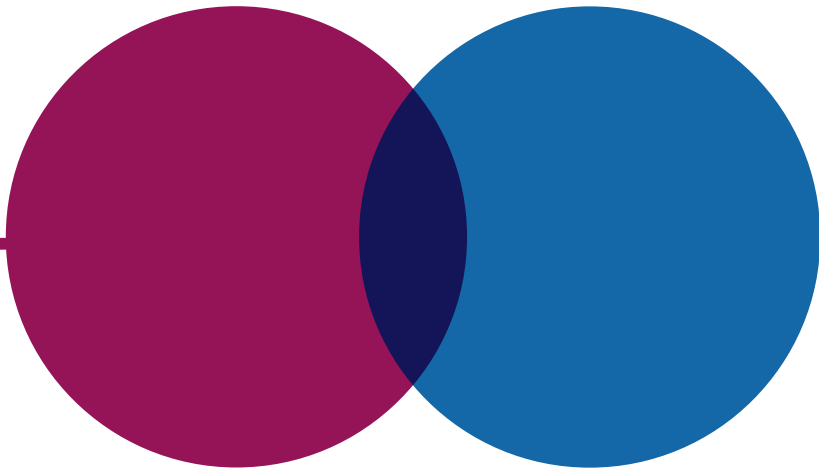




National Audit Office




REPORT

# Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending

Ministry of Justice, HM Prison & Probation Service

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SESSION 2022-23  
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HC 1282



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Ministry of Justice, HM Prison & Probation Service

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## Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed on 10 May 2023

This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act

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**Gareth Davies**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**  
**National Audit Office**

**9 May 2023**

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## Key facts

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**58,915**

number of prison releases  
in 2021-22

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**2 in 5**

adults released from custody  
between April 2020 and  
March 2021 reoffended in  
the 12 months following their  
release, on average

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**£16.7bn**

the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ's)  
estimate of the costs of  
reoffending to society across  
all adult offenders identified  
in 2016 (in 2017-18 prices)

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- 76%** of prison leavers between April 2022 and February 2023 were in settled accommodation after three months, compared with 75% in 2021-22
- 25%** of prison leavers between April 2022 and February 2023 were employed after six months, compared with 17% in 2021-22
- 37%** of prison leavers with a substance misuse treatment referral were engaged in community-based treatment within three weeks of release in 2021-22, compared with 38% in 2020-21
- £550 million** funding allocated to the MoJ in the 2021 Spending Review to reduce reoffending, although it is currently reviewing its allocations due to the government's Efficiency and Savings Review
- £340 million** maximum total value of HM Prison & Probation Service's 131 Commissioned Rehabilitative Services contracts, which started between June 2021 and October 2022
- 1,762** out of 6,158 probation officer roles were unfilled as at December 2022, a vacancy rate of 29%

# Summary

## Introduction

**1** Prisons and probation services have two core purposes: to carry out the sentences given by the courts; and to rehabilitate people in their care and supervision to help them lead law-abiding and useful lives and to protect the public. In 2021-22, there were 58,915 releases from prison in total (including some people released more than once, see paragraph 1.2). Between April 2020 and March 2021, 38% of adults released from prison reoffended in the 12 months following their release (four percentage points lower than the previous year). Reoffending has significant costs to society. This includes direct financial losses to victims and the costs that the criminal justice system must meet, from running police investigations and court hearings, to holding offenders in prisons and ensuring their effective supervision in the community. In 2019 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) estimated that reoffending across all adult offenders identified in 2016 had cost society £16.7 billion (in 2017-18 prices).

**2** HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) is an executive agency of the MoJ. It carries out sentences given by the courts, in custody and in the community. It is responsible for operating public sector prisons, overseeing private sector prisons and the Probation Service in England and Wales. When people leave prison, HMPPS aims to protect the public by managing any risks they pose, and to reduce the chances of them reoffending by supporting their resettlement in the community.

**3** The COVID-19 pandemic created significant challenges for prisons and probation services. In March 2020, to limit the spread of COVID-19 through the estate, prisons curtailed normal regimes and restricted prisoners' access to staff. HM Inspectorate of Prisons reported that some prisoners were locked in their cells for more than 22 hours a day. Probation providers delivered more of their work remotely and some support services were curtailed. In February 2022, all legal COVID-19 restrictions ended, but prisons and probation services have not yet fully returned to normal.

**4** Prison leavers are more likely to reoffend if they are not resettled into the community, for example if they have nowhere to live, no job or other income, and have poor continuity of healthcare. HMPPS and its partners aim to minimise the risk of this through their resettlement work. While in custody, staff should regularly assess prisoners to understand their needs and risks throughout their sentences. Before someone leaves prison, there should be handovers between prison- and community-based staff. During and following a prisoner's release, support should be available to help them address known barriers to successful resettlement. These include:

- **housing:** homelessness and rough sleeping among prison leavers is a long-standing problem, with at least 11% of prisoners in 2021-22 released homeless. Barriers to finding settled accommodation can include a shortage of housing stock, delays in obtaining benefits, the high up-front costs of renting, and landlords' unwillingness to house people with criminal records;
- **employment:** prison leavers often find it difficult to find a job as employers may be reluctant to employ them. Many prisoners have lower educational attainment than the general population, may lack the skills and confidence to apply for a job and often leave prison lacking basic paperwork to secure a job such as a form of identification or a CV; and
- **healthcare:** prisoners experience a disproportionately higher burden of illness and poorer access to treatment, as well as problems with substance misuse. In 2018, the MoJ reported that 45% of prisoners needed treatment for substance misuse.

**5** Many different organisations across government have responsibilities for prisoners' resettlement (**Figure 1**). In December 2020, the government established the Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Board (the Board) to identify opportunities to reduce reoffending.

**6** HMPPS has implemented two major reorganisations of probation services in the past nine years. In 2014, the government contracted out probation services for low- and medium-risk offenders to Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) who were also responsible for delivering resettlement services. In July 2018, the MoJ decided to terminate these contracts. We published several reports on these changes.<sup>1</sup> In May 2019, the MoJ announced its decision to create a new public sector Probation Service. In June 2021, around 7,000 staff from CRCs and their supply chains transferred either to the new service or to organisations it had commissioned to deliver services to offenders (Commissioned Rehabilitative Services, or CRS).

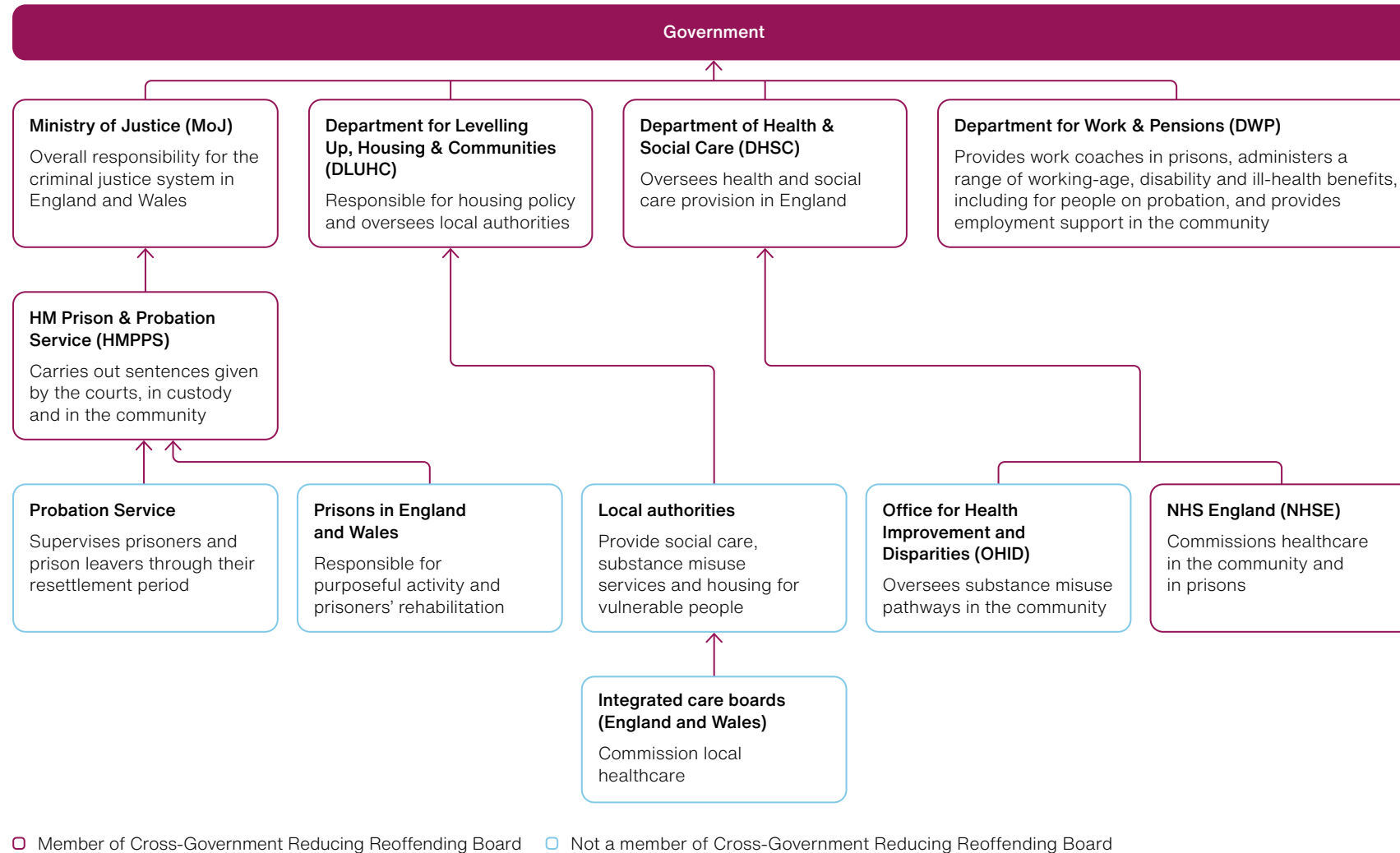
<sup>1</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Transforming Rehabilitation*, Session 2015-16, HC 951, National Audit Office, April 2016; Comptroller and Auditor General, *Investigation into changes to Community Rehabilitation Company contracts*, Session 2017-2019, HC 676, National Audit Office, December 2018; Comptroller and Auditor General, *Transforming Rehabilitation: Progress Review*, Session 2017-2019, HC 1986, National Audit Office, March 2019.



**Figure 1**

Responsibilities for prisoners' resettlement across government

Responsibility for providing resettlement support to prison leavers is shared across government



**Note**

1 Wales has distinct healthcare arrangements from England.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental strategies, outcome delivery plans and Accounting Officer System Statements

**7** By July 2022, HMPPS had awarded 131 CRS contracts to support offenders' needs for accommodation, education, training, employment, finance, benefits, debt, substance misuse and personal wellbeing. HMPPS expects its personal wellbeing contracts to help offenders in areas such as building positive relationships, developing legitimate lifestyles and engaging with community-based services (see Appendix Two for further information). In November 2021, the government announced £550 million of new investment over three years to reduce reoffending, of which £484 million is for adult offenders. Funding is subject to change as the MoJ considers the potential impacts of the government's Efficiency and Savings Review. HMPPS is investing the majority of its funds through a wide range of new discretionary services, initiatives and roles to complement its existing statutory service provision and improve prisoners' resettlement. The MoJ also secured £120 million of the £900 million allocated to government to deliver the government's 10-year drugs plan.

### **Scope of this report**

**8** This report examines:

- government's effectiveness in resettling prison leavers (Part One);
- the factors affecting service performance (Part Two); and
- what needs to be addressed to improve resettlement services in the future (Part Three).

**9** Our report examines resettlement arrangements for adult prison leavers in England and Wales with a focus on services relating to prison leavers' accommodation, employment and substance misuse treatment outcomes. We did not examine the resettlement of children and young people and did not review support for offenders sentenced in the community in detail.

**10** While we examine how HMPPS managed the transition of resettlement services to its new arrangements, we did not audit its overall approach to unifying probation services in detail. This report refers to both prison leavers and offenders as some of government's services and initiatives are available to all offenders, including those sentenced in the community. Where data are not captured for prison leavers specifically, we have used data across all offender types.

## Key findings

### Performance of offender management and resettlement services

**11 Available data indicate a decline in the quality of resettlement services in recent years.** HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation (‘the Inspectorates’) inspect prisons and probation services, respectively. Prison inspection ratings have declined in recent years. HM Inspectorate of Prisons rated 30% of prisons as ‘good’ for ‘rehabilitation and release planning’ in 2019-20 before falling to only 3% in 2021-22. No prison had been rated as ‘good’ for these services in 2022-23. On probation, HM Inspectorate of Probation changed its approach to inspection, so its ratings before and after unification are not directly comparable. It rated 13 of the 14 CRCs it inspected as ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’ for their resettlement services prior to unification. In 23 regional inspections following HMPPS’s creation of the new Probation Service, it has rated only one local delivery unit as ‘good’ for its service delivery. This service delivery rating covers prisoners’ resettlement but also a broad range of other offender management and supervision activities (paragraphs 1.7 to 1.9 and Figures 3 and 4).

**12 HMPPS is not consistently preparing prisoners for their release.** In 2022, HMPPS found that of 98 prisoners it sampled, almost one-fifth had no contact with their probation officer in the community before their release; handovers between prison and probation staff were poor; and almost one-third of prisoners’ resettlement plans did not sufficiently identify their needs. Its sample was taken during temporary restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic but provides “a factual assessment of current delivery” to help guide future improvements across the Probation Service. In November 2022, the Inspectorates found that HMPPS’s Offender Management in Custody model, an approach intended to improve coordination during prisoners’ sentences and resettlement in the community, was complex and poorly understood by staff. It also found that staff shortages were undermining public protection work, information-sharing and relationship-building (paragraphs 1.10 and 1.11).

**13 HMPPS cannot demonstrate that its new CRS contracts are making a positive difference to offenders, and its baseline audits revealed poor performance.**

HMPPS has awarded 131 CRS contracts to support offenders' rehabilitation, including prison leavers' resettlement. It holds providers to account against two administrative measures but does not systematically monitor all providers' activities or offenders' outcomes. HMPPS audited 28 of its highest-value contracts, which started in June 2021. It completed these between June and September 2022 and rated:

- the quality of the Probation Service's referrals to providers as 'amber/red' or 'red' in 25 contracts (89%), where delivery did not meet standards in 'some regards' or 'failed' to meet standards;
- the sufficiency of CRS providers' delivery to address offenders' needs as 'amber/red' or 'red' in 19 contracts (68%); and
- the quality of CRS providers' communication with probation staff as 'amber/red' or 'red' in 13 contracts (46%).

Common problems included: a lack of clarity on reasons for referrals; insufficient activities to meet offenders' complex needs; and inadequate assurance of the work providers had delivered caused by poor record-keeping and limitations in HMPPS's IT system. HMPPS identified good practice in some personal wellbeing contracts and the one women's services contract it audited. It has work underway to improve performance across its contracts. HMPPS acknowledges that there is limited evidence on whether its contracts are improving outcomes for offenders. It plans to complete evaluation work by February 2025 (paragraphs 1.3, 1.4, 1.27 to 1.29, 3.11 and Figure 9).

**14 The government's performance in improving prison leavers' outcomes linked to reducing reoffending has been mixed.**

HMPPS, the MoJ and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) monitor prison leavers' outcomes in areas including accommodation, employment and substance misuse treatment. Available data show a mixed picture, where accommodation outcomes have remained stable, employment outcomes have improved and substance misuse treatment outcomes have remained poor. For example, between April 2022 and February 2023:

- 76% of prison leavers were in settled accommodation after three months of release compared with 75% in 2021-22; and
- 25% of prison leavers were in employment after six months of release compared with 17% in 2021-22.

In addition, in 2021-22, 37% of prison leavers in England with a substance misuse treatment referral were engaged in community-based treatment three weeks after release, compared with 38% in 2020-21 (paragraphs 1.12, 1.24 and Figure 5).

**15 HMPPS does not know why different groups of prison leavers have very different resettlement outcomes.** HMPPS and the MoJ monitor how outcomes for prison leavers vary between groups. For example, in 2021-22: 8% of female prison leavers were employed after six months compared with 18% of male prison leavers; 11% of black or black British prison leavers were employed after six months compared with 18% of white prison leavers; and 16% of prisoners serving sentences of less than 12 months were homeless on release compared with 5% of those serving sentences of two years or more. HMPPS has not performed analysis to identify the causes of this variation (paragraph 1.13).

