



**ENDING THE
REVOLVING
DOOR OF CRISIS
AND CRIME:
RESPONSE TO
THE LABOUR
PARTY JUSTICE
AND HOME
AFFAIRS
COMMISSION**



DECEMBER 2018

About Revolving Doors Agency

- Revolving Doors is a national charity that has been working for 25 years to change systems and improve services for people in the revolving door of personal crisis and crime.
- People in the revolving door are characterised by repeat low-level, nonviolent offences, such as theft and minor drug offences, linked to multiple underlying problems, including mental ill health, problematic substance use, homelessness and domestic abuse. Their health, care and offending-related needs go hand in hand with persistent poverty, long-term unemployment, trauma and social exclusion.
- We bring independent research, policy expertise and lived experience together to support effective solutions to end the revolving door.
- We work with policy-makers, commissioners, local decision-makers, and frontline professionals to share evidence, demonstrate effective solutions, and change policy, while involving people with direct experience of the problem in all our work through lived experience forums based in London, Birmingham, and Manchester.

The extent of revolving door

- The precise size of the revolving door group is difficult to quantify. The most robust recent estimate¹ suggests that almost 600,000 people receive support, treatment or interventions from the substance misuse treatment sector, homelessness services or the criminal justice system each year, with around 60,000 receiving support from all three.
- This is likely to be an underestimate of revolving door group, indeed many more are at risk or face different combinations of need (e.g. domestic abuse and criminal justice), or may not be accessing services. Often considered the ‘hardest to reach’ or to help by services, these individuals come into repeated contact with policing, criminal justice, homelessness, substance misuse, health and emergency services, but struggle to access the kind of support they need to tackle their multiple problems.
- Indeed, our recent analysis of MoJ data has found that last year 60,000 cautions or convictions for minor offences were given to people who had offended 11 or more times. The data reveals that these individuals had a total of over 1.8 million previous sentencing occasions where the criminal justice system failed to provide an effective intervention when they were dealt with for similar minor offences in order to prevent or to break the cycle of personal crisis and crime.²

About this consultation

Our response to the Labour Party’s Justice and Home Affairs Commission has been informed by the research and policy expertise outlined above as well as a consultation with people with recent lived experience of the criminal justice system held in London on 24 October 2018 on “*how can Labour’s manifesto help end the revolving door of crisis and crime?*” specifically looking at both preventing people entering the revolving door and supporting people to exit the revolving door. The majority of quotes in this response are from the above consultation session.

¹ Lankelly Chase. 2015. “Hard Edges” London lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Hard-Edges-Mapping-SMD-2015.pdf

² Ministry of Justice. 2018. “Offending History Data Tool: previous offence statistics” London. Ministry of Justice. data.gov.uk/dataset/cbe983-a459-444f-bc92-39dc70bbdec1/criminal-justice-statistics2

What should we do prevent people entering the revolving door?

I. Focus on root causes of revolving door: Trauma, poverty and exposure to community violence

- Our research³ shows that childhoods that lead to a revolving door adulthood have a typical pattern: They involve multiple and repeated experiences of neglect, abuse and household dysfunction. They are blighted by poverty so profound that even the necessities of life – three meals a day, a warm coat – cannot be guaranteed. And the direct experience of community violence – of family members being murdered, of friends being beaten up, of families being driven to move home – is as stark as poverty and adverse childhood experiences.
- We ask the Labour Party to focus on root causes of crime and put tackling poverty and adverse childhood experiences at the front and centre of criminal justice policy. Our consultation with people with lived experience highlights the need to intervene at the critical stage of young adulthood (18-25) where people can enter the revolving door, and where the criminal justice system embeds existing disadvantage.

“The majority of young people in the youth offender institutions have physical or sexual abuse, their parents have mental health problems or involved in criminality. They need therapy to address trauma. They need support with their mental health. It’s a massive deal for a young person to admit to these issues, but they shouldn’t be let down.”

- Many participants highlighted the toxic combination of adverse childhood experiences, poverty, and exposure to community violence was not a problem of an individual or even a single family, but a problem of an entire neighbourhood. For many inequalities (and lack of opportunities for social mobility) were drivers of crime:

“If there’s only one who’s got nothing, they’ll do what they need to have the same”.

