals very soon after they are assigned a new case. If this cannot be done in person or via phone or digitally, then they should be making use of the Email-a-Prisoner provision. A simple, quick

email with a reply sheet attached, will open the channels of communication and let the person know that they want to be heard from and create a feeling of being treated like a human.

> *"My COM went off on holiday way into my parole window, that went to long term sick. I got a new probation two weeks ago and my parole is next week. I got a new probation and they are writing my parole report now but she ain't even sent me a letter let alone spoke to me or come see me!"*

People in prison felt that not being an active part of the transition from POM to COM, in some cases, can damage the relationship with their COM before it has even formally begun. They felt it would be beneficial to be a part of this process. It would give them a chance "to iron out any kinks" discuss any difficulties so that there are no feelings of resentment (residual or otherwise) or blame being assigned. It would also enable a proper understanding of what the future holds for people in prison and what the expectations are. Again, there was evidence of this happening in some prisons, but this was the exception:

> *"Had regular contact with my POM who seemed to understand me. I also had meetings with my COM, and he met with my mother too"*

> *"When you don't have communications between two parties, there is no understanding, there is no planning it's all been one-sided with no reply…"*

A high-quality service also means acknowledging and recording when people are making good progress and being very clear about what provision is in place for when people leave prison. This was reiterated by a senior prison official who stated, "it goes to there being a level of trust [between the individual and OMiC team], that there will be communication between POMs and key workers which will be a combination of face-to-face, quality entries on Nomis[1] [and utilising applications, in-cell phones and other forms of correspondence.]"

Delivery of service

> **Since desistance is an inherently individualised and subjective process, approaches to criminal justice supervision must accommodate and exploit issues of identity and diversity. One-size-fits-all interventions will not work (Weaver and McNeill, 2010).**

One size, definitely, does not fit all when it comes to OMiC, and this is what we heard consistently from the participants. People in prison are aware that OMiC does not change from prison to prison, or more accurately, from category to category. Which means that [it is felt] OMiC is being delivered in much the same way in category A prisons as it is in category C prisons. People in prison say that they would like to feel the difference between approaches when they leave one category and move to a lower category prison.

> *"I don't' feel like it has been personalised at all,...it's a set process, copy and paste from offender to offender"*

[1] National Offender Management Information System (p-NOMIS) is the operational database used in prisons

> *"I came here [a category C prison] from Long Lartin [part of the Long Term High Security Estate] and my probation was trying to throw courses on me that ain't on my SP [sentence plan] and you can only do in a A-cat! What the hell are they telling me!"*

Many people told us they wanted to be much more involved with their sentence planning so that it was something they could properly engage with.

OMiC intends to put rehabilitation at the centre of custodial and post-release work to reduce reoffending and promote community reintegration.. These aims are led by the sentence plan, and as such mean that OMiC, can be done 'to' or, conversely,'with' the individual. This means that prisoners can be rendered 'passive' by their OMiC team, or they can be engaged with at the sentence plan design stage and become 'active' participants in their own lives.

What we have heard from participants are the negative impacts of not being able to play an active part in their sentences and, not being given an opportunity to use what is available to help build the new identity they see for themselves.

> *"I feel like it [my sentence plan] was written for me not in consultation with me"*

> *"I was told when I came in that I would have a sentence plan done telling me what needed to be done, it never happened… now I'm getting out I ain't got a clue what I am doing and what they are gonna make me do out there. It's shit, coulda' done better by myself cos I know what I need, ya get it?!"*

> *"sentence plan, in this prison? Non-existent!" 'Did you have a sentence plan done for you on this sentence?' Reply: "yeah but it was bullshit cos I told them I was not guilty and maintained my innocence, then they gave me one SP target to do - victim awareness but I ain't doing it. No one asked me nothing!"*

Several people who had been to prison more than once told us that they had the same sentence plan each time they returned to prison. This gave them a feeling of hopelessness. It stands that being brought back to prison to re-complete a sentence plan which had no positive impact on their ability to desist, will be felt as a lack of interest, care or understanding of the individual.