**16 HMPPS is introducing new approaches to improve outcomes for offenders, including prison leavers.** In July 2021, HMPPS launched a new accommodation service in five probation regions, to provide up to 84 nights of accommodation for offenders at risk of homelessness. By 16 February 2023, HMPPS had accommodated 5,210 offenders, mostly prison leavers. Early monitoring suggests outcomes for securing accommodation on the first night of release are better in regions with the service compared with those without it. HM Inspectorate of Probation reported that the service is working well, although securing accommodation once placements has ended remains difficult. By March 2023, HMPPS had introduced employment leads, responsible for improving prisoners' employability, in all eligible prisons. It is too early to know if prisons with an employment lead have helped to achieve better employment rates than prisons without one (paragraphs 1.17, 1.18, 1.20 and 1.23).

## Factors influencing performance

**17 HMPPS reorganised resettlement services in challenging circumstances, and it retained most staff during the transition.** HMPPS took a prudent approach in designing its new resettlement model, learning from previous arrangements. It clarified where CRCs' previous responsibilities for offender management and resettlement would sit in the future. HMPPS unified probation services quickly and in challenging circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ahead of unification, HMPPS did not understand how many staff were involved but now estimates that of the 748 staff who spent most of their time on resettlement work prior to unification, at least 78% (580) transferred to HMPPS following unification (paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3).

**18 Severe staff shortages, high caseloads and high sickness absences, particularly in the Probation Service, are negatively affecting support for prison leavers.** In December 2022, 1,762 out of 6,158 probation officer roles were unfilled, a vacancy rate of 29%. Across prisons and probation regions, there are high levels of sickness absence. In 2022, HMPPS found many probation staff were managing more than 70 cases, against a suggested case load of 30 to 60. For the probation officer grade in March 2023, 104 out of 113 of HMPPS's probation sub-regions with available data (92%) were operating at or above 100% of their operational capacity. Staff vacancies and high caseloads have had a detrimental impact on support for prison leavers. For example, essential handover meetings between prison and probation staff and prisoners did not happen as intended in around half of cases between April 2022 and January 2023 (paragraphs 2.6 to 2.9 and Figure 10).

**19 HMPPS awarded 110 new CRS contracts from the first day of unified probation services, prioritising the services it offered in the short term.** HMPPS took a phased approach to letting CRS contracts. It did so because it had tight deadlines and constrained internal resources to run the procurements and was concerned about prospective providers' capacity to bid for contracts during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, feedback from regional probation directors indicated that probation regions were better suited to procure some types of contracts given existing relationships and local variation. Therefore, HMPPS prioritised procuring 110 contracts centrally where it considered services should be available universally: accommodation; employment, training and education; personal wellbeing; and women's services. Probation regions have taken forward procuring remaining contracts. As at January 2023, eight and six of HMPPS's 11 probation regions (excluding Greater Manchester) have finance, benefits and debt and substance misuse contracts in place, respectively (paragraphs 1.3, 1.4 and Figure 14).

Work required to improve prison leavers' outcomes

**20 HMPPS has a clear vision for resettlement services and has plans to improve delivery, but it needs to align services better and improve communication with staff.** HMPPS's review of resettlement services in July 2022 concluded it had a clear vision for resettlement services. However, its plan to deliver that vision was not clear to staff and its complex and fragmented delivery model for resettlement did not support its vision. Some local staff reported finding it difficult to absorb the high volume of change communicated by the centre of HMPPS. HMPPS's subsequent improvement plans show that it has a clear understanding of the problems it needs to fix. However, given the many different MoJ and HMPPS teams responsible for resettlement, HMPPS needs to be clear with staff on how policies, projects and internal reviews align and contribute to improving outcomes (paragraphs 3.2 to 3.4).

**21 Building on its understanding of barriers to prison leavers' employment, HMPPS has introduced a range of new roles and initiatives.** Employment initiatives are primarily overseen by the New Futures Network, the team in HMPPS which facilitates contact between prisons and employers. The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) also provides support through its network of prison work coaches who can advise prisoners on employment and support them to make claims for Universal Credit. HMPPS found that identifying suitable candidates in prisons for interviews was a significant challenge to successful employment so has begun to introduce new initiatives such as a digital job matching system and dedicated specialists to actively find candidates for roles. Although the work is still at an early stage, HMPPS has made good progress in filling roles and establishing new functions. In addition, it told us emerging feedback is positive, with employers reporting they are finding it easier to employ prison leavers (paragraphs 1.21 to 1.23 and Figure 7).

**22 HMPPS, NHS England (NHSE) and DWP have been slow to improve the collection and sharing of prison leavers' data, which limits their ability to provide appropriate support and monitor outcomes.** HMPPS and NHSE have been slow to improve information-sharing arrangements despite recommendations from us and the Committee of Public Accounts in 2017. The NHS operates an informed consent approach, whereby patients must provide consent for their health information to be shared. Although current legislation does allow for some access, prison and probation staff have historically not necessarily known whether someone has been referred for drug treatment on release. DWP also does not collect data on the number of prisoners it has supported, the type of support it has provided or whether prison leavers found employment as a result. Moreover, DWP cannot track prisoner leavers' progression through the benefits system as its IT system does not have relevant identification markers (paragraphs 1.22, 2.11 and 2.12).

**23 The Board has not fully clarified accountability arrangements for improving prison leavers' outcomes.** Establishing the Board was a positive development to improve joint working and information-sharing. The Board has identified which departments have a role in improving accommodation and employment outcomes, but not substance misuse. It has not set out a detailed governance structure or performance reporting arrangements across departments' work. Given the substantial investment of taxpayers' money and the complex systems underpinning government's delivery arrangements, clarifying accountability arrangements would help departments to improve coordination and embed stronger incentives for improvement (paragraph 3.13).

**24 The MoJ and HMPPS have started to evaluate the impact of the new initiatives but HMPPS needs to do more to understand the effectiveness of its investment to improve prisoners' employment outcomes.** HMPPS does not yet have a mature evidence base for the impact of its new areas of investment, and its evaluation plans may not provide the evidence it needs. For example, on its new accommodation service (paragraph 16), HMPPS plans to compare outcomes with control groups in late 2023 to test the initiative's impact. Its evaluation plans for employment initiatives are still in the early stages. It currently has limited employment-related impact evaluations planned to determine whether recent improvements are a consequence of its efforts or would have happened anyway (paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10).

**25 While HMPPS has a good understanding of the overall costs of probation services, it does not have a robust estimate for the costs of resettlement services.** Isolating the costs of resettlement services is challenging. Services are delivered in prisons, but also by the Probation Service and CRS providers in the community, where probation officers and CRS providers have wider responsibilities beyond resettlement. HMPPS cannot distinguish the separate costs of supporting prison leavers only. Without this, it cannot demonstrate whether it is using public money effectively or identify potential efficiency savings (paragraphs 3.16, 3.17 and Figure 13).

**26 HMPPS needs to plan for higher demand for resettlement services as the prison and probation populations are forecast to increase significantly.** As at end March 2023, the prison population was around 84,400. The MoJ forecasts that the prison population could reach between 93,100 and 106,300 by March 2027, increases of 10% and 26%. This is primarily due to the impact of police officer recruitment and longer prison sentences for serious offenders. The increased prison population will have a follow-on effect for the Probation Service, which will experience more demand for resettlement services. The MoJ's central estimate in its recent modelling work indicates that, while projections are uncertain, the Probation Service may need to supervise around 5,900 more prison leavers starting their supervision in the community by March 2025, an increase of around 10% compared with caseloads in September 2022 (paragraphs 3.18 and 3.19).

## **Conclusion**

**27** One of the core purposes of prisons and probation services is to prepare prisoners for release effectively and ensure their smooth resettlement into the community. However, HMPPS and its partners across government do not do so consistently. Within prisons, HMPPS does not provide sufficient activities to prepare prison leavers and those it does provide are not at the required standard. The Inspectorates have reported a significant deterioration in the quality of release planning and rehabilitation services in recent years. Moreover, HMPPS does not have good enough data on its CRS contracts to know whether they are making a positive difference.



**28** We observed a strong commitment among prison and probation staff to turning prison leavers' lives around, but performance has been hampered by staff shortages and high workloads. Accountability arrangements and dependencies between departments' work are unclear. In addition, data collection and information-sharing on prisoners' needs and outcomes, particularly on substance misuse treatment, is fragmented.

**29** HMPPS has had a turbulent few years, both because of its reorganisations and because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on prisons and probation services. Consequently, performance has suffered significantly. However, it has now started to take some welcome steps to address unmet need. It needs to focus on improving the performance of its core services and develop its understanding of which initiatives make the greatest contribution to reducing reoffending. Resettlement services are under significant pressure now, and this looks likely to increase. Responding to higher demand soon means senior leaders will need to be prepared to take difficult decisions on whether some elements of resettlement support may need to be de-prioritised.

## **Recommendations**

**30** These recommendations are intended to support government in improving accountability and coordination, developing the evidence base and managing higher demand for resettlement services.

- a** To improve accountability, government bodies on the Board with primary responsibility for improving prison leavers' accommodation, employment and substance misuse treatment outcomes – MoJ, HMPPS, DWP, NHSE, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and Department of Health & Social Care – should engage with relevant stakeholders and publish a report in early 2024-25 setting out:
- clear roles and responsibilities in the resettlement system across government departments, including governance and oversight arrangements;
  - interdependencies between departments' work;
  - their consideration of developing shared performance measures between departments to embed stronger incentives for improvement; and
  - progress on improving coordination and resolving barriers to collecting and sharing data.
- b** To evidence the impact of its Commissioned Rehabilitative Services, HMPPS should consider implementing a revised approach to its future set of contracts so that it enables providers to systematically report on outcomes achieved for offenders. Where appropriate, HMPPS should verify providers' reporting on outcomes achieved for offenders through validating supporting evidence.

- c** By April 2024, HMPPS and DWP should complete analysis to understand overlaps and gaps in services using high-quality data on what support its local staff are providing to prison leavers. They should use this information to provide assurance that government's delivery of employment, training and benefits support services do not unnecessarily overlap and exploit opportunities to achieve savings.
- d** By November 2023, MoJ and HMPPS should finalise evaluation plans for HMPPS's initiatives to improve prison leavers' access to employment. Where feasible, they should commit to comparing outcomes with control groups and use data and intelligence on trends in local and regional labour markets to isolate the impact of its initiatives.
- e** By April 2025, HMPPS should complete analysis to understand the causes of variation in resettlement outcomes for prison leavers across different demographic groups and areas of the country. It should use this analysis to inform future changes to resettlement services.
- f** Commencing by November 2023, MoJ and HMPPS should develop a long-term strategy to manage increased demand for resettlement services. This should be informed by their understanding of local prison- and community-based probation teams' capacity to accommodate higher caseloads. HMPPS should use this information to identify which areas of resettlement activity could be de-prioritised, streamlined or re-sequenced.

# Part One

## Effectiveness of resettlement services

**1.1** This part sets out HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) approach to resettling prison leavers, including its contracts to provide rehabilitative services. We examine:

- the performance of HMPPS-led resettlement services, including by prisons and probation services;
- government performance relating to prison leavers' accommodation, employment and substance misuse treatment; and
- the performance of Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers who provide support to offenders, including prison leavers.

### Approach to resettlement

**1.2** HMPPS is responsible for operating public sector prisons, overseeing private sector prisons and delivering probation services in England and Wales. In 2021-22, there were 58,915 prison releases,<sup>2</sup> while as at end March 2023, the prison population was around 84,400. In December 2019 (in Wales) and June 2021 (in England), HMPPS completed its structural changes to probation services following its termination of Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) contracts. It unified probation services, including prisoners' resettlement services, bringing this into a newly formed public sector Probation Service comprising 12 probation regions led by regional probation directors.

**1.3** The voluntary and private sectors still have a role in supporting offenders' rehabilitation. Ahead of unification, HMPPS awarded 110 CRS contracts which started on the first day of its new system. The contracts covered accommodation; employment, training and education; personal wellbeing; and tailored services for women.<sup>3</sup> Probation staff can draw on the services provided through these contracts to support offenders they are supervising, including prison leavers.

2 This figure counts the number of releases rather than the number of prisoners released. Where an individual has been released from prison more than once in 2021-22, they will be counted once for each release. This could include, for example, a release following a prisoner's return to prison for breaching their supervision requirements in the community. We selected this figure for comparability with other data we have presented in this report. This does not align with HMPPS's official statistics which do not include all types of releases.

3 HMPPS expects its personal wellbeing contracts to help offenders in areas such as building positive relationships, developing legitimate lifestyles and engaging with community-based services (see Appendix Two for further information).

**1.4** HMPPS originally planned to let more contracts from the first day of unified probation services. It procured contracts in challenging circumstances. It took a phased approach because it had tight timescales and limited internal capacity to run the procurements and it was concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organisations' capacity to bid for contracts. HMPPS undertook analysis to inform how it could prioritise and streamline its approach. It decided to defer letting contracts to support prison leavers with their finance, benefits and debt needs, and substance misuse needs. It did so because regional probation directors reported that these needs could be met through existing services in some areas. In addition, it identified that probation regions would be better placed to commission services given local variation. Therefore, HMPPS prioritised procuring contracts centrally where it considered services should be available universally: accommodation; employment, training and education; personal wellbeing; and women's services. Probation regions have taken forward procuring remaining contracts. HMPPS started to award these contracts from May 2022. As at January 2023, HMPPS has awarded the following number of contracts across 11 of its probation regions (excluding Greater Manchester): nine finance, benefits and debt contracts across eight probation regions; and 11 dependency and recovery contracts across six regions. The 131 CRS contracts HMPPS awarded by July 2022 have a maximum total value of £340 million. Figure 14 in Appendix Two sets out the scope of these contracts.

**1.5** Resettlement work should be carried out to prepare prisoners for their release by addressing the factors which influence reoffending. Resettlement planning should start from prisoners' first day in custody and continue throughout their sentences and after their release during their ongoing supervision in the community. HMPPS regards managing prisoners' sentences effectively as an important part of resettlement. In 2018, it introduced a new sentence management approach, Offender Management in Custody (OMiC), to improve coordination during prisoners' sentences, their resettlement in the community and engagement between prison- and community-based probation staff and prisoners and with each other. Delivering resettlement services places high demands on staff and the wider organisations they work with. They must understand prison leavers' individual needs and risks and tailor available support to meet them. HMPPS's intended resettlement process therefore relies on the contributions and effective coordination of many teams and roles.

**1.6** **Figure 2** on pages 20 and 21 sets out HMPPS's intended resettlement process for longer-sentenced prisoners. For prisoners serving shorter sentences, HMPPS aims to prioritise resettlement activities, given time constraints. Teams and roles include:

- **pre-release teams** – responsible for assessing and identifying prisoners' resettlement needs on their entry into custody, working with community offender managers and providing a point of contact for HMPPS's new CRS providers to engage with prisoners;

- **key workers** – prison officers responsible for supporting and coaching prisoners throughout their custodial sentences;
- **prison offender managers** – staff in prisons responsible for assessing prisoners’ risks and needs, planning prisoners’ sentences and providing a link to supervision in the community through handovers to community offender managers; and
- **community offender managers** – probation officers in the community responsible for planning prisoners’ resettlement, including making referrals to CRS providers to address their rehabilitative needs.

## Performance of resettlement services

**1.7** HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation (‘the Inspectorates’) carry out inspections to improve prisons and probation services, respectively. HM Inspectorate of Probation has found many examples of the Probation Service not carrying out activities required to deliver good outcomes for prison leavers, such as meeting their resettlement needs; proportionate contact between probation staff and prisoners; and considering their risk of harm. HM Inspectorate of Prisons ratings of prisons show deteriorating performance since HMPPS unified probation services in June 2021:

- In 2022-23, as at 31 March 2023, 97% of prisons were rated as ‘not sufficiently good’ or ‘poor’ for ‘purposeful activity’ compared with 63% in 2018-19.
- In 2018-19, 13% of prisons were rated as ‘good’ for ‘rehabilitation and release planning’ and 30% in 2019-20, but only 3% were rated as ‘good’ in 2021-22 and none have been rated ‘good’ in 2022-23, as at 31 March 2023 (**Figure 3** on pages 22 and 23).