- Some participants found that the current political discourse put young people (especially from BAME backgrounds) living in deprived neighbourhoods in a negative light, instead of recognising the emotional, financial and social struggles they face:

“All the media and politicians are on about gangs, gangs and gangs. I grew up on an estate and if you looked at us now, we would be called a gang. We weren’t a gang, we were living on an estate, all of us coming from families that were dysfunctional and we came together to support each other and look after each other. Yes, there was criminality, selling drugs etc, but we need to stop labelling all these poor young black people as ‘gang’. They need to focus on poverty, discrimination, and the ‘elders’ who groom them and push them into crime.”

- Participants commented that the childhood patterns that lead to a revolving door adulthood has been repeated over generations and suggested that supporting families/parents in the revolving door of crisis and crime is important in preventing the next generation of young people entering it.

“My ex-husband has come from a home with serious domestic violence. He has seen his mum going through mental health crisis, substance abuse. He was taken into care. He has never received any support with those issues. He is now 33 years old. He is serving a long sentence. Before that, he was abusive to me, which pushed me into drugs and mental health crisis. Now my child is 11 years old. He has been diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder. He is acting out in anger. My

³ Ibid.

mum and I are doing are best to avoid it, but he might be taken into care. He isn't getting the support he needs. We aren't getting the support we need. Revolving door keeps turning."

- Participants identified school exclusion and being taken into care as two main pathways that put young people at greater risk of being caught in the revolving door of crisis and crime.

2. Support trauma and poverty-informed criminal justice responses

- Our consultation with people with lived experience suggests that people who are in the revolving door are routinely being let down by services, and underlines the need for a fresh approach to tackling crime and the root causes of crime.
- Participants commented that the criminal justice pathway from police, to courts, youth offending teams and prison either failed to recognise trauma or further traumatised people:

"When you get arrested police doesn't question why you're doing it. They put it down to drugs or being a rebel"

"When children go to youth offending teams, they need to ask why people are offending, what is going on in their lives that causes their behaviour – YOTs should see trauma, not label them as 'rebels', 'criminals'"

"You go in prison and come out messed up in your head"

- Participants commented that trauma and poverty informed police services, in particular, would be able to reduce crime by preventing the crisis or its escalation:

"The first person you call when you've got a problem is the policeman. When you've got kids and you can't find them you will phone the policeman. They need to be trained in not just how to be policemen but how to deal with people – people skills"

Their responses also highlighted the difference a trauma-informed policing can make in their lives:

"I had a police officer named R, I had a big flip out last year and a policeman from Kentish town police came, and he realised I just had therapy and I was going proper crazy in my head, and he sat with me, talked and said to me 'do I want to go to hospital?' and I said no but I'd go to NA the next day. And he phoned me the next day to see if I was alright and this was only last year. So there is good coppers and bad coppers."*

- Participants also unanimously agreed that every public servant (especially teachers, police officers, prison and probation staff) should be trauma informed to give the sensitive response to people from childhood to adulthood.

"People don't trust services – they don't trust teachers, police officers, Job Centre, prison officers and probation. It is because they tell you what you are doing wrong, they deal with the criminal behaviour. They should deal with the trauma that caused the problems."

3. Diversion from the criminal justice system.

- Most of the interventions needed to turn a life around sit outside the criminal justice system. Our police are not substance misuse workers; our prosecutors are not mental health nurses. But they are the decision makers who can set lives in different directions: Diversion, deferred prosecutions, out of court disposals sit in their gift and can be the difference between recovery and entrenchment. Consistent with the research evidence, people with lived experience have highlighted that appropriate diversion from the criminal justice system delivers better outcomes for the individual and better safety for their community.

“From the age of 13, I have been in and out of prison, and hand on heart, I have never had the support I needed. Problems which pushed me to crime only got worse. If someone keeps offending, the system needs to step back and think “what are we doing wrong and what can we do differently”

- Participants suggested that the police are not always equipped to identify mental ill health, substance abuse and domestic violence that brought people in contact with the criminal justice system:

“If you’re in a big police station, it’s very overwhelming, it’s difficult to talk about your substance abuse, mental health problems, you don’t want to talk about these issues, because you feel this can be used against you. It’s important that the police are better equipped to ask these sensitive questions.”