> *"...in terms of the rehabilitation side, in terms of managing the progress through, you know, from court to prison, leaving prison to back into society, to you know, obviously becoming a reformed citizen, you know, progressing along that route, you know, that didn't really exist to me..."*

Making an effort is noted, appreciated and makes a difference. For example, participants described how they appreciated it when they were given clear information in person.

> *"At least she's got the balls to come and tell me to my face rather than over the phone"*

> *"She's done everything I've asked her to do and she doesn't take long to do it, for us, she's very good...and she would come back and say if she could or not, she wouldn't leave it..."*

Participants also described how these interactions are an important part of their preparation for their release. Learning how to engage with people to get things done is just as important as the practical tasks of sorting out identification such as birth certificates and bank accounts.

> *"People need to know how to handle things on the outside"*

One person described how he felt that he had to make a huge effort to get the help he needed and said it really should not be like that.

> *"I feel like you have to do something bad for them to help you, for them to hear you. You have to keep asking and asking and asking."*

In contrast, another said how much they appreciated having the same POM as on a previous sentence, because this made things so much easier, and a relationship was already established. This POM was seen to be very responsive to the participant's needs and recognised the increased the level of complexity. This meant more regular contact, which proved to be effective in sorting out multiple issues ("Super POMMING"). The participant was given the opportunity to undertake a structured intervention, even though it was not on the original sentence plan. This supported the participant to stop self-harming. However, there was no handover from POM to COM in this case, so the participant had concerns about the support that will be available after release.

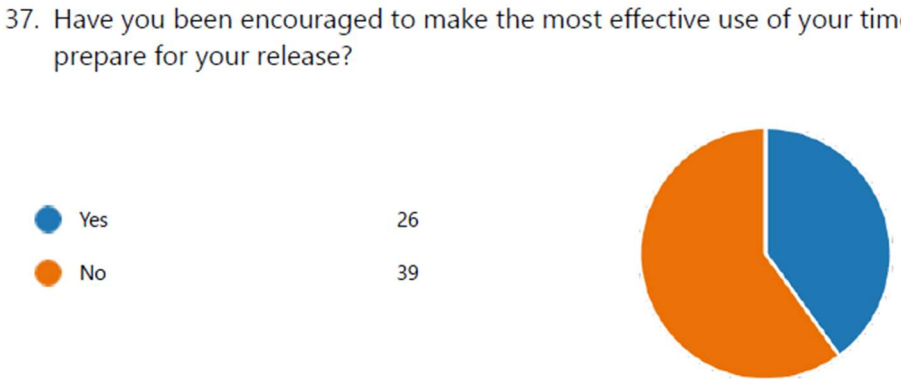
> *"I haven't seen or heard from inside or outside probation and my parole is in June!... I keep putting in apps to see someone, even my key worker told me not to bother putting in anymore, he said he'd complain for me!"*

> *"How does my outside probation do a report on me without ever talking to me or seeing me - none of that shit?!"*

Range of services

> **Interventions based only on developing the capacities and skills of people who have offended (human capital) will not be enough. Probation also needs to work on developing social capital, opportunities to apply these skills, or to practice newly forming identities (such as 'worker' or 'father') (Farrall, 2002, 2004; McNeill and Whyte, 2007).**

The current system is perceived as rendering the individual as passive, with very little opportunity for people to have an input into their sentence planning. Many people expressed a desire to feel that this planning was done with them rather than to or for them.



In some cases, participants described how they had been sent to a particular prison to complete Offending Behaviour Programmes however, once there they were informed that they were unsuitable for the programme on their sentence plan, that they didn't meet the criteria for the programme, or after assessment, they no longer needed to do it. In a few cases, the courses they should have been completing for their sentence plan were not available in the prison they were sent to. For example, we heard a number of references to the lack of options for Horizon or Kaizen programmes, completion of which could have enabled progression to the open estate, with one person describing this as a circular conundrum. If sentence plans could indicate that an individual should be assessed for a particular course, this would require a further discussion should the course not be available, or the person not meet the requirements.