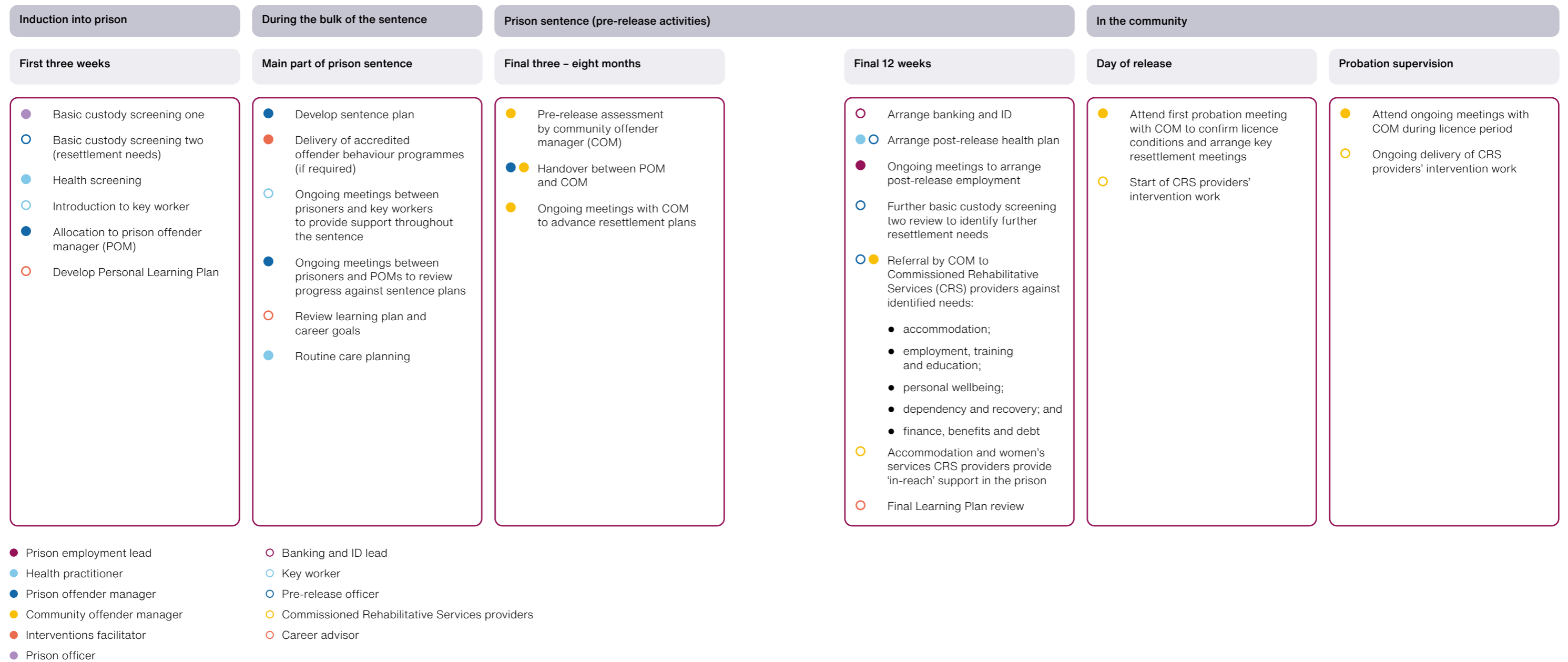
**1.8** Prior to unification, HM Inspectorate of Probation rated 13 out of 14 CRCs as ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’ for their resettlement services. It issued an overall rating of ‘requires improvement’ to 10 out of 13 CRCs, with the remaining three rated as ‘good’.<sup>4</sup>

**1.9** In 2021 HM Inspectorate of Probation changed the methodology it used to assess probation services and no longer reports on resettlement services specifically. It now issues a ‘services’ rating which covers a broad range of activities to supervise and support offenders, including resettlement. Therefore, inspection ratings pre- and post-unification are not directly comparable. Out of 23 inspections following unification only one Probation Delivery Unit was rated as ‘good’ for its service delivery (**Figure 4** on page 24).

<sup>4</sup> It did not issue an overall rating in one inspection in 2019-20 as it cancelled part of its fieldwork due to COVID-19 safety measures.

**Figure 2**  
HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) intended resettlement process for prisoners sentenced for ten months or more

HMPPS's intended resettlement process relies on the contributions and coordination of many roles

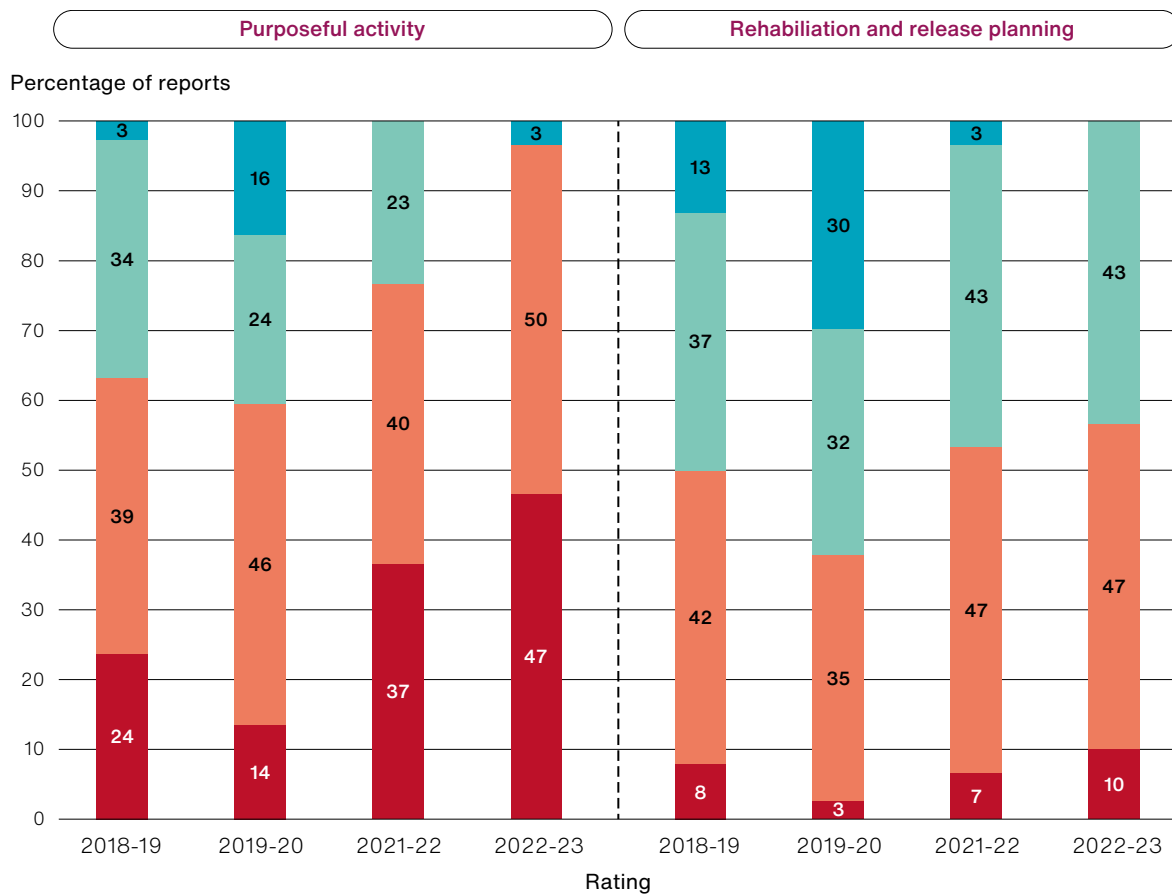


Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Prison & Probation Service documents

**Figure 3**

HM Inspectorate of Prisons' ratings for 'purposeful activity' and 'rehabilitation and release planning', 2018-19 to 2022-23

HM Inspectorate of Prisons has rated higher proportions of prisons as 'poor' or 'not sufficiently good' for 'purposeful activity' and 'rehabilitation and release planning' from 2021-22



	Number of reports				Number of reports			
	2018-19	2019-20	2021-22	2022-23	2018-19	2019-20	2021-22	2022-23
Good	1	6	0	1	5	11	1	0
Reasonably good	13	9	7	0	14	12	13	13
Not sufficiently good	15	17	12	15	16	13	14	14
Poor	9	5	11	14	3	1	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>

**Figure 3** *continued*

## HM Inspectorate of Prisons' ratings for 'purposeful activity' and 'rehabilitation and release planning', 2018-19 to 2022-23

**Notes**

- 1 Each inspection report includes ratings ('poor', 'not sufficiently good', 'reasonably good' and 'good') for each of HM Inspectorate of Prisons' four healthy prison tests. These are its assessments of the treatment of prisoners.
- 2 'Purposeful activity' assesses whether prisoners are able, and expected, to engage in activities likely to benefit them such as education, skills and work activities.
- 3 'Rehabilitation and release planning' assesses whether prisoners are: supported to maintain and develop relationships with their family and friends; helped to reduce their likelihood of reoffending; helped to manage their risk of harm effectively; and prepared for their release into the community.
- 4 HM Inspectorate of Prisons inspects every prison at least once every five years, although it expects to inspect most prisons every two to three years. It did not issue ratings in 2020-21 due to COVID-19 safety measures.
- 5 Our analysis is based on inspection reports released by 12 April 2023 and excludes prisons designated solely for young offenders under the age of 18.
- 6 In 2019-20, HM Inspectorate of Prisons issued more than one rating for rehabilitation and release planning' at HMP Hewell. We included both ratings in our analysis.
- 7 Prior to 2021, HM Inspectorate of Prisons used 'resettlement' as its fourth healthy prison test for women's prisons. We include the ratings issued for 'resettlement' under 'rehabilitation and release planning'.
- 8 Years shown are financial years.
- 9 Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Inspectorate of Prisons reports

**1.10** In early 2022, HMPPS audited 98 prison leavers' cases to assess offender management and resettlement performance, rating delivery against service standards as 'amber/ red'.<sup>5</sup> HMPPS stated that the purpose of this work was not to criticise but "to provide a factual assessment of current delivery" to help guide future improvements across the probation service. Its sample reflected changes to delivery arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic and cases which spanned the transition to unified probation services (paragraph 2.2). It found:

- 19% of prisoners had no pre-release contact with their community-based probation officer;
- in 29% of cases where there was a pre-release sentence plan or resettlement plan, these plans did not sufficiently identify the prisoner's resettlement needs or plan adequately to address them;
- in more than half of relevant cases, the prisoners' finance, benefits and debt needs remained unmet on release; and
- prisoners' supervision in prison and case handovers between prison- and community-based probation staff were poor.

5 HMPPS's sample represented a small proportion of prison leavers released in 2021-22 (0.2%). However, it included prisoners sentenced to 10 months or more released across the closed male prison estate and into supervision across all probation regions. It included prison leavers with a range of risk levels released in late November 2021 so may not be representative of the proportion of releases across sentence types and lengths.

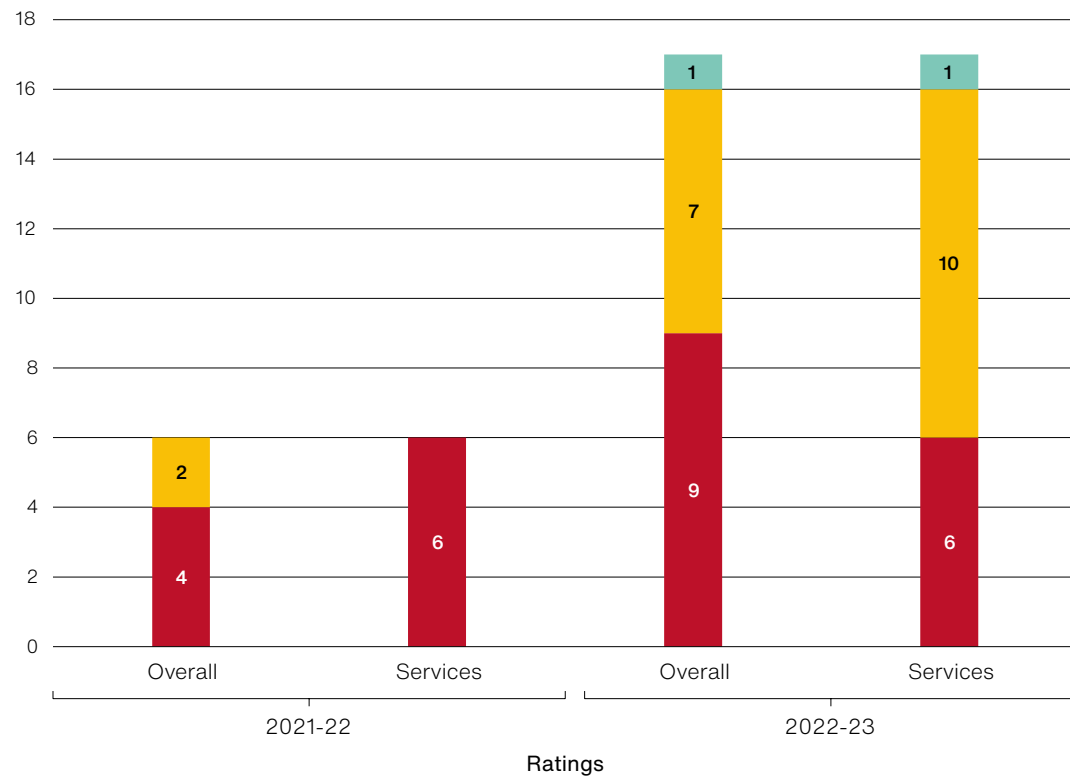


**Figure 4**

HM Inspectorate of Probation’s inspection ratings for the Probation Service, 2021-22 and 2022-23

All but two of 46 ‘overall’ or ‘services’ ratings issued by HM Inspectorate of Probation in the past two years have been ‘inadequate’ or ‘requires improvement’

Number of inspection reports



■ Good ■ Requires improvement ■ Inadequate

**Notes**

- 1 HM Inspectorate of Probation inspects each region of the Probation Service annually. There are 12 regions across England and Wales, and each region has Probation Delivery Units (PDUs). In each region it conducts a regional review, and then inspects one-third of the PDUs.
- 2 HM Inspectorate of Probation rates all services as either ‘outstanding’, ‘good’, ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’.
- 3 The ‘services’ measure covers a range of offender management and support activities for offenders, including resettlement work. The ‘overall’ rating is a composite of the ratings given across nine core measures (leadership, staff, services, information and facilities, court work, assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, reviewing).
- 4 Our analysis is based on inspection reports published by 31 March 2023.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Inspectorate of Probation reports

**1.11** In November 2022, the Inspectorates found that HMPPS's OMiC approach was complex and poorly understood by staff. They highlighted that prisoners' needs were not always catered for, staff shortages undermined delivery and there were shortfalls in public protection work, information-sharing and relationship-building between prison staff, probation officers and prisoners.<sup>6</sup> HMPPS has launched improvement work to address the report's findings.

## **Performance against accommodation, employment and health outcomes**

**1.12** HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) monitor prison leavers' accommodation and employment outcomes while the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) monitors prison leavers' engagement in substance misuse treatment in the community in England. Data demonstrate a mixed picture of performance in improving prison leavers' outcomes in these areas. Between 2021-22 and April 2022 to February 2023, there was a:

- one percentage point decrease in the proportion of prison leavers housed on the first night of release, from 87% to 86%;
- one percentage point increase in the proportion of prison leavers in settled accommodation three months after release, from 75% to 76%;
- four percentage point increase in the proportion of prison leavers in employment six weeks after release, from 13% to 17%; and
- eight percentage point increase in the proportion of prison leavers in employment six months after release, from 17% to 25%.

In addition, between 2020-21 and 2021-22 there was a one percentage point decrease in the proportion of prison leavers with a referral for substance misuse treatment in treatment within three weeks of release, from 38% to 37% (**Figure 5** on pages 26 and 27). Latest data, covering November 2021 to October 2022, shows a slight improvement to 39%.

**1.13** The MoJ and HMPPS monitor how outcomes for prison leavers vary between groups. There are significant variations in employment and accommodation outcomes between different groups of prison leavers. For example, in 2021-22:

- 8% of female prison leavers and 18% of male prison leavers, and 11% of black or black British prison leavers and 18% of white prison leavers were employed after six months; and
- 16% of prisoners serving sentences of less than 12 months were homeless on release compared with 5% of those serving sentences of two years or more.