- Participants felt that having peer support as part of the liaison and diversion services was central not only to identify the support needs, but also engagement with the support services and compliance with the support plan:

“When I was young, I was so anti-system, I was so anti-authority. When I was a young woman showing up at the police station with a black eye, I was asked about the drugs I was taking and selling but I wasn’t asked about domestic violence. I felt I couldn’t grass my boyfriend up, just like that. If there was a woman there who experienced what I had experienced, I might have told her what’s happening, and they could have helped me differently.”

- Women who have come into repeat contact facing homelessness, and using substances are sometimes wary of disclosing this information to criminal justice agencies (police and courts) for fear of judgement or having their children taken away, or they may just be unaware what support is on offer. Some, who have disclosed this information, felt that the support was not available to them:

“I’ve been through serious domestic abuse, substance abuse, served several sentences, but never had the mental health support I needed. I experienced child sexual abuse, and the only support available to me was group therapy which just didn’t suit me. I don’t believe there is any women who wants to commit a crime, go to prison, or have their children taken away from them. But they are not offered an alternative.”

- Participants highlighted that the information from police to courts need to be improved:

“Psychiatric assessments from custody to courts need to be improved, information about your mental health problems needs to follow through the system.”

- Participants also felt that people from more disadvantaged backgrounds get a worse outcome in substance and mental health treatment, as well as criminal justice system:

“The rich goes to rehab, the poor goes to prison”

4. Effective community sentences

- Participants unanimously back the introduction of a presumption against the use of short custodial sentences of less than six months. This would allow such a sentence only when no other appropriate disposal is available. Where short prison sentences are imposed, courts should have to say why. This approach does not remove the court's discretion; it is a presumption not a ban. So the courts can still deal appropriately with offences that are serious and/or risk harm, such as domestic violence. This approach does not remove the court's discretion; it is a presumption not a ban. Therefore, under these proposals offences that are serious and/or risk harm, such as domestic violence, can be dealt with appropriately by the courts. Introducing a presumption alongside probation reforms is likely to provide the catalyst needed for improving the quality for community sentences.

“Although I was in prison for a short time I felt traumatised by the whole experience. In fact, sending me to prison was just a waste of time and money. I was released with no explanation and no support. I found myself back in the violent relationship which exacerbated my addiction which led to further arrests and trauma.”

Our campaign, Short-sighted⁴, calls the government to introduce a presumption against short sentences under six months, requiring the court to only impose such a sentence if no other appropriate disposal is available and to record publicly the reason for a custodial sentence. The campaign has a wide base of support, including Labour MPs, peers and PCCs, most notably Baroness Corston PC, Kate Green MP, Ellie Reeves MP and Ruth Cadbury MP, and Hardyal Dhindsa (PCC for Derbyshire and the lead of APCC Portfolio Group on Alcohol & Substance Misuse)

- To make unpaid work effective, all schemes should adhere to five principles: clear community connection, strength-based employment, incentives, holistic support and opportunities for employment.

“If you're going to get someone to sort of like get their hours done on time and show up interest and not [be] recall[ed], give them something that's of interest to them, they will add to their skills, something that would be meaningful not to allow them to reoffend and something that they can take forward.”

- Participants supported the national roll out of Community Sentence Treatment Requirements (CSTRs). CSTRs can help divert relevant offenders away from frequently ineffective short-term custodial sentences and towards treatment. The programme focuses on increasing the use of treatment requirements for drug rehabilitation, alcohol treatment and mental health treatment. Northamptonshire CSTR, which is specifically for women, provides an excellent example of the difference this programme can make. The provision offers different services under one roof: including mental health treatment, drug and alcohol treatment, domestic abuse, and family support. The provision also includes a social business (The Good Load) that provides real employment opportunities for vulnerable local women to help them break the cycle of poverty, unemployment and offending.

⁴ Revolving Doors Agency. 2018. "Short-Sighted: Reducing The Use Of Short Prison Sentences In Favour Of A Smarter Approach". <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/2271/download?token=p3aMJ1PX>.

What should we do make sure people exit the revolving door?