> *"It's like trying to find the end of the roundabout"*

Those who did manage to complete the Horizon course at an appropriate stage in their sentence described it as being very useful, as well as being challenging and quite confronting at times, which was welcomed. When matched to the right course, people in prison may often benefit from completing it. For those who wish to make changes in their attitudes and beliefs, develop new (or sometimes improve existing) coping skills and mechanisms, challenge negative aspects of their personalities, and find more pro-social and productive ways of dealing with negative situations, the programmes and courses available provide opportunities for people in prison to benefit. And this was an overwhelming majority who agreed with this statement.

> *'Something needs to change else nothing will change"*

However, many people reported that they felt sentence planning was an empty goal setting task that did not really provide any tangible benefits. This is because it was felt that there was no real interest in the sentence planning from the professionals (POMs), courses were just assigned to individuals, in what was described as a scattergun approach, as though they just wanted to add to the targets of a sentence plan to make it look as though there had been some thought gone into it. We were told that people often had to be proactive themselves if they wanted to get things done.

> *"It's all been my own attempts, no one's told me I had to do anything, or come and approached me to do anything"*

However, this was only possible if work had not been done or sentence plans were incomplete. The overriding issue which a large percentage of individuals faced was, trying to get incorrect or inaccurate items removed from their sentence plan or OASys. These ranged from incorrect historical information to targets and courses which had been recorded haphazardly (incomplete), lazily (old information which had been pulled through from one document to another) or overzealously (courses which did not apply to the individual's offending history). One participant suggested that the induction pack could include better information on the process and on what was available during the sentence. Many people said they knew what they needed:

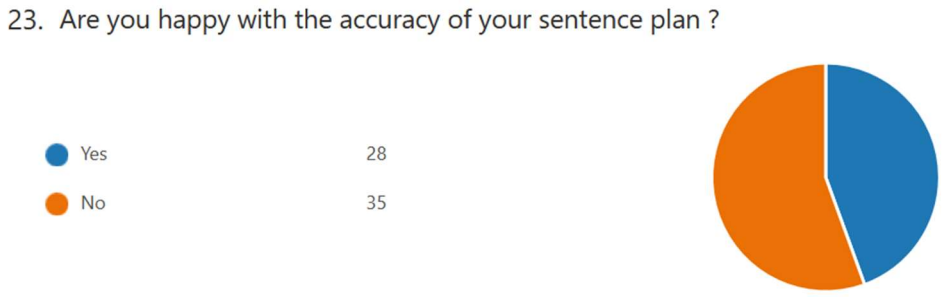
> *"accommodation, bit of help with drugs, bit of help getting a job"*

But we also heard that people often ended up doing the same courses multiple times.

> *"And then a person comes from assessment to see you and says it's part of your sentence plan, and you've not gone over it or spoke about it, then it's a bit difficult to tell the person you don't need to do it when you do need to do it cos it's part of your sentence plan… but you don't know why it's part of your sentence plan"*

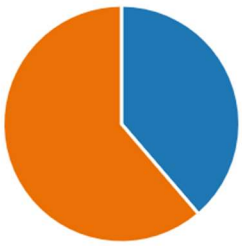
Many of the people we spoke to were able to effectively map out their own needs and solutions, as well as being able to objectively look at their own offending, identify at least some of the root causes and then, appropriately state the types of protective factors which needed to be put in place to ensure no repeat offending. These insights were refreshing and could be the basis for active participation in sentence planning processes and relevant, realistic and achievable goal setting.

People in prison collectively stated that they had no idea what services were available and more significantly, were not told by professionals exactly what they could help with, what services they could refer to, and what was within theprofessional's remit.



24. Have you been referred to any other agencies as a result ?

Yes	24
No	38



People we spoke to felt this was due to the professionals not wanting to create more work for themselves. Therefore not informing the individual about services would mean they would not be asked to do more work. This was not a majority response, but other responses were also quite negative and reflecteda lack of trust in the professionals tasked with their care.

Supporting desistance

> **"There is little agreement on the definition and measurement of desistance from crime. Some see desistance as a permanent cessation of offending over several years, whilst others take an arguably more fluid definition of desistance, accepting that episodes of re-offending may occur." (MacNeill et al, 2012)**

Participants told us that they also wanted their sentence plan to incorporate courses to help them to address some of the root causes of their behaviour. For example, a course might currently focus on the act of drinking but not look at the underpinning reasons. Examining some of the underlying behaviours might be more effective in supporting desistance.