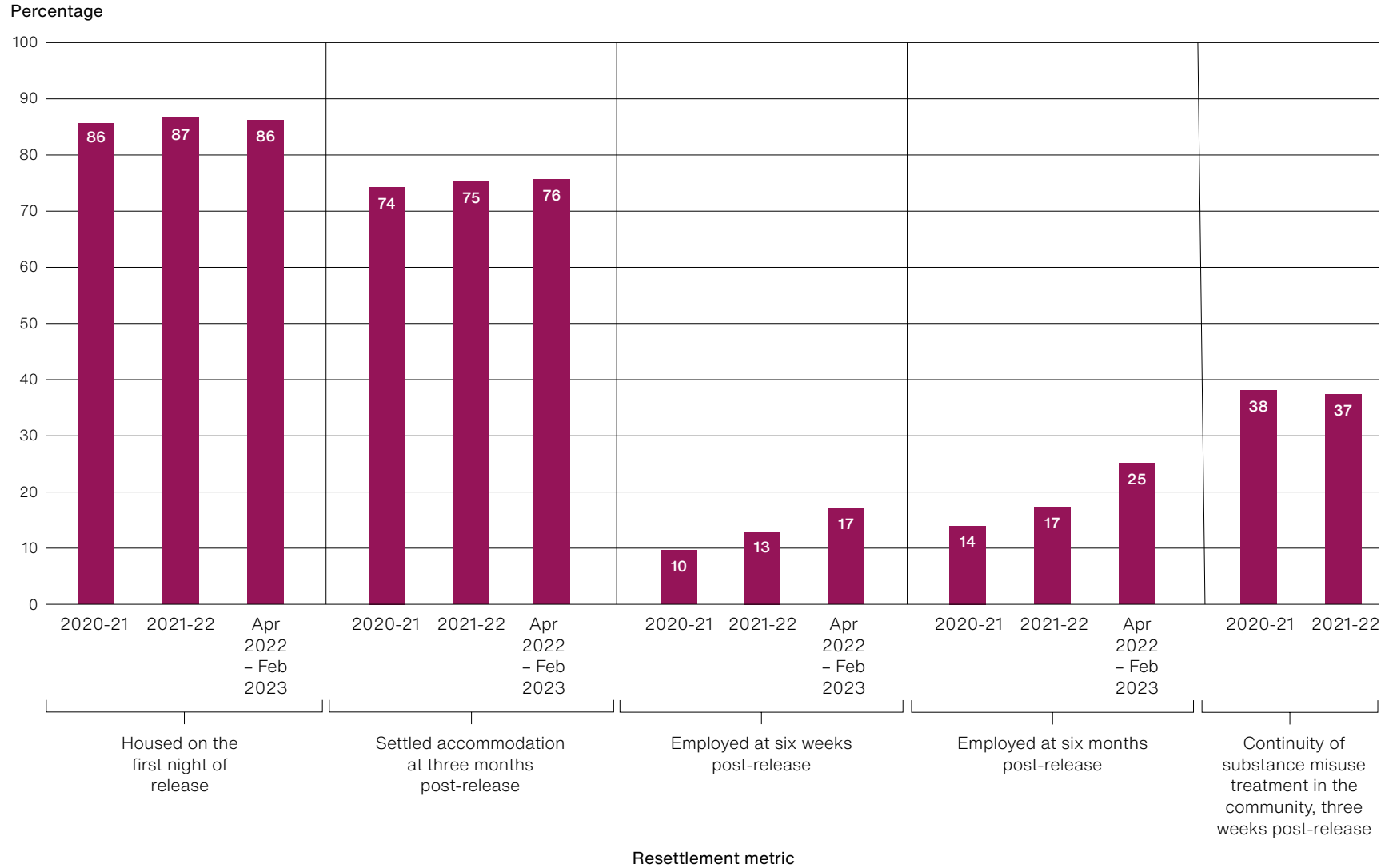
HMPPS has not analysed the causes of this variation and told us this is an area for development.

<sup>6</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *Offender Management in Custody – pre-release*, November 2022.

**Figure 5**

National performance on key resettlement metrics for prison leavers, April 2020 to February 2023

Available data show a mixed picture, where accommodation outcomes have remained stable, employment outcomes have improved and substance misuse treatment outcomes have remained poor



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**Figure 5** *continued*

National performance on key resettlement metrics for prison leavers, March 2020 to February 2023

**Notes**

- 1 Accommodation and employment data cover England and Wales and exclude cases where HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) does not know the status of prison leavers due to missing data. For example, in 2021-22, it did not know accommodation outcomes for 3,741 out of 44,272 prison leavers (8.5%) and it did not know employment outcomes for 3,750 out of 38,401 prison leavers (10%).
- 2 We sourced 2020-21 and 2021-22 data for accommodation and employment from the Ministry of Justice's Community Performance official statistics. We sourced April 2022 to February 2023 data from HMPPS's latest internal performance data. These data are management information and are subject to change in future official releases.
- 3 We sourced substance misuse data from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID). Data covers England only.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ministry of Justice, HM Prison & Probation Service and Office for Health Improvement and Disparities data

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**1.14** HMPPS sets probation regions targets relating to offender management and resettlement. Since unification, performance against the targets has been highly variable but poor overall. In 2021-22, two probation regions (London; and Kent, Surrey and Sussex) did not achieve any of their offender management and resettlement-related targets. Wales and Greater Manchester were the highest-performing regions, with both meeting all their targets in 2021-22. Between April 2022 and January 2023, no probation regions met all their targets (**Figure 6** overleaf). Only two probation regions out of 12 met targets for prison leavers being housed on release (Greater Manchester; Kent, Surrey and Sussex) and only one met its target for prison leavers being in settled accommodation after three months (Wales).

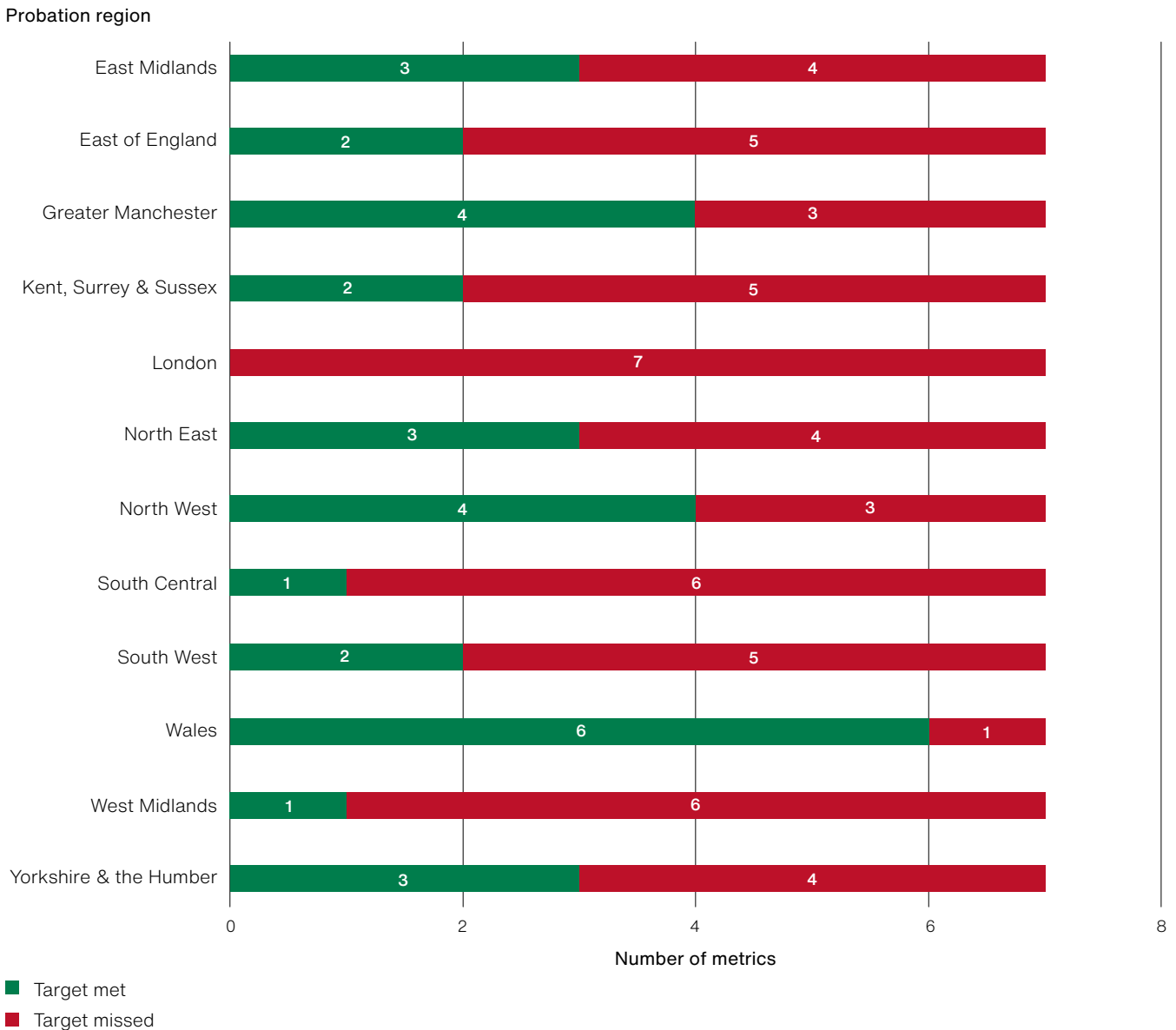
**Accommodation**

**1.15** Accommodation outcomes for prison leavers have remained stable. From April 2022 to February 2023, 76% of prison leavers were in settled accommodation after three months, compared with 75% in 2021-22. Prisoners serving shorter sentences are more likely to be homeless on release (paragraph 1.13).

**Figure 6**

Probation regions’ performance against offender management and resettlement targets, April 2022 to January 2023

**Probation regions’ performance against targets has been highly variable across England and Wales but poor overall**



**Notes**

- 1 The Probation Service comprises of 12 probation regions led by regional probation directors.
- 2 HM Prison & Probation Service sets each probation region year-to-date targets across each metric. Probation regions meet the targets if their year-to-date performance meets or exceeds the targets.
- 3 The seven metrics included in this figure are: employed at six weeks post-release; employed at six months post-release; housed on first night of release; initial appointment for releases; monthly supervision appointments offered to offenders; prison offender manager – community offender manager handover; settled accommodation at three months post-release.
- 4 Six of the seven metrics apply to prisoners or prison leavers. One of the seven metrics (monthly supervision appointments offered to offenders) applies to offenders sentenced in the community as well as prisoners or prison leavers.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Prison & Probation Service performance data

**1.16** Through its work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and pilot work with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC), HMPPS identified the need for a new type of accommodation support for offenders, including prison leavers. HMPPS acted quickly at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to introduce an emergency temporary accommodation scheme to protect prison leavers' health.<sup>7</sup> HMPPS identified in its evaluations of the scheme and through its Offender Accommodation Pilot that many prison leavers, particularly those with complex needs, were not ready to sustain tenancies immediately on release and benefit from transitional accommodation and support.<sup>8</sup>

**1.17** In July 2021 HMPPS expanded its accommodation services by launching a Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) service in five probation regions.<sup>9,10</sup> Suppliers provide up to 84 nights of accommodation and individual support for prisoner leavers and offenders leaving approved premises or bail accommodation who are at risk of homelessness and accept a placement. Due to the broader range of offenders who can accept placements in CAS3 accommodation, outcomes data are not directly comparable to regional accommodation targets for prison leavers. As at 16 February 2023, HMPPS had accommodated 5,210 offenders, mostly prison leavers, of which 4,420 had exited the service. The most common accommodation outcomes where HMPPS has data were:

- 1,630 offenders had moved into settled accommodation (38%);
- 1,320 offenders were either returned to prison for breaching their supervision requirements or were imprisoned for a new offence (31%);
- 490 offenders were in transient accommodation (12%); and
- 393 offenders were homeless or rough sleeping (9%).<sup>11</sup>

**1.18** Early monitoring data show mixed outcomes for offenders' accommodation in CAS3 regions compared with non-CAS3 regions. By January 2023 the proportions of offenders:

- housed on the first night of their release was 7.6 percentage points higher in CAS3 regions versus non-CAS3 regions; and
- accommodated at three months following their release was 0.7 of a percentage point lower in CAS3 regions versus non-CAS3 regions.

7 Across the two phases of the scheme delivered between May 2020 and May 2021, HMPPS referred 10,486 prisoners and secured accommodation for 5,680, but did not secure accommodation or know outcomes in 30% and 16% of cases, respectively.

8 The Offender Accommodation Pilot is a joint pilot between HMPPS and DLUHC. Through the pilot, eligible prison leavers from HMP Bristol, HMP Leeds and HMPPS Pentonville were offered accommodation alongside other support.

9 Yorkshire and Humberside; North West; East of England; Kent, Surrey and Sussex; and Greater Manchester.

10 HMPPS provides accommodation in approved premises in the community for high-risk offenders (CAS1) and bail accommodation in the community for alleged offenders on bail, prisoners on Home Detention Curfew and prison leavers serving their period of supervision in the community who are at risk of being returned to prison due to loss of accommodation (CAS2).

11 We did not verify HMPPS's outcomes data. HMPPS draws data from a monitoring spreadsheet and is dependent the quality of data inputted by staff.

**1.19** Due to HMPPS's changes to its probation regions before and following unification, it is not possible to determine if its current CAS3 regions were already more likely to offer better opportunities for offenders to find settled accommodation, for example due to a greater availability of social housing. HMPPS plans to evaluate its CAS3 service to test its impact, including comparing outcomes with control groups (paragraph 3.9).

**1.20** In its March 2023 inspection of post-release support for prison leavers, HM Inspectorate of Probation found that CAS3 has worked well. However, it found that lengthy referral processes reduced the time available for staff to engage directly with offenders, while securing accommodation once placements had ended remains difficult.<sup>12</sup>

## **Employment and benefits support**

**1.21** The Prison Strategy White Paper set an ambitious vision to improve prisoners' and prison leavers' access to employment.<sup>13</sup> Using funds from its Spending Review 2021 allocation, HMPPS has recently introduced a range of services, initiatives and roles intended to equip prisoners with the skills and support needed to find and apply for work. Most initiatives are overseen by the New Futures Network, a team within HMPPS which facilitates links between prisons and employers (**Figure 7**). New employment initiatives are still at an early stage but HMPPS told us emerging feedback on its initiatives is positive, with employers reporting they are finding it easier to employ prison leavers.

**1.22** HMPPS and the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) also work together to ensure prison leavers have access to benefits support. A key part of DWP's responsibilities is providing dedicated work coaches in prisons who can advise prisoners on employment and support them to make claims for Universal Credit.<sup>14</sup> However, DWP does not collect data on the number of prisoners supported by coaches, the type of support provided or employment outcomes they helped to achieve. In addition, DWP cannot track prison leavers' progression through the benefits system as its IT system does not have relevant identification markers. We identified some overlap in the remit of roles and organisations in supporting prison leavers, for example:

- both HMPPS's CRS providers for finance, benefit and debt support and DWP's work coaches have responsibilities to support prison leavers' access to benefits; and
- HMPPS's New Futures Network and DWP's work coaches both have responsibilities to engage with local employers to help secure employment opportunities for prisoners.

<sup>12</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation, *Offender Management in Custody – post-release*, March 2023.

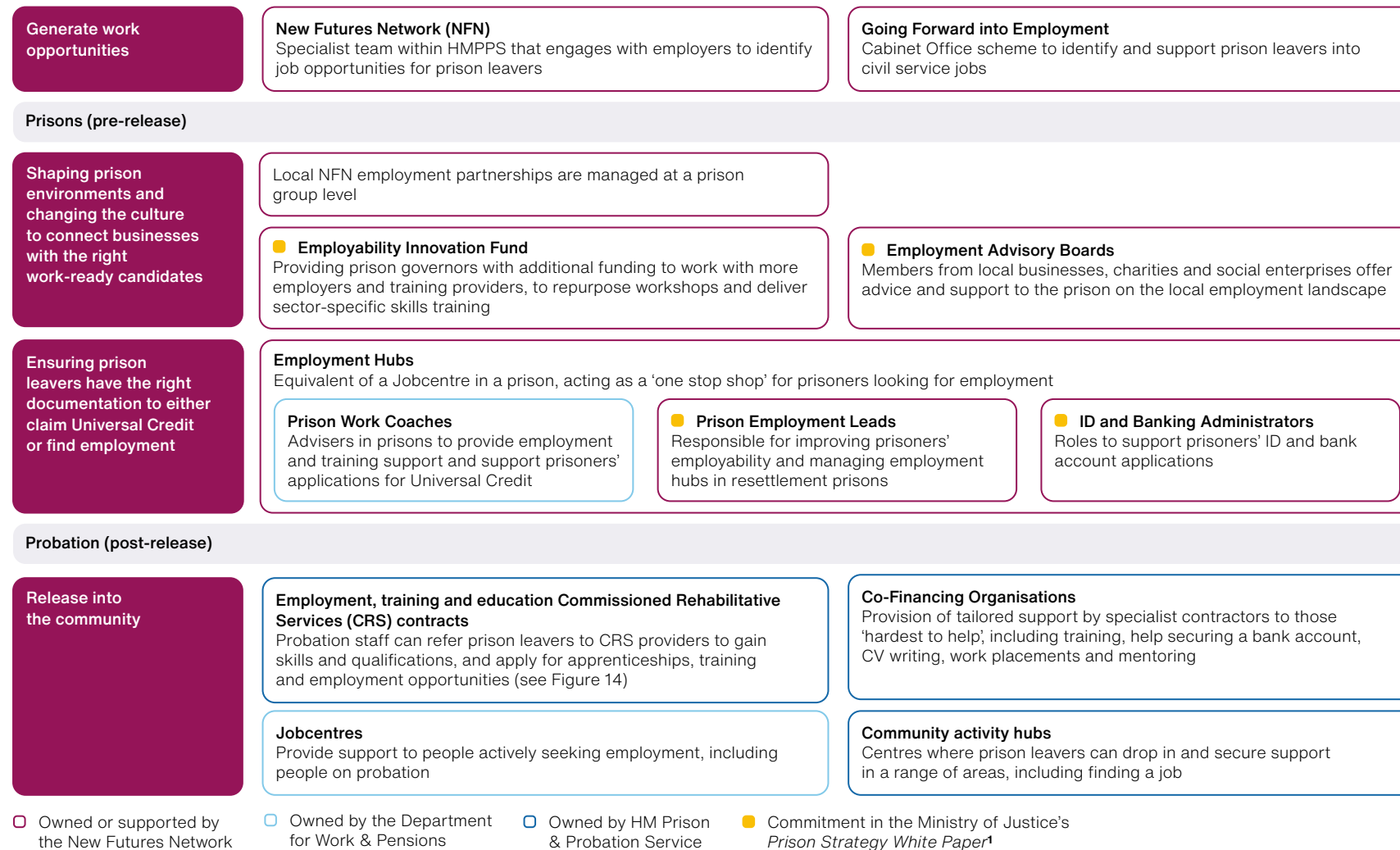
<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Justice, *Prisons Strategy White Paper*, CP 581, December 2021.

<sup>14</sup> As at September 2022, DWP had 163 full-time equivalent (FTE) prison work coaches in England and Wales. DWP told us that this includes coaches who undertake work in Jobcentres in the community to support ex-offenders. DWP spent around £8.3 million on deploying its coaches in 2021-22 in England, Wales and Scotland; this figure includes around 27 FTE coaches in Scotland.

**Figure 7**

Overview of employment, training and benefits support initiatives to support prison leavers' resettlement

The New Futures Network within HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) leads on most of the government's initiatives designed to support prison leavers' access to employment, training and benefits



**Note**

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice, *Prison Strategy White Paper*, CP 581, December 2021.



**1.23** HMPPS identified multiple barriers to successful employment, including finding suitable candidates for jobs and prisoners' access to ID and bank accounts. It is launching a digital job-matching tool, and from January 2022, it began to introduce prison employment lead (PEL) and ID and banking administrator (IDBA) roles in prisons. PELs have overall management responsibility for employment hubs in prisons (equivalent to Jobcentres in the community) while IDBAs process prisoners' ID and bank account applications. It is too early to know if prisons with an employment lead have helped to achieve better employment rates than prisons without one, but early data covering April to December 2022 show 11% of prisoners released from a prison with a PEL secured a positive employment outcome after six weeks, compared with 9% of prisoners released from a prison without one. HMPPS has made good progress in filling roles and establishing new functions. As at 13 March 2023 the New Futures Network reported that across the 92 prisons in scope:

- 90% (83 prisons) have Employment Hubs;
- 100% of prisons have a PEL; and
- 98% (90 prisons) have an IDBA.

### **Supporting substance misuse treatment**

**1.24** The continuity of prison leavers' drug treatment in the community has remained low for many years. In 2021-22, 37% of prison leavers in England with a substance misuse treatment referral were engaged in community-based treatment three weeks after release (38.1% in 2020-21). There have been marginal improvements: between 2015-16 and 2021-22, there was a seven percentage point increase in the proportion of prison leavers' engaging with treatment, from 30% to 37%.

**1.25** A cross-government partnership agreement for England covering 2022-2025 aims to reduce reoffending and to support access to, and continuity of, care including throughout the prison estate and in prison leavers' resettlement into the community. HMPPS's focus on substance misuse treatment to support resettlement is part of a broader set of initiatives aiming to improve prisoners' health and is linked to the cross-government 2021 drugs strategy *From harm to hope*.<sup>15</sup> HMPPS's projects cover a range of initiatives, including prison safety, reducing the availability of drugs in prisons, collecting better data on drug availability and continuity of prison leavers' care in the community. Through its Drug Recovery Wings and Incentivised Substance Free Living Units in prisons, which provide support for prisoners abstaining from drugs or their prescribed substitutes, HMPPS hopes to reduce the need for ongoing substance misuse treatment in the first place. **Figure 8** sets out HMPPS's substance misuse initiatives that focus primarily on prison leavers' resettlement into the community. Several important projects are still in early stages: as at March 2023, recruitment was still underway for Health and Justice Partnership co-ordinators; and HMPPS's project in partnership with NHS England (NHSE) to improve information-sharing between community treatment providers and the Probation Service is significantly delayed.

<sup>15</sup> HM Government, *From harm to hope: a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives*, December 2021.

**Figure 8**

Overview of HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) initiatives to improve prison leavers' continuity of substance misuse treatment in the community

HMPPS's initiatives to improve prison leavers' continuity of substance misuse treatment in the community are in their early stages

Service or initiative	Description	Implementation status
Recruiting new drug strategy lead roles	New roles in male Category C and women's prisons to provide strategic and operational direction within the prison to reduce substance misuse and develop relationships between HMPPS, drug and alcohol agencies, and external commissioners <sup>1</sup>	As at March 2023, HMPPS had filled 18 roles and plans to recruit a further 18 posts in 2023-24 . Its plans to fill remaining posts are still in development
Recruiting new health and justice partnership coordinator roles	New probation role to oversee support for prison leavers to access appropriate support and treatment once released, with a focus on continuity of care	As at March 2023, HMPPS had 32 staff in post against a target of 45. Five out of 12 probation regions were fully staffed. HMPPS aims to have all staff in post by September 2023
Telemedicines	Procurement of laptops so prisoners can attend virtual appointments with community treatment providers ahead of their release	As at February 2023, HMPPS planned to procure 650 laptops or tablet computers by March 2023. This builds on 419 devices procured by NHS England (NHSE) or jointly between NHSE and HMPPS by March 2021. HMPPS has not collected data on how prisoners and providers have utilised the availability of laptops, including the number of appointments held
Probation Notification and Actioning Project	Project to enable drug treatment providers in prisons to notify the Probation Service of referrals they have made to providers in the community. Planned benefits include consistency of information-sharing and maximising the Probation Service's role in supporting prison leavers' engagement with treatment	HMPPS aimed to introduce the service in England on 1 April 2022. The project is significantly delayed due to lengthy negotiations with NHS regional commissioners on the legal basis of sharing prison leavers' health information without their consent. In March 2023, the senior responsible officer for the project approved the rollout of the service in one pilot area (South Wales) in April 2023. HMPPS has not identified when it expects the service to be available nationally
Commissioned Rehabilitative Services dependency and recovery contracts	Support to enhance access and sustain engagement with substance misuse treatment services, achieve controlled dependency or abstinence, and provide additional support where disorders occur alongside mental ill health and other complex needs	As at January 2023, HMPPS had awarded 11 contracts across six out of 11 probation regions (excluding Greater Manchester)

**Note**

<sup>1</sup> Category C prisons are training and resettlement prisons. They provide prisoners with the opportunity to develop skills to find work and resettle back into the community on release.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Prison & Probation Service documents

**1.26** In a thematic inspection of community-based drug treatment and recovery work in 2021, HM Inspectorate of Probation and the Care Quality Commission reported that the arrangements for prison leavers are complex. This is because they involve drug services in prisons and local authorities' provision in the community, and probation-led services in prisons and the community. All of these services need to communicate and share information effectively to inform resettlement and treatment plans, while working with prison leavers to provide motivational support. The report found that too many prison leavers were “falling through the net”, with those with opiate addictions not always released into the community with substitution medication when needed.<sup>16</sup> They found that of the 25,255 prison leavers released with a treatment need in England in 2019-20, only 8,708 (34%) picked up treatment in the community while only 2,931 (12%) were retained in treatment for at least 12 weeks. There is also wide geographical variation. For example, in August 2022, 57% of prison leavers in the north-east of England successfully engaged with treatment but only 21% did in London.<sup>17</sup>

### **Performance of Commissioned Rehabilitative Services contracts**

**1.27** HMPPS set explicit requirements that services in its CRS contracts should not duplicate existing provision or involve basic signposting to wider services without appropriately tailored support. It expects providers to provide support such as advocacy or helping people to navigate access to community services. HMPPS does not systematically monitor all providers' activities or offenders' outcomes as it opted to hold providers to account through two administrative targets: their timeliness in holding appointments and their completion of action plans for service users. HMPPS's internal review of resettlement (paragraph 3.2) and our case study visits confirmed staff members' frustrations with the limited range of services available, and with a lack of monitoring and reporting on prison leavers' outcomes secured through the contracts.

**1.28** HMPPS focused its detailed assurance activity on 28 of its highest-value contracts, which started in June 2021. It completed audits of services delivered in the first year of the contracts between June and September 2022. Overall, its audits have confirmed ineffective early performance against service standards and contractual requirements. It rated:

- the **quality of the Probation Service's referrals to CRS providers** as 'amber/red' or 'red' in 25 contracts (89%) where delivery did not meet standards in 'some regards' or 'failed' to meet standards. Problems included a lack of clarity on the reasons for referrals, missing information on individuals' risks, and gaps in information on individuals' personal circumstances;

<sup>16</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation and Care Quality Commission, *A joint thematic inspection of community-based drug treatment and recovery work with people on probation*, August 2021.

<sup>17</sup> HMPPS does not have data on prison leavers' engagement with substance misuse treatment in Wales.

- the **sufficiency of CRS providers' delivery to address offenders' rehabilitative needs** as 'amber/red' or 'red' in 19 contracts (68%). Providers who performed poorly often relied on basic signposting to other services, their activities did not meet offenders' complex needs and there was minimal evidence of structured activities taking place; and
- the **quality of CRS providers' communication with probation staff** as 'amber/red' or 'red' in 13 contracts (46%). For poorly performing contracts, providers' feedback lacked detail on what they had delivered and what, if any, progress offenders had made. HMPPS also identified that limitations in its IT system for the contracts affected providers' ability to record and monitor progress effectively (**Figure 9** overleaf).

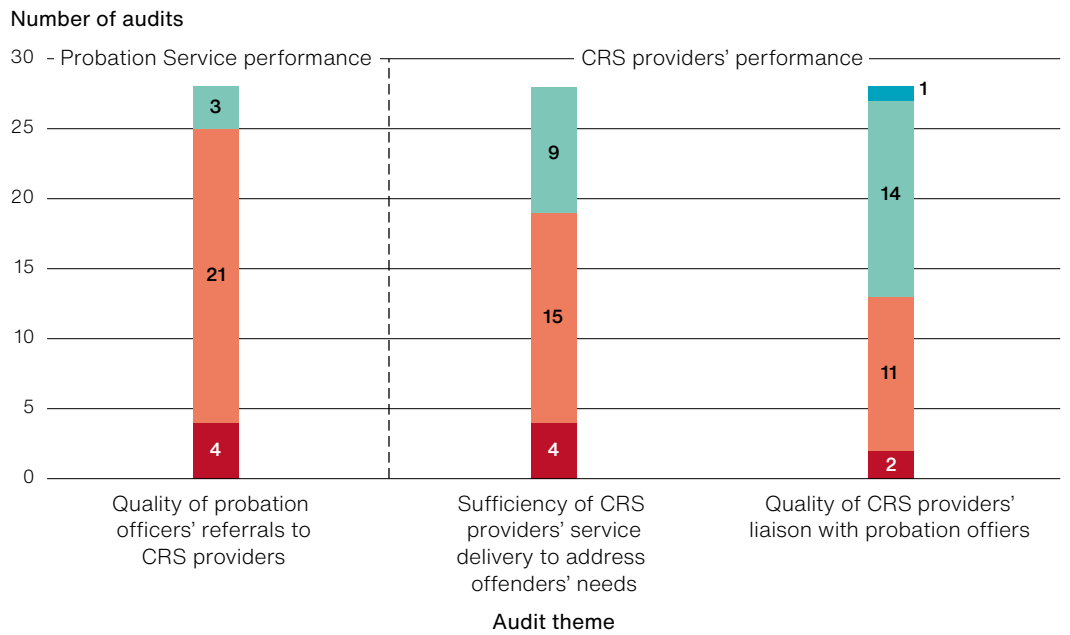
**1.29** Despite mixed performance overall, HMPPS identified good practice in some personal wellbeing contracts, where providers responded well to offenders' needs through a range of interventions. It also identified a 'broadly positive' picture in the women's contract it audited, where services took account of women's specific needs and were supported by clear records of activity and progress. HMPPS's audits have provided a baseline to assess future performance and it has not imposed financial penalties on providers. After two years, up to 5% of annual payments will be at risk if performance is poor. HMPPS has established a forum to coordinate performance improvement activities. It is working with its regional contract management teams and suppliers to improve performance and compliance across its contracts, including:

- issuing new guidance and training to probation staff to improve the quality of referrals;
- undertaking regular audits of cases to ensure providers improve recording practices to evidence the work they have delivered and outcomes achieved;
- reviewing providers' delivery models against contractual commitments; and
- improving collaboration between probation staff and providers to raise awareness of available services.

**Figure 9**

HM Prison & Probation Service’s (HMPPS’s) baseline operational audit ratings for its highest value Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) contracts, June – September 2022<sup>1</sup>

**The Probation Service’s and audited CRS providers’ early performance in the contracts has been poor overall**



**Audit rating key**

- Service delivery meets or exceeds quality standards
- Service delivery sufficiently meets quality standards
- Service delivery does not meet quality standards
- Service delivery fails to meet quality standards in significant areas

**Notes**

- 1 HM Prison & Probation Service completed its audits between June and September 2022. Its audits examined service delivery in the first year of the contracts which started in June 2021.
- 2 HM Prison & Probation Service audited: 18 personal wellbeing contracts; six employment, training and education contracts; three accommodation contracts; and one women's services contract.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Prison & Probation Service documents

## Part Two

### Factors affecting performance

**2.1** In this part we examine the main factors which have had an impact on the government's performance in resettling prison leavers as set out in Part One, including:

- the transition of resettlement services;
- staff shortages and high workloads;
- sharing prisoners' data; and
- the IT systems to support resettlement.

#### **Transitioning resettlement services**

**2.2** HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) undertook a major reorganisation of probation services during the COVID-19 pandemic but its approach to resettlement services was under-developed. Before transitioning probation services to its unified model in June 2021, HMPPS published a target operating model to articulate the design of the new service. HMPPS met demanding timescales for the transition in the challenging operational period during the COVID-19 pandemic. HM Inspectorate of Probation found that HMPPS had taken necessary steps to ensure the continuity of offenders' supervision. However, it found that HMPPS's workstream to transition resettlement services was under-developed and resettlement staff were not clear about their future roles in the new probation regions.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation, *A thematic review of work to prepare for the unification of probation services*, May 2021.