In a lot of cases, participants told us that they would benefit far more from the life skills courses they see advertised around the prisons, (parenting courses, cooking classes, money management, and courses to help them build soft skills), or at least in conjunction with the offending behaviour programmes they are required to do. They stated repeatedly that there are strings attached to the Offending Behaviour Programmes, if they do not complete the courses on their sentence plans then they cannot progress through the system, especially when talking about going to the open estate. Most would be willing to complete the targets set just so they could progress. When prompted to elaborate, responses such as, "bad timing", "already lost faith", "they should have come to me sooner", "I had to work out my own route to not coming back", highlighted common experiences.

> *"They can't be supporting me... they have never asked me about my plans"*

It was also recognised that providing examples and case studies from people who have lived experiences of imprisonment can help people to express themselves more openly. This was certainly the case with our interviews, and we hope there is scope for greater engagement with people who have successfully navigated a path of desistance. They can act not only as good

role models, but also as a useful comparison for people who might feel that society does not have a place for them.

Participants told us that they found communication much easier in person, rather than via the application process. Yet in some cases people would be happy to know that they were being heard and responded to:

> *"You can't really get your point across with only so many lines in the app"*

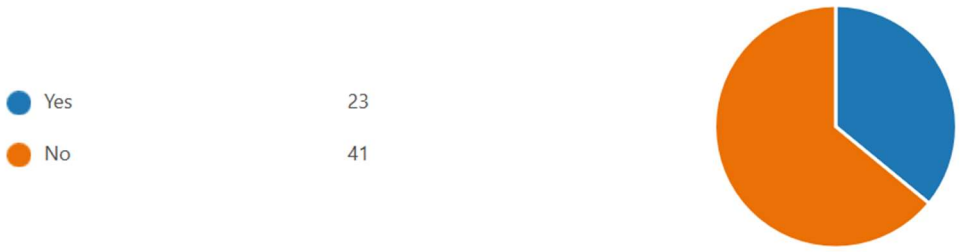
> *"They don't really care – and because I have been in and out of prison so many times, I doesn't even bother asking anymore."*

A participant who had felt able to 'open up' to his POM and talk through his sentence plan, then reported how OMU facilitated support for his mental health which he found beneficial. Another stated:

> *"Now that I've got housing I won't have to go out and sell myself, it's a big weight off me shoulders"*

This is a stark reality check, which we feel, drives home the need for consistency across the board. If sentence planning is done well, services are commissioned at the earliest point possible and time is taken to really understand an individual's needs then something as basic as somewhere to live will be the difference between someone not reoffending or placing themselves at great risk on a daily basis just to feed, house and clothe themselves, and ultimately returning to custody at some point in their future.

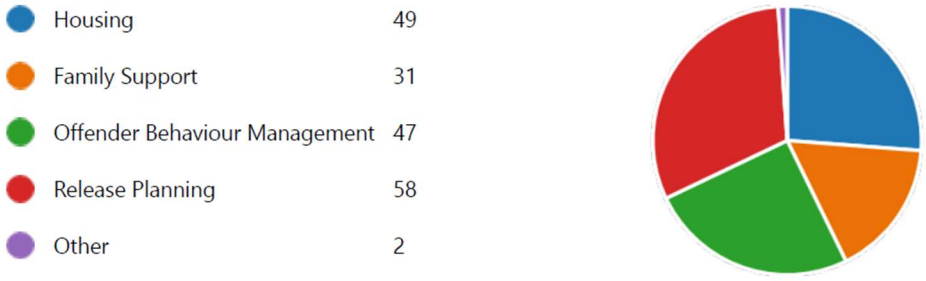
31. Do you feel the support from your POM is focused on your own circumstances and desistance?



The figures above are bleak. Although, we cannot claim the data to be representative of the wider prison population, this is how it is felt by 2 out of every 3 people we spoke to, clearly more needs to be done to change this perception.