**2.3** HMPPS took a prudent approach in designing its new resettlement model by applying learning from previous arrangements. It clarified where Community Rehabilitation Companies' (CRCs') previous responsibilities for offender management and resettlement work would sit in the future, including across pathways such as accommodation, employment and health. However, it identified that, in some cases, work formerly undertaken by CRCs was not factored into its final design, for example where CRCs delivered work beyond the terms of their contracts. Effective service transitions require good data and information on what needs to be transferred to new arrangements. However, ahead of transition, HMPPS did not establish a baseline of the number of staff involved. Based on analysis in November 2022, which has limitations, HMPPS now estimates that of the 748 staff who spent most of their time on resettlement work in May 2021 prior to unification:

- 580 (78%) transferred to HMPPS following unification;
- 110 (15%) did not feature in HMPPS's transfer data, but HMPPS expected this group to transfer to Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers; and
- 58 (8%) did not feature in HMPPS's transfer data where it expected this group to transfer to HMPPS following unification.<sup>19</sup>

**2.4** Before unification, CRCs provided resettlement support to remand prisoners, those who are awaiting trial or sentencing. Remand prisoners can face some of the same barriers to resettlement as sentenced prisoners. HMPPS considered services for remand prisoners ahead of its unification of probation services and opted to provide limited support for this group. HMPPS has begun varying its CRS contracts for integrated services for women, and services for men, including accommodation and finance, benefit and debt contracts, to improve support for remand prisoners.

**2.5** Following unification, resettlement is working in different ways in different regions. While some aspects of the new resettlement model were mandatory, regional probation directors had flexibility to adjust delivery to suit local circumstances. HMPPS found regions that kept their existing resettlement teams in place during transition have reported better working relationships. However, in some prisons, resettlement teams were reduced or removed and not properly replaced. Support for prisoners serving short sentences also varies. HMPPS's aim is for dedicated teams in each probation region to provide more flexible and prompt support to those serving 10 months or less in prison. By March 2023 the Wales probation region had fully established short sentence teams as part of its "early adopter" model, while in England implementation was in progress in nine regions, one region had paused implementation due to staffing pressures and one region had not started implementation due to staffing pressures.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Individual percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding. HMPPS used manually collected data to calculate its estimates, which it did not quality-assure. There was variation in the job titles used by CRCs which increases the potential for inconsistent classification. HMPPS's analysis is based on staff which it identified spent the majority of their time on resettlement activities. It told us that this analysis does not include some staff who spent some of their time supporting resettlement activities.

<sup>20</sup> HMPPS implemented early adopters of short sentence teams in some regions to identify learning to inform its longer-term approach.

## Staff shortages and high workloads

**2.6** When we last reported on probation services in 2019, we found that severe staff shortfalls and high workloads in the former National Probation Service were constraining delivery. The staffing position remains acute and although the number of probation officers has increased following unification in June 2021, the number of unfilled roles has also increased. In December 2022, 1,762 out of 6,158 probation officer roles were unfilled, a vacancy rate of 29% (**Figure 10** overleaf).

**2.7** Both the prison and probation services faced resourcing issues and high levels of sickness absence:

- In 2021-22, 8% of probation officers left the service, the highest level in the last six years, and in 2020-21 their sickness absence was 64% higher than the civil service average.
- In 2021-22, 15% of prison officers left the service, the highest level in the last six years; and in 2020-21 sickness absence was 126% higher than the civil service average.

**2.8** As a result of these staff shortages, HMPPS is not completing all the resettlement work that it recognises is essential. HMPPS's audit of 98 cases and feedback from 15 service managers confirmed many of their probation staff were managing more than 70 prison leaver cases at a time, against a suggested case load of 30 to 60. Between April 2022 and January 2023, the required case handover meeting between prison and probation staff and prisoners did not happen as intended for around half of prison leavers.<sup>21</sup> In 2022-23, an HMPPS review found 14 out of 27 key events in the resettlement process were not routinely happening.

**2.9** HMPPS recognises that its staff are working above the recommended capacity. To understand capacity, HMPPS measures workloads as a proportion of available staff resources. For the probation officer grade in March 2023, 104 out of 113 (92%) probation sub-regions with available data were operating at or above 100% capacity. The 2022 Civil Service People Survey results show the Probation Service scores lower than the median civil service benchmark score on all but one of the key measures (**Figure 11** on page 41), although its relative performance has improved since 2021. Despite these challenges, we observed a strong commitment among staff to improve prison leavers' outcomes in our case study visits.

**2.10** HMPPS, recognising that resignation rates are increasing, is carrying out exit interviews to understand the reasons behind this. It reports that pay and lack of career progression are the key recurring themes. HMPPS has implemented a multi-year pay deal for probation staff through to 2024-25 and told us it hopes this will improve retention rates. HMPPS is also exploring introducing a possible geographic allowance so it can target areas where the labour market is very competitive or where there are particularly high workloads or poor retention rates.

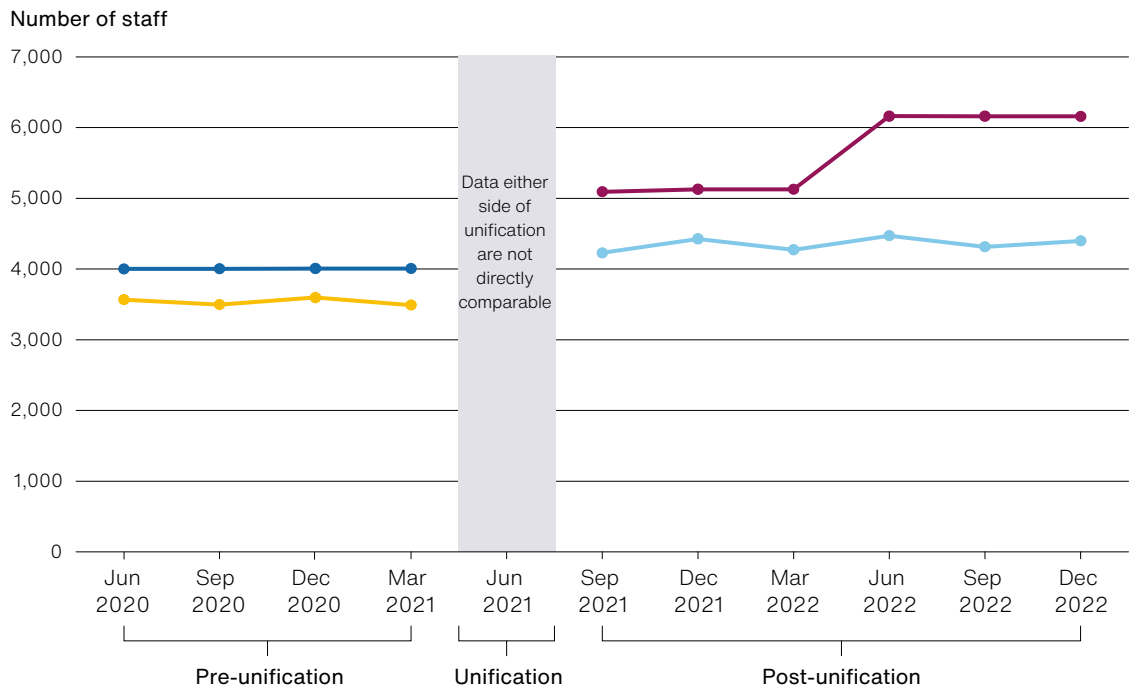
<sup>21</sup> For the handover meeting to meet HMPPS's standards, all three parties must be present and the meeting should take place within four weeks of the prison leavers' allocation to a community offender manager.



**Figure 10**

Probation officers: comparison between staff in post and required staffing, June 2020 to December 2022

The number of probation officers HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) required grew following its unification of probation services in June 2021. However, the gap between required and actual staff levels also grew



**Probation Service**

● Required staffing	5,092	5,126	5,126	6,162	6,160	6,158
● Staff in post	4,228	4,425	4,272	4,470	4,314	4,397

**National Probation Service**

● Required staffing	4,000	4,002	4,007	4,007		
● Staff in post	3,556	3,496	3,597	3,489		
Difference	434	506	411	518	864	701

**Notes**

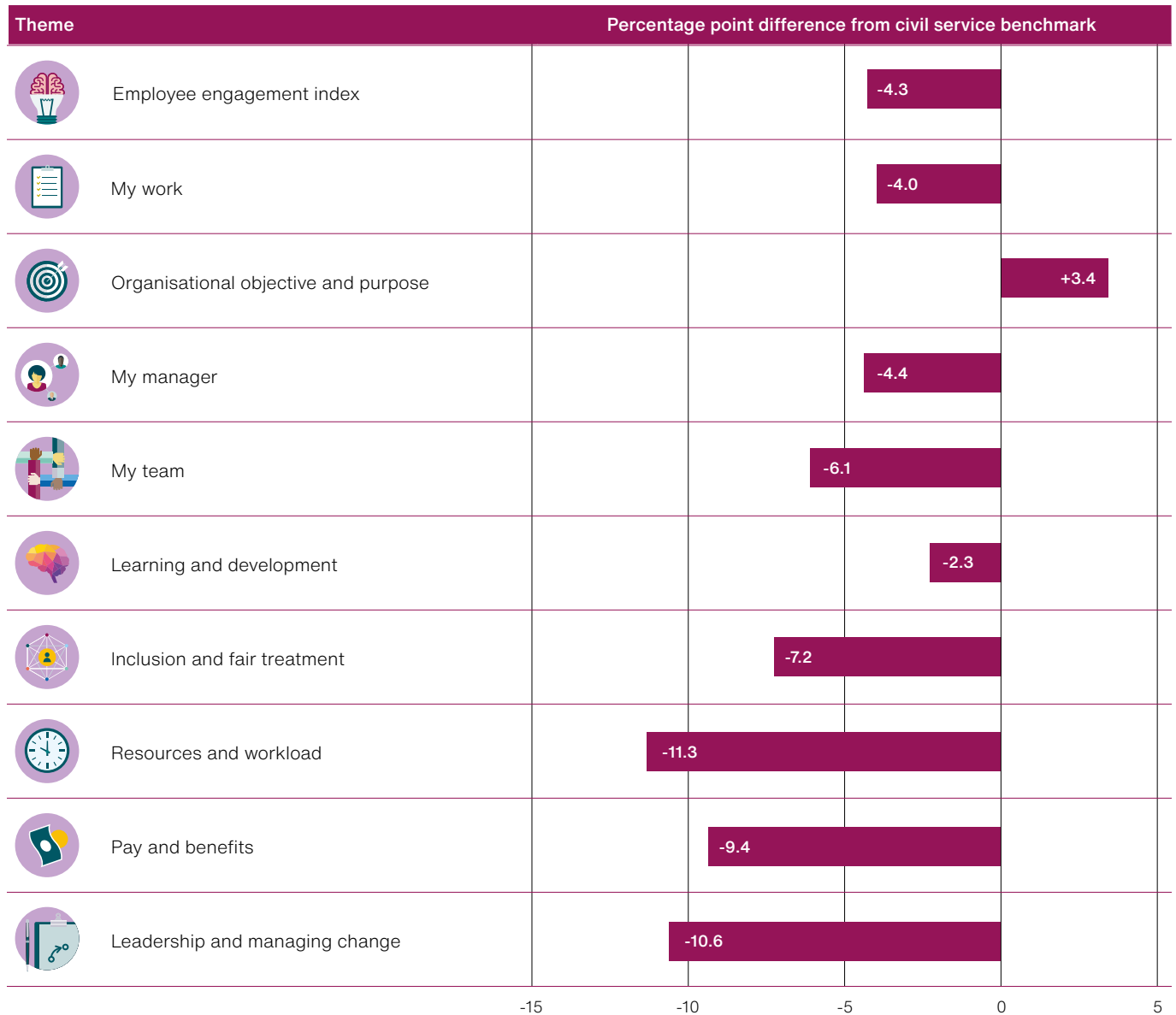
- 1 Required staffing is HMPPS's estimate of the total number of probation officers it requires in post.
- 2 Required staffing levels are not available for June 2021 due to HMPPS's unification of probation services in that month.
- 3 Data for June 2020 to March 2021 cover National Probation Service staffing only. Data from September 2021 to December 2022 cover all probation officers in the new unified service, therefore includes staff previously employed in the National Probation Service as well as some staff formerly employed by Community Rehabilitation Companies.
- 4 The increase in required staffing from September 2021 onwards represents the interim position following unification. HMPPS has work underway to develop the required staffing level as the Probation Service moves towards its new target operating model.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Prison & Probation Service staffing data

**Figure 11**

The Probation Service's percentage point difference from Civil Service People Survey median scores, 2022

The Probation Service scores lower than the civil service median scores on all but one survey theme



#### Notes

- 1 All staff in the Probation Service were invited to participate in the survey. The survey was open from 22 September to 31 October 2022. The survey achieved a response rate of 61%.
- 2 Civil service benchmark is the median of all participating organisations' scores.
- 3 The result for each of the headline themes is calculated as the median percentage of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses, across all organisations, to all questions in that theme.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of 2022 Civil Service People Survey results

## Sharing prisoners' data

**2.11** Difficulties with sharing information is a barrier to effective working between service providers. Many different organisations provide healthcare in prisons and services in the community. NHS England (NHSE) and HMPPS have launched initiatives to improve coordination and reduce disruption between them. These initiatives include NHSE's Reconnect Programme and HMPPS's creation of new health and justice coordinator roles. In 2017, both we and the Committee of Public Accounts recommended that NHSE and HMPPS improve information-sharing arrangements between health, prison and probation staff following concerns that healthcare records do not follow patients as they enter or leave prisons.<sup>22</sup> To improve data-sharing between healthcare providers in prisons and the community, NHSE has been running a project since 2017 to enable the automatic transfer of healthcare records. It expects this project to complete at the end of 2023.

**2.12** The NHS's approach to managing patient data means it does not always share prison leavers' healthcare records and data with outside agencies without consent, including probation services. The NHS generally operates on an informed consent approach, whereby patients must provide consent for their health information to be shared. Although current legislation does allow for some access, prison and probation staff have historically not necessarily known whether someone has been referred for drug treatment on release. HMPPS told us that this can limit probation staff in ensuring prison leavers engage with treatment. HMPPS's Probation Notification and Actioning Project, which aims to support effective handover between prisons and probation on treatment requirements, has been significantly delayed due to lengthy negotiations with health commissioners on the legal basis of sharing prison leavers' health information without their consent. HMPPS has secured agreement on an information-sharing model but still requires approvals on a regional basis. HMPPS aimed to launch the service across England in April 2022 but, as at March 2023, it planned to launch the service on a pilot basis in one region in April 2023. A further implementation risk identified by HMPPS relates to incomplete referrals due to staff or healthcare providers not following the new processes once agreed.

<sup>22</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Mental health in prisons*, Session 2017–2019, HC 42, National Audit Office, June 2017; Committee of Public Accounts, *Mental health in prisons*, Eighth Report of Session 2017–2019, HC 400, December 2017.

## IT systems to support resettlement

**2.13** In our review of 17 prison leavers' cases, we identified differences in the information stored in HMPPS's three IT systems which support the resettlement process. We also observed that it was difficult to track the progress of prison leavers' resettlement and whether their identified needs were met. Resettlement plans were not always recorded in the correct system and where they were available, they were not always comprehensive enough to support resettlement activity. HMPPS is introducing Resettlement Passports, which will record relevant information and requirements for support around mental health, drugs, education, skills, work, accommodation and family ties. The Resettlement Passports will start on entry to prison and continue through to resettlement post-release. Between November 2022 and 13 March 2023, 534 prison leavers were released with a paper Resettlement Passport across five participating prisons. HMPPS expects to start rolling out a digital version in May 2024 and complete its rollout to all prisoners by December 2024, with overall forecast project costs of around £5.6 million.

**2.14** Technical debt is the estimated cost of addressing deficiencies in digital systems which are creating inefficiencies or risks such as security vulnerabilities.<sup>23</sup> In 2020-21, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) reported that its estimated technical debt was £500. HMPPS's vision is for its systems to enable a "seamless view of the individual starting in court and continuing through their sentence and rehabilitative journey". It has developed a strategy to achieve this and plans to complete projects by 2027-28. As part of this, it expects to replace its risk and needs assessment tool to support improved resettlement planning, although it has not yet approved the funding to do so. It hopes to commence work by mid-2023 and expects it will take 12 months to deliver a "minimum viable product".

<sup>23</sup> If left unresolved, technical debt can cause business disruption and greater unforeseen issues in future digital projects.