Participants had a clear expectation of the support they wanted to receive and this ties in with what we know about the needs of people being released from prison.

12. What is your expectation of the type of support you should receive from OMIC ? (please tick all that apply)



However, many participants said that this support had not been forthcoming and that they had to seek it out themselves.

> *"You'd be better off without them [OMU], which is frustrating because if you're not proactive and you're quiet and you don't like to talk to other people about stuff then you ain't going to get anything you want."*
>
> *"There is no planning for release, I've had no plan for release. Everything I have got for release I've done myself."*
>
> *"Last time I was in prison, I was going into a hostel. I got a letter under my door the day before I was released saying I couldn't now go to the hostel and instead I was being released as homeless and the letter told me to present myself to the council the next day as homeless"*

Above all, it was the sense of being treated like a human being that people in prison valued.

> *"...she [POM] treats me like a human"*
>
> *"I know we're prisoners and they have authority but we should still be tret [sic] like normal people"*

Keeping others safe

> **Although the focus is often on offenders' risks and needs, they also have strengths and resources that they can use to overcome obstacles to desistance - both personal strengths and resources, and strengths and resources in their social networks. Supporting and developing these capacities can be a useful dimension of criminal justice social work (Maruna and LeBel, 2003, 2009).**

This question proved to be quite difficult for participants to answer and many of the responses related to self-harm or personal safety rather than the safety of others. This perhaps reflects a different focus of priorities between staff who have an objective target to keep people safe and prisoners who focus on their own experiences and pathways. This does not mean that people in prison are oblivious to the harmful effects of offending behaviour, but that individuals can only take responsibility for their own circumstances.

Covid has had a huge impact on mental health issues and has led to an increase in the number of people in prison with safety concerns, with a consequent increase in the requirement for welfare checks carried out by staff, who are already limited on resources and operating under the constraints of the Covid regime. This was prioritised by OMiC teams, sometimes at the expense of other essential work, for example the maintenance of detailed case notes. This means that connections with previous mental health issues were not easily made. An outcome of Covid is to have instilled the importance of welfare checks and this practice now needs to be incorporated as a core part of key work, making connections between previous trauma and future relationships and supervision arrangements.

We were keenly aware of the number of participants who reported previous experiences of trauma and were very conscious of our responsibility not to exacerbate this. We found that the lived experience of our team enabled us to speak to participants on a very personal level, with an empathy which meant we were often able to engage with people who had been labelled as "hard to reach".

***I 1.26* Is there evidence that the individual has experience of trauma that is relevant to their offending?**	**#**	**%**
Yes	46	48%
No	36	38%
Not clear	14	15%

Extract from HMIP demographic data

Keeping others safe inevitably depends on the extent to which an individual's behaviour can be predicted and (self) managed. People we spoke to had high expectations of the structures that should be in place to enable this.

One simple suggestion from the people we spoke to is, having a private space available for discussions with a key worker. Often these conversations take place through the cell door, which is not conducive to talking about sensitive issues or to raising concerns. One participant reported that his key worker had taken the time to sit with him and try to explain how anxiety works, to understand what might trigger his anxiety and work around that in order to help him be calmer in custody and address the root causes of his self-harming.

> *"[the OMiC service] keeps you safe, keeps other people safe – they catch up with you every week, every two weeks they see how you're going, what help you need, what support [you need]"*
>
> *'If it wasn't for my key worker, I'd have no support in here. She's good, she's a nice woman. She cares, man, she cares about the people on her watch. She's proactive, man"*

Resettlement needs

The development and maintenance not just of motivation but also of hope become key tasks for criminal justice social workers (Farrall and Calverley, 2006).

As people prepare for their release, they want to be given the relevant information, but many described being left "in a fog" and said that when they are told something, the reasons are often not given which can make it difficult to accept and comply. The transition from prison to community is an anxious time and is one where the handover from POM to COM alongside the relationship with the person leaving prison is crucial. Most people we spoke to said that what they really needed was clarity, around living arrangements and supervision appointments, as well as a clear understanding of what is required of them.