## Part Three

### Future areas to address to improve resettlement services

**3.1** In this part we set out HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) improvement plans and our assessment of areas it needs to focus on. We also outline areas the government needs to address to improve resettlement services given the additional investment to reduce reoffending, including:

- more evaluation of services;
- better cross-government working;
- improving cost estimates; and
- managing demand.

#### **Improving resettlement services**

**3.2** In July 2022, HMPPS completed an internal review of resettlement services to understand local delivery under unified probation services and whether it was on track to put in place its planned new structure and operations. HMPPS concluded it had a clear vision for resettlement services, although its plan to deliver that vision was not clear. This was compounded by its complex and fragmented delivery model. It found that:

- many Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HMPPS teams are involved in the design and delivery of resettlement services. This leads to complexity in the division of decision making which impacts on resettlement services and means HMPPS could miss opportunities to address risks and limits opportunities to maximise improvements;
- staff interpreted HMPPS's expectations for resettlement services differently, leading to confusion, gaps, duplications of work and barriers to collaboration;
- local staff were concerned about how the centre of HMPPS aligned, prioritised and communicated multiple changes which impact on resettlement services. Staff also reported finding it difficult to absorb the volume of change communicated from the centre of HMPPS; and
- significant staffing pressures and gaps in services had led to inconsistencies in resettlement services.

**3.3** To address the identified issues, HMPPS's plans include:

- improving its alignment of scrutiny and decision-making at a national level across prisons and probation services, to ensure its future changes which impact on resettlement are being made, and communicated to staff, jointly;
- applying best practices identified in regional delivery models within resettlement services more widely;
- more clearly communicating to front-line staff the resettlement services that are available; and
- identifying, communicating and rolling out an 'ideal' resettlement journey.

**3.4** Our examination of HMPPS's improvement plans found that it had a clear understanding of the problems it needs to fix. However, given the many different MoJ and HMPPS teams responsible for resettlement HMPPS needs to be clearer on how new and existing policies, projects and internal reviews align together to contribute to improving outcomes. HMPPS also lacked an end-to-end, real-time view of how services were performing for prison leavers. Instead, it relies on ad hoc audits and internal reviews to understand what is happening in resettlement services. HMPPS will need to help people across the organisation understand how changes contribute to its resettlement goals to encourage them to adopt them.

### **Additional investment**

**3.5** HMPPS has received additional funding in recent years to address reoffending and support resettlement. In January 2021, the MoJ announced £50 million of funding for HMPPS to deliver:

- an 'Accelerators' initiative across 16 prisons. It trialled new approaches to improve accommodation, education, employment, health and substance misuse outcomes, including new specialist roles in these areas;
- improvements in Approved Premises (secure community accommodation for high-risk prison leavers), including by recruiting additional staff, increased maintenance work and more purposeful activity while in prison, such as education and work activities; and
- a new Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) in five probation regions (see Part One).

**3.6** The first phase of HMPPS's evaluation of the impact of the investment in February 2022 found progress varied and difficulties recruiting specialist roles had limited improvement. Due to the short time elapsed between the investment and evaluation, HMPPS could not assess the outcomes achieved for prison leavers.

**3.7** In the 2021 Spending Review, the MoJ secured £550 million over three years to reduce reoffending. The MoJ allocated this funding to HMPPS, with £484 million assigned to support adult offenders (**Figure 12**). Sixty-four per cent of the £484 million is assigned to programmes aiming to improve prison leavers' access to accommodation, including £207 million for continuing its rollout of CAS3. The MoJ told us that the funding allocations in Figure 12 are subject to change as it considers the potential impacts of the government's Efficiency and Savings Review. The MoJ also secured £120 million of the £900 million allocated to government to deliver the government's 10-year drug plan.

### Figure 12

Overview of HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) planned investment to reduce reoffending for adult offenders, 2022-23 to 2024-25

HMPPS plans to spend £484 million on new projects, programmes and roles aimed at reducing reoffending for adults, 64% of which it has allocated to accommodation-related programmes. The Ministry of Justice told us that the funding allocations in this figure are subject to change as it considers the potential impacts of the government's Efficiency and Savings Review

Intervention	Description	Cost (£mn)
<b>Accommodation</b>		<b>310.2</b>
Community Accommodation Service	Rollout of temporary accommodation for prison leavers and other offenders at risk of homelessness	206.7
Expansion of approved premises	300-bed expansion of approved premises to accommodate high-risk offenders in the community	40.6
Approved premises workforce	Funding a new training unit and additional front-line staff capacity	11.8
Other	Programmes include recruiting housing specialists and expanding bed capacity for offenders on home detention curfew	51.1
<b>Employment</b>		<b>67.8</b>
Employability Innovation Fund	Fund for prison governors to repurpose workshops, deliver sector-specific training and improve literacy	21.4
Employment advisers	Recruit 91 employment advisers	13.5
Integrated data systems	Improving efficiency of employment interventions through four new digital tools	12.2
ID support roles	Additional staff to support prison leavers to apply for bank accounts	10.8
Other	Programmes include funding to acquire ID and rollout of video technology	9.9
<b>Education</b>		<b>49.4</b>
Head of education, skills and work roles	123 new roles to design education and training programmes in resettlement prisons	19.2
Neurodiversity support managers	123 new roles to help prisoners with conditions such as autism, brain injury or ADHD with education and employment	15.3
Digital learning content for education	New digital learning content and expanding the use of secure laptops	11.2
Other	Trialling new methods of getting education specialists into prisons and development of education training materials for prison staff	3.7

**Figure 12** *continued*

Overview of HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) planned investment to reduce reoffending for adult offenders, 2022-23 to 2024-25

Intervention	Description	Cost
<b>Female offenders</b>		<b>37.5</b>
Women's safety in prisons	Specialist interventions to respond to gendered complexities which contribute towards women's safety issues in custody, such as self-harm or assault	15.6
Additional funding for women's centres	Funding to stabilise the financial position of women's centres	15.0
Other	Programmes to support local partnerships and support women serving shorter sentences	6.9
		<b>(£mn)</b>
<b>Other</b>		<b>73.3</b>
Programme and analytical costs	Administration costs to support the £550 million spending package	37.2
Reducing reoffending support roles	85 new posts to support the introduction of Resettlement Passports and other interventions	10.8
Other	Programmes include employment support for prisoners with substance misuse issues and addressing behaviour driving criminality	25.3
	Less 10% for optimism bias	-53.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>484.4</b>

**Notes**

- 1 HMPPS applies a 10% reduction on each project's estimated cost to counter for optimism bias.
- 2 HMPPS has also allocated £63.1 million from the Spending Review 2021 for youth offending programmes.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Prison & Probation Service's documents

## Areas for the government to address

**3.8** To support HMPPS's plans to improve services and get the best value from the additional investment we identified four key areas to be addressed, including areas where HMPPS is already taking positive action:

- evaluating services;
- working effectively across government;
- estimating costs; and
- managing demand.



## Evaluating services

**3.9** HMPPS does not yet have a mature evidence base for the impact of its new areas of investment, and its evaluation plans may not provide the evidence it needs. A key challenge for HMPPS will be to demonstrate whether recent improvements in prison leavers' outcomes are attributable to government initiatives or whether they may have happened anyway without intervention. For example, on its Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) initiative, HMPPS plans to compare outcomes against control groups in late 2023 to isolate the effectiveness of the service in improving accommodation outcomes.

**3.10** HMPPS's plans to evaluate its employment initiatives are still in the early stages. Good evaluation practice emphasises the importance of understanding how a new intervention is expected to achieve the intended outcomes and the need to plan evaluation at the design stage before implementing it. HMPPS has not yet prepared theories of change for its employment initiatives although it plans to complete these by April 2024.<sup>24</sup> HMPPS plans at a minimum to monitor data on employment outcomes in prisons with different combinations of support roles (paragraph 1.23). However, this type of monitoring alone will not provide it with sufficient evidence to test whether improvements are attributable to its interventions. HMPPS aims to undertake more robust impact evaluations, according to where interventions have the greatest potential to improve the evidence base but these are not yet firm plans. It has so far committed to undertake two impact evaluations across its portfolio of 14 possible future evaluations. It hopes to prioritise evaluation where there is limited existing evidence and where sample sizes are sufficient for robust evaluation of impact.

**3.11** HMPPS acknowledges that there is limited evidence on whether its Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) contracts are improving outcomes for offenders. It does not know whether, once known, the benefits will justify the costs. To improve the evidence base and inform future investment decisions, HMPPS plans to complete impact and economic evaluations by February 2025. However, as at February 2023, HMPPS was still considering what analytical approach to take in its evaluations.

**3.12** In July 2022 the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) and the MoJ started a pilot project across 15 prisons to test different approaches to preparing to make Universal Credit claims before release, with a view to rolling out across the prison estate by 2024. The departments expect to complete an evaluation of the pilot in summer 2024. DWP and HMPPS's New Futures Network have also launched another pilot initiative across three prisons, which aims to support prison leavers' employment in sectors with labour market shortages (hospitality and logistics).

<sup>24</sup> A theory of change captures the theory of how the intervention is expected to work (setting out all the steps expected to be involved in achieving the desired outcomes), the assumptions made, the quality and strength of the evidence supporting them, and wider contextual factors.

## Working effectively across government

**3.13** Government has made some progress in improving joint working and information-sharing. In December 2020, the MoJ established a Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Board (the Board). The Board is made up of senior representatives from 12 central government bodies and has a remit to identify opportunities to reduce reoffending.<sup>25</sup> The Board has identified the main departments which have a role in improving prison leavers' accommodation and employment outcomes but has not done so for substance misuse treatment.<sup>26</sup> The Board has not set out a detailed governance structure or performance reporting arrangements across departments' work. Our 2016 report *Accountability to Parliament for taxpayers' money* highlighted the risk that cross-cutting initiatives involving several departments can leave accountability unclear and weaknesses in performance unchecked.<sup>27</sup> Given the strategic importance of reducing reoffending to government, the substantial investment involved and the complex systems underpinning government's delivery arrangements, there remains insufficient transparency on progress or a clear articulation of accountability arrangements to Parliament. Clarifying accountability arrangements would help departments to improve coordination and embed stronger incentives for improvement.

**3.14** Our November 2022 report *Progress combatting fraud* set out our evaluative framework for assessing the effectiveness of cross-government strategies which require a whole-system approach.<sup>28</sup> This includes having:

- a clear understanding of what the system is, with all parties involved in developing a picture of how the system works and incentivised to work towards agreed system-level goals;
- an integrated system-level plan that aligns the working of all parties and manages interdependencies and system-wide constraints;
- measurable objectives set for bodies responsible for delivering change that are aligned and consistent with overall cross-government goals; and
- capable leaders at all levels of the system to drive joined-up working and foster a culture that engages, 'hearts and minds' in achieving the goal.

**3.15** The Board also lacks complete data to understand progress in improving prison leavers continuity of substance misuse treatment in the community. It does not have a view on performance in Wales and, as at November 2022, HMPPS was developing options for collecting data centrally.

25 MoJ, HMPPS, HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, Wales Office, DWP, Department for Education, No.10 Downing Street Delivery Unit, Department of Health & Social Care, NHS England, UK Health Security Agency and Home Office.

26 Accommodation: MoJ, HMPPS and Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. Employment: MoJ, HMPPS, and DWP.

27 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Accountability to Parliament for taxpayer's money*, Session 2015-16, HC 849, National Audit Office, February 2016.

28 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Progress combatting fraud*, Session 2022-23, HC 654, National Audit Office, November 2022.

## Estimating costs

**3.16** Government needs to understand the costs of delivering services to make informed decisions on prioritising and effectively using public money. Robust cost estimates also allow government to understand whether its activities are achieving financial benefits for taxpayers and can help inform approaches to planning efficiencies. While HMPPS understands the overall costs of delivering probation services in prisons and in the community, it does not have a robust understanding of the estimated costs of resettlement services (**Figure 13** on pages 51 and 52). Costing resettlement services is inherently challenging. For example:

- resettlement services are delivered in prisons and the community across different teams and organisations;
- HMPPS's commissioning arrangements cover contracts and grants to support prisoners, prison leavers and offenders sentenced in the community; and
- probation staff discharge a broad range of roles beyond resettlement, such as sentence and risk management activities.

**3.17** There are opportunities for HMPPS to improve its cost estimates. It could use existing data better, collect more detailed data and gather structured feedback from staff on:

- the cohorts of offenders supported by staff and providers to estimate time spent supporting prisoners, prison leavers and those sentenced in the community; and
- the types of activities undertaken by staff and providers to estimate time spent on different activities, including resettlement.

Without this, HMPPS cannot demonstrate whether it is using public money effectively or identify potential efficiency savings.

## Managing demand

**3.18** As at end March 2023, the prison population was around 84,400, a 6% increase from March 2022. While projections are uncertain, the MoJ expects significant increases in the prison population in the near term, primarily due to the impact of higher demand caused by increases in the number of police officers and increases in the duration of serious offenders' prison sentences. It predicts the prison population could reach between 93,100 and 106,300 by March 2027 across its low- and high-demand scenarios. This is between a 10% and 26% increase from March 2023.

**Figure 13**

HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) cost estimates for offender management and resettlement activities, 2022-23

There are limitations in HMPPS's cost estimates to understand the cost of resettlement services

Category	Description and scope	Limitations	Cost estimate (£mn)
<b>Reducing Reoffending 2021 Spending Review settlement</b>			
Services for prisoners and prison leavers	Investment in services for adult prisoners and prison leavers, including accommodation, employment and education initiatives, and services for women	None	120.4
<b>Commissioning and grants</b>			
Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) contracts	Services to ensure offenders receive tailored support and to meet their needs, behaviours and circumstances	CRS providers do not exclusively provide resettlement support and provide support to both prison leavers and offenders sentenced in the community  HMPPS has not isolated the estimated costs associated with CRS providers' support to different cohorts of offenders, including prison leavers	60.8
Regional Outcomes and Innovations Fund	Funding available for regional probation directors to invest in services which may reduce reoffending	HMPPS's grants can cover services for prison leavers and people sentenced in the community	8.0
<b>Staff costs</b>			
Pre-release community probation practitioners	Probation staff who deliver supervision activities during the pre-release phase of prisoners' sentences, including resettlement planning, liaison with pre-release teams, referrals to CRS providers and risk management activities	HMPPS's estimate is based on target rather than actual staffing  Probation staff have mixed caseloads and supervise prison leavers and offenders sentenced in the community  HMPPS cannot isolate – and has not estimated – the time spent by staff on different types of activity	53.3
Prison offender managers (POM) – probation	Probation staff in prisons who supervise high-risk prisoners to assess and manage their risks, plan prisoners' sentences and provide a link to probation practitioners working in the community	HMPPS's estimate is based on target rather than actual staffing  HMPPS cannot isolate – and has not estimated – the time spent by staff on different types of activity	52.9
POM – prison	Prison staff with responsibility for prisoners with 10 months or more to serve	HMPPS's estimate is based on target rather than actual staffing  HMPPS cannot isolate – and has not estimated – the time spent by staff on different types of activity	38.9

**Figure 13** *continued*

HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) cost estimates for offender management and resettlement activities, 2022-23

Category	Description and scope	Limitations	Cost estimate
Pre-release teams	Teams embedded in prisons responsible for assessing and identifying prisoners' resettlement needs on their entry into custody, working with community offender managers and providing a point of contact for CRS providers to work with prisoners	None	19.1
Community offender managers – post-release	Probation officers working in the community who supervise prison leavers and offenders sentenced in the community	<p>Probation staff have mixed caseloads and supervise prison leavers and offenders sentenced in the community</p> <p>HMPPS cannot isolate – and has not estimated – the proportions of prison leavers and offenders sentenced in the community which its probation staff supervise or the time spent by staff on different types of activity</p>	Unknown
<b>Total</b>			<b>353.4</b>

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Prison & Probation Service documents and data

**3.19** As these additional prisoners progress through their sentences, there will be higher demand for resettlement services. The MoJ's central estimate in its recent modelling work on forecast volumes of prison leavers starting their supervision in the community shows that, while projections are uncertain, the Probation Service may need to supervise around 5,900 additional prison leavers by March 2025. This corresponds to an increase of around 10% compared with HMPPS's existing caseload of around 60,900 in September 2022. HMPPS is already operating with a 29% vacancy rate for probation officers (paragraph 2.6). HMPPS has considered its possible future staffing requirements for probation officers based on the full range of work they undertake, including supervising offenders sentenced in the community. Its central estimate indicates that it may require around 7,200 probation officers in 2027-28, compared to its required staffing figure of 6,100 as at October 2022.<sup>29</sup> The MoJ told us that as its model is based on current assumptions around staff activities and projected workloads, these become more uncertain in later years. It is currently reviewing its assumptions and plans to undertake impact assessments of its future workforce requirements. HMPPS has recently started a 'One HMPPS' restructuring programme to better align prisons and probation services. As part of this, it is reviewing HMPPS's central support to front-line teams. To respond to higher demand effectively, senior leaders will need to achieve clear structural coherence in the system, understand probation regions' capacity to respond to accommodate higher caseloads and be clear about what resettlement activities can be de-prioritised, streamlined or re-sequenced.