> *"You're being asked to jump through hoops that we can't necessarily achieve"*
>
> *"I just want to know exactly what I've got to do so I can do it"*
>
> *"My inside probation keeps moving the bloody goalposts… every time I ask her to support me for D-cat she comes with some next bullshit! …she has done this three times and could have give me all them things the first time. She don't want me to go nowhere"*

Participants reported that they were fearful of asking too many questions of their COM as they did not want to be perceived as difficult. But at the same time, they needed to understand what is required of them and there is an overriding concern about being recalled to prison, based on stories they have heard from others who have had this experience.

> *"You see me yeah, I don't wanna be hassling people to the point where they start saying I'm aggressive and all that, but I don't know how to get my dossier"*

People also drew strong links between successful release and social structures. Many said they needed help with resolving issues such as housing, ID and bank accounts. In prisons which operate a resettlement hub, this seems to be working well, although not all prisoners were aware of this facility. The concerns we have heard even where resettlement hubs are in place is the time at which the hub picks up individuals. For some people, 12 weeks is not long enough to resolve outstanding issues, and some are released (or transferred) without these interventions being completed which has also left some in a quandary. One person told us that he is on recall because he left the prison while waiting for his driving licence to be sent to him. He waited, as it would be his only form of ID and when he enquired was told it had been sent to the prison. However, when enquiring with the prison he was told that they had never received it. Without ID he couldn't get a bank account and which meant he couldn't get a job, a matter of weeks after that resulted in him offending again and ending up back in prison.

> *"I would expect the prison to have some sort of system where their office let's say, Mr... is being released in say eight weeks, right, we've got to contact social security and have them ready to talk to him on the phone, not all this, alright, you've been put on hold, press number one, press number two and all that crap, 'cos we haven't got time to stand on the phone, we get screamed at to get off the phone, get off the phone NOW...behind your door,"*

Many people are released to an Approved Premises. Some people told us they know the details about this as much as 3 months prior to release, which has helped them to plan and prepare. One person described how this certainty has helped him to identify how he will access further support services after he is released. However, others described more chaotic arrangements where they had been told what they could not do (eg live in the same area as family) and what they were not eligible for (eg place in an Approved Premises) but not what they could do or what help was available. Unsurprisingly this level of uncertainty prior to release contributed to high levels of anxiety and frustration.

For some people, the nature of their conviction has ongoing implications which are difficult to avoid. A participant with a conviction for arson reported having tried to access a range of services without success, resorting to sofa surfing, being surrounded by people committing more crime and not being able to extract himself from this lifestyle. He described being fed up of this, but not having the capacity to follow a different path.

> *"It feels like the system has got hold of me and won't let me go"*

Participants summarised this as a "topsy-turvy" situation. They often know what they need to give them the best chance of not reoffending but have to navigate their way through an obstructive system and find persuasive ways to receive this support. People said that they did not know who to ask or where to get help.

Conclusion

> **Since desistance is in part about discovering self-efficacy or agency, interventions are most likely to be effective where they encourage and respect self-determination; this means working with offenders not on them (McCulloch, 2005; McNeill, 2006).**

There are three overarching themes to come out of our conversations with people in prison. They link very succinctly to each other and denote an insight which is often not recognised by those charged with supervising, managing and caring for people in prison.

We believe however, that these themes can shape improvements to the OMiC model and overall concept. Whilst some continuity is required, there is scope and a clear need for change. The people we spoke to said that a few fundamental changes or inserts could revolutionise the current OMiC model. This would not make it perfect, however it would make it palatable and acceptable to those who are subject to it.

The Prisoner Voice

People in prison have a voice and it needs to be heard. We are aware that in some contexts this is already recognised and valued. Peer supporting is where it is most prevalent within a prison setting, it helps to minimise self-harm and violence, increase education and training and keep prisons safer. However, the voice of the individual does not feature in the individual's own journey through prison - sentence planning, risk reduction strategy and post-sentence planning (at least in terms of conditions etc).