<sup>29</sup> We did not audit the MoJ's modelling analyses.

# Appendix One

## Our evidence base

**1** We reached our independent conclusions on the government's resettlement services following analysis of evidence collected between August 2022 and April 2023.

### **Qualitative analysis**

**2** We held approximately 20 interviews with senior officials from HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS), topics included:

- a focus group of eight senior civil servants with responsibilities for resettlement services, to assess main challenges and opportunities for resettlement;
- analytical teams responsible for modelling prison population, staffing requirements and contract demand;
- design of resettlement services, including transitioning to the new target operating model;
- workforce management including pay, recruitment and retention;
- projects, programmes and interventions to improve prisoners' resettlement outcomes such as employment initiatives, accredited programmes and Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3); and
- oversight of spending and evaluation.

**3** We also interviewed officials from inspectorates, other government departments and agencies to improve our understanding of resettlement work and performance, including what role the organisation plays in supporting resettlement services, and, where applicable, how they work across government. We interviewed officials from:

- HM Inspectorate of Prisons;
- HM Inspectorate of Probation;
- the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC);
- the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP);
- the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID); and
- NHS England (NHSE).

## **Wider stakeholder consultation and interviews**

**4** We ran an online consultation in November 2022 to gather views and observations from organisations who help prison leavers to resettle. Our consultation included nine questions to gather feedback on government's performance in delivering resettlement services. We received 20 responses in total which included four responses from different staff in one organisation. We have presented our analysis of the consultation response in Appendix Three. Respondents were self-selecting and we did not seek to verify the claims made. However, there were similarities between many of the issues raised by respondents and findings from our other audit methods.

**5** We interviewed a selection of stakeholders outside government to gain external perspectives on the key strengths and weaknesses of resettlement. We interviewed:

- the Howard League for Penal Reform;
- Revolving Doors;
- The Prison Reform Trust; and
- Professors Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Peter Mackie and Lolo Madoc-Jones, academics with expertise in homelessness.

**6** We also met people with lived experience of the criminal justice system to inform our approach to fieldwork. We liaised with Revolving Doors, a criminal justice organisation whose membership includes individuals with recent experience of leaving prison, to organise a focus group on resettlement experience. Revolving Doors selected four of their lived experience members to discuss experiences of the support provided to prison leavers and areas where the government needs to improve. We also interviewed three people with lived experience who currently work in the Ministry of Justice Group through the Going Forward into Employment programme (Figure 7). This was facilitated through HMPPS. To meet our ethical standards, we did not ask individuals about their personal circumstances or record personal data. We used insights from these interviews to develop lines of enquiry in our fieldwork and to develop evidence requests which we submitted to government departments.

**7** We drew out the main findings and commonalities from our interviews. We used this to inform further lines of inquiry that we followed up with HMPPS and to identify some of the most common themes across evidence sources.

## Prison visits

**8** We visited six prisons in October 2022:

- HMP Hindley, a Category C resettlement prison in Wigan (covering the Greater Manchester Probation Region);
- HMP Pentonville, a reception and resettlement prison in Islington (London Probation Region);
- A joint visit to two female prisons in the Yorkshire & Humber Probation Region – HMP Askham Grange, a female open resettlement prison near York and HMP New Hall, a female local and resettlement prison in West Yorkshire;
- HMP Rochester, a Category C trainer and resettlement prison in Kent and the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Probation Region; and
- HMP Berwyn, a Category C reception, trainer and resettlement prison in Wrexham, Wales Probation Region.

**9** We held 33 interviews or focus groups with staff across the six prison visits, mostly face-to-face interviews, but some remotely. We interviewed or held focus groups with the following core staff in each prison:

- prison governor or deputy governor;
- prison offender managers;
- community offender managers;
- resettlement team leads and administration staff; and
- Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers or contract managers in HMPPS.

**10** Core interview themes included:

- how resettlement services and responsibilities are organised in the prison;
- key issues in provision of resettlement services;
- good practice in the provision of resettlement services;
- transition to new probation target operating model; and
- performance of CRS contracts.



## **Document review**

**11** We reviewed more than 500 published and unpublished documents to assist with:

- defining the scope of the audit and deepening our understanding of resettlement performance;
- informing further discussion and follow-up with HMPPS and other government bodies; and
- informing our findings and triangulating findings from other sources including interviews and data analysis.

**12** The documents we reviewed included:

- published strategies, reports and policy papers from government departments and other stakeholders;
- business cases;
- contracting documents;
- board meeting minutes and papers for HMPPS and the Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Board;
- internal audit reports and performance monitoring reports, including a specific review of resettlement services post-unification of probation services;
- inspection reports published by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation; and
- evaluation and research documents.

## **Review of prisoners' case records**

**13** We reviewed records held on four HMPPS IT systems for 17 prison leavers. We did not seek to review a representative sample. We reviewed these records to aid our understanding of case management practices and to explore the level of complexity involved in service delivery. Our findings were triangulated with other evidence sources.

## **Operations management review**

**14** In November and December 2022, our People and Operational Management Hub supported the audit. We applied our Operations Management framework that tests alignment between strategic management, and service design and delivery. We used the framework to test whether HMPPS is setting itself up for success through its action plan (following its July 2022 internal review of resettlement) and wider management and governance arrangements. Members of the Hub met with 13 people, observed four meetings or workshops, and reviewed 26 documents.

## Quantitative analysis

**15** We analysed published and internal HMPPS statistics. The key data sources are as follows:

- Community Performance statistics – these show housing and employment outcomes for prison leavers. The data include breakdowns by demographic characteristics, allowing a comparison of outcomes for different groups. HMPPS does not know the accommodation and employment for around one in 10 prison releases and these unknown outcomes are excluded from the statistics.
- Operational audit ratings for its 28 highest-value CRS contracts
- Internal performance data – we analysed these data to assess performance against key resettlement and offender management targets. This dataset is reported on a national and probation region level, allowing us to assess performance against national and regional targets. The dataset does not cover entire financial year for 2022-23: it only covers April 2022 to January or February 2023. HMPPS does not know the accommodation and employment for around one in 10 prison releases and we excluded these unknown outcomes in our analysis.
- Quarterly workforce statistics – this includes data on leaving rates and sickness rates for probation and prison officers. It also includes data on required levels of probation officers.
- Proven reoffending statistics.

**16** We also analysed the following wider data sources:

- HM Inspectorate of Prisons' ratings of prison performance between 2018-19 and 2022-23.
- HM Inspectorate of Probation's ratings of probation region performance between 2021-22 and 2022-23.
- The 2022 Civil Service People Survey data for the Probation Service, which achieved a response rate of 61%. We decided not to report on data for the Prison Service due to a very low response rate of 28%.
- OHID data on prison leavers' engagement with substance-misuse treatment in the community.

## Appendix Two

### Commissioned Rehabilitative Services contracts

**1** **Figure 14** on pages 59 and 60 sets out the scope of HM Prison & Probation Service's (HMPPS's) Commissioned Rehabilitative Services contracts, the number of contracts it has awarded, the number of contracts it has awarded to voluntary, community and social enterprise providers, and the maximum value of the contracts.

**Figure 14**

## Overview of HM Prison &amp; Probation Service's (HMPPS's) contracts with Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers

HMPPS expects to spend a maximum total of around £340 million on the 131 CRS contracts which became operational between June 2021 and October 2022. It has awarded 73% (95) of its contracts to the voluntary, community or social enterprise sector

Service type	Cohort	Intended outcomes for offenders	Number of contracts <sup>1</sup>	Number of awarded providers <sup>2</sup>	Contracts awarded to VCSEs <sup>3</sup>	Maximum contract values (£mn)
<b>'Day 1' contracts operational from 21 June 2021</b>						
Accommodation	Men	Support to overcome practical barriers and build skills to secure and maintain settled accommodation	14	7	9	45.9
Education, training and employment	Men	Support to obtain and sustain suitable training, education and employment, including apprenticeships	11	4	1	46.2
Personal wellbeing (PWB): family and significant others	Men	Support to maintain and develop positive family and intimate relationships	41	8	30	116.3
PWB: lifestyle and associates	Men	Support to develop pro-social leisure interests and purposeful activities and disengage with pro-criminal associates and activities				
PWB: emotional wellbeing	Men	Support to improve: coping skills and resilience; engage with mental health services; comply with medication, treatment and therapy; and interact confidently with others				
PWB: social inclusion	Men	Support to: transition from the prison environment; engage with community-based services; and build and sustain social networks and reduce social isolation				
PWB: services for young adults in Wales	Young men	Tailored services delivered by providers with specialist skills, knowledge and experience of delivering activities which address young adults' needs to develop maturity, self-sufficiency and independence  HMPPS expects providers to support young men in Wales in the following areas: accommodation; education, training and employment; finance, benefits and debt; emotional wellbeing; social inclusion; family and significant others; lifestyle and associates; and dependency and recovery	4	1	4	2.3
Women's services	Women	Tailored services delivered by providers with specialist skills, knowledge and experience of offering a holistic and tailored approach to supporting women through trauma-informed and strength-based services  HMPPS expects providers to support women in the following areas: accommodation; education, training and employment; finance, benefits and debt; emotional wellbeing; social inclusion; family and significant others; lifestyle and associates; and dependency and recovery	40	15	39	59.5

**Figure 14** *continued*

Overview of HM Prison &amp; Probation Service's (HMPPS's) contracts with Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers

Service type	Cohort	Intended outcomes for offenders	Number of contracts <sup>1</sup>	Number of awarded providers <sup>2</sup>	Contracts awarded to VCSEs <sup>3</sup>	Maximum contract values (£mn)
<b>'Day 2' contracts operational from February to October 2022</b>						
Finance, benefits and debt	Men	Support to build financial management skills, reduce or stabilise debt and access and maintain benefits	9	4	5	30.9
Dependency and recovery	Men	Support to enhance access and sustain engagement with substance misuse treatment services, achieve controlled dependency or abstinence, and provide additional support where disorders occur alongside mental ill health and other complex needs	11	3	6	37.2
Engaging people on probation	Men and women	National contract to ensure HMPPS involves offenders in the design, development and delivery of CRS contracts and acts on their feedback to improve services	1	1	1	2.1
<b>Total</b>			<b>131</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>340.4</b>

**Notes**

- 1 HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) has awarded: ten accommodation contracts at probation region level in England and four contracts across its four sub-regions in Wales; 11 education, training and employment contracts at probation region level; 41 personal wellbeing contracts for men and 40 women's services contracts at police and crime commissioner level; nine finance, benefits and debt contracts across eight probation regions, including two contracts in its South Central region; 11 dependency and recovery contracts across six probation regions, including three in North East England and four in Yorkshire and the Humber. This figure excludes CRS contracts awarded in Greater Manchester (which HMPPS co-commissioned with Greater Manchester Combined Authority) and services for women in London (which it co-commissioned with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime).
- 2 This figure shows the total number of providers who HMPPS awarded contracts to across individual contract types. The overall total shows the total number of distinct providers across all contracts.
- 3 VCSE (voluntary, community or social enterprise).

Source: National Audit Office analysis of HM Prison &amp; Probation Service documents and data

## Appendix Three

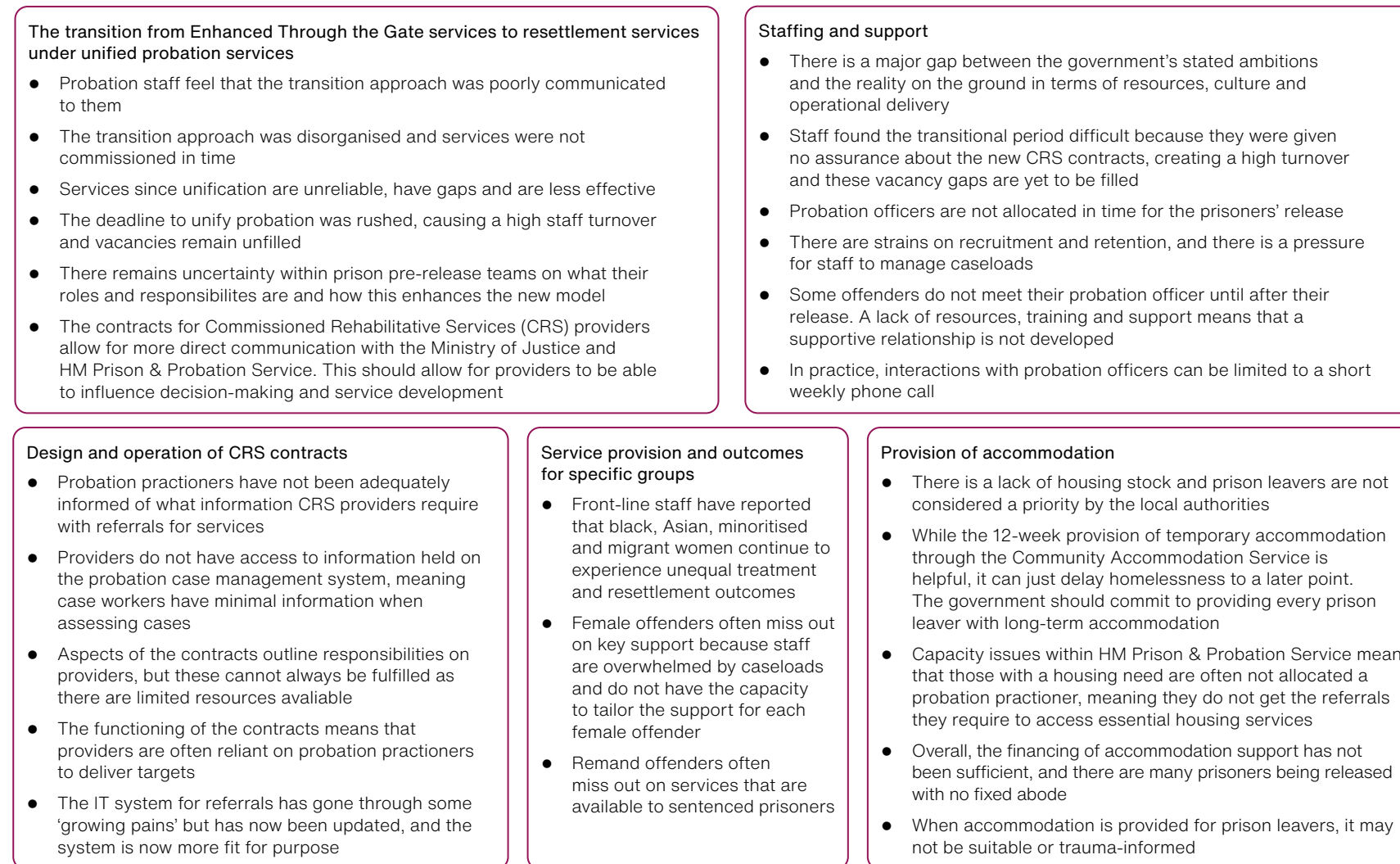
### Our online consultation

**1** We ran an online consultation in November 2022 to gather views and observations from organisations who help prison leavers to resettle. Our consultation included nine questions to gather feedback on government's performance in delivering resettlement services. We received 20 responses in total, which included four responses from different staff in one organisation. Respondents were self-selecting and we did not seek to verify the claims made. However, we identified many of the issues raised by respondents in our audit. A summary of respondents' feedback is set out in **Figure 15** overleaf.

## Figure 15

### Summary of responses to our consultation from organisations who help prison leavers to resettlement

We ran an online consultation in November 2022 to gather feedback from organisations who help prison leavers to resettlement. Most respondents provided negative feedback across the areas set out in this figure. However, while many responses align with our wider findings in this report, our respondents were self-selecting and we did not verify the claims made









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