We have heard from people in prison that they, and the professionals, will benefit greatly from them being more involved in these processes. It will have a multiple benefit in that relationships between POMs / COMS and people in prison will be positively formed and cemented at the earliest point which will ease tensions when difficult subjects are discussed, and necessary conditions imposed. Relationships matter. Both parties will gain a deeper understanding of mindsets and how the person in prison really wants to be perceived, how committed they are to desistence and will open the way for personal growth in the individual, based on the professionals' knowledge and expertise. It will also encourage individuals to take more responsibility for their own actions and behaviours, challenging them to live up to the trust and responsibility placed in them.

Creating and Building Identities

An overriding theme is the concern that people in prison do not want to be rehabilitated to any version of their former selves but want to create, build and maintain new identities - new versions of themselves, challenging them to take an active role in their own lives. This was stated verbatim at the start of this document, and it has been included again for two reasons. Firstly, the emphasis is necessary to reinforce that this is exactly how it needed to be raised and secondly there is no better way to say it. The ultimate goal of a sentence, as well as the punishment and retribution elements, is to release people safely back into society. This is so that they are no longer a danger to themselves or to others and are less likely to reoffend.

Most people in prison do not want to be stuck in a cycle of offending. They do not wish to be known or perceived as criminal with all the associated stigmas. People understand that while they are in prison and serving a sentence (in custody or in the community) such labelling will be an unfortunate part of that process. However, they wish to be able to shed these labels as soon as possible. If people are given the chance to attach new pro-social identities to themselves as early into their sentences as possible, then they are more likely to stick and be felt by the individual.

One Size Does Not Fit All

Being able to employ a model across such a diverse and complex population was always going to be a challenge, yet creating a model which has no room for flexibility, which is rigid, and immovable will only make it effective for some as opposed to all. The lack of communication between the OMiC teams of key workers (operational prison), POMs (non-operational prison) and COMs (probation community), is exacerbated by the different systems on which relevant information is held. This does not enable faith in the team from the individual subject to OMiC when one cannot see or gain access to the information recorded by another.

This goes back to the heart of what this report has highlighted, the sentence plan is the key to the information sharing and where other issues can be managed and mitigated. If there is a comprehensive, accurate and robust sentence plan completed and one that is done in conjunction with the individual, as opposed to or for, then regardless of any other issues, if a prisoner is moved or their POM, key worker or COM is replaced they will be able to stay on course and keep progressing to the ultimate finish line, to be released with the best chance of desisting and maintaining a prosocial lifestyle.

References

Farrall S and Calverley A (2006) Understanding desistance from crime, Crime and Justice Series, Open University Press: London

Farrall S (2002) Rethinking what works with offenders, Willan Publishing: Cullompton, Devon

Farrall S (2004) Social capital, probation supervision and desistance from crime, in Maruna, S and Immarigeon R (eds) After crime and punishment: ex-offender reintegration and desistance from crime, Willan: Cullompton

McCulloch T (2005) Probation, social context and desistance: Retracing the relationship, Probation Journal 52(1), 8-22

McNeill F (2006) A desistance paradigm for offender management, Criminology and Criminal Justice, 6(1), 39-62

McNeill, F., Farrall, S., Lightowler, C. and Maruna, S.. (2012) 'How and why people stop offending: discovering desistance', *IRISS Insights*, (April). https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/how-why-people-stop-offending-discovering-desistance

McNeill F and Whyte D (2007) Reducing reoffending: Social work and community justice in Scotland, Willan: Cullompton

Maruna S (2001) Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives, American Psychological Association Books: Washington DC

Maruna S and LeBel T (2003) Welcome home? Examining the 're-entry court' concept from a strengths-based perspective, Western Criminology Review, 4, 91-107

Maruna S and LeBel T (2009) Strengths-based approaches to reentry:Extra mileage toward reintegration and destigmatization, Japanese Journal of Sociological Criminology, 34, 58-80

Seligman, M (2011) Building Resilience. Harvard Business Review: https://hbr.org/2011/04/building-resilience

Weaver B and McNeill F (2007) Giving up crime: Directions for policy, Scottish Consortium on Crime and Criminal Justice: Edinburgh

Weaver B and McNeill F (2010) Travelling hopefully: Desistance research and probation practice, in Brayford J, Cowe F and Deering J (eds), What else works? Creative work with offenders, Willan: Cullompton