1. Improved probation support

- Individuals should receive consistent support throughout the whole criminal justice pathway – from arrest to courts, to sentencing, and back into the community. Each of these transition points should be seen as an opportunity for a trauma-informed approach, which can build relationships, identify and address underlying needs, and break the cycle of personal crisis and crime:

“It’s really important because [all of us have] deep stuff which is part of what’s brought us to where we are and like, if you’re going to share that with a probation officer and then, all of a sudden, they’re gone, You’re not going to want to share it with someone else. And then you keep re-traumatising yourself as well.”

- Peer support should be embedded in probation. People in the system say having support from ex-offenders who have been in a similar position to them is a vital mechanism to improve engagement, particularly for people in the ‘revolving doors’ group who experience repeated criminal justice contact, multiple problems and low levels of trust.

“My probation officer she just, I don’t know, she’s just doing her job basically, there’s no relationship. Although she tries it’s just not there, it’s like I’m the one bringing the information to her rather than she is giving me information.”

- Revolving Doors has coproduced a model of peer support with NHS England that has been piloted in Wiltshire and Birmingham, and is now being rolled out across the country as part of the national Liaison and Diversion operating model. Early evidence shows increased levels of engagement with services. This model could be adapted for probation services.
- Participants recommend that probation contracts to evidence how they involve people with lived experience in designing and delivering their service. This must go beyond ‘consultation’ to offer meaningful involvement at a strategic level in all Community Rehabilitation Company/National Probation Service areas.

2. Better support on release from prison

- Our recent analyses based on the figures received from Ministry of Justice under Freedom of Information legislation shows that:
 - Nearly a third of people serving short prison sentences under six months have a drug problem.
 - The known rates of rough sleeping on release from prison for people sentenced to less than 6 months has increased by 25-fold in the last 21 months, with women disproportionately affected
 - 1000 prisoners a month are released homeless and rough sleeping.
 - The rates of homelessness including rough sleeping is high for the entire prison population (1 in 7) but most pronounced for people serving short prison sentences.
 - 1 in 4 short sentenced prisoners are released homeless and rough sleeping. This figure is likely to be an underestimate as the Ministry of Justice does not know where a sixth of short-term prisoners are intending to sleep on their first night.
- Our consultation with people with lived experience highlights the need for a holistic support plan to be put in place prior to prison release. People in the revolving door often have multiple needs (mental ill health, substance abuse, housing problems) that do not meet

the threshold for secondary care services, but together can perpetuate the cycle of personal crisis and crime. It is important that the post-custodial support addresses all of these needs.

“If someone has a mental health need they should have someone to see, a mental health worker, the minute they leave the prison. It’s not being done. They don’t care if we’re dead. Its less money they have to pay out - that’s how I feel.”

“Housing needs to be part of the rehabilitation programme – it is important for people to be able to get out of the environment which is trapping them in the crime. They need to get away from the gangs that exploit them, they need to get away from their partners who abuse them, they need to get away from bad influences.”

- Participants also told us that resettlement plans should be personalised and co-produced with prisoners, so that they have ownership of their plan and know where and how they can get support.

“Sentence plan needs to be personalised. It should be my sentence plan. If you are involved in it, you are more likely to agree to a document that you have created, developed or agreed.”

Revolving Doors Agency: Recent publications relevant to this consultation

Short sentences briefing and campaign (2018)

The public and the evidence are clear and in agreement: short prison sentences are short-sighted. They are ineffective at tackling petty crime. Revolving Doors has campaigned to introduce a new presumption against short prison sentences of less than six months.

A review of all police and crime plans (2018)

A comprehensive review of all police and crime plans for multiple and complex needs, and transition to adulthood.

See also a series of Spotlight publications on best practice among PCCs in relation to: mental health, women in the criminal justice system, young adults, tackling violence against women and girls, and tackling substance misuse.

Rebalancing Act: A joint publication with the Home Office and Public Health England (2017)

A resource for directors of public health, police and crime commissioners, the police service and other health and justice commissioners, service providers and users outlining the health inequalities faced by people in contact with the criminal justice system.

Service user involvement with offenders in the community: A toolkit for staff (2016)

Commissioned by the National Offender Management Service and based on fieldwork in probation areas, this is a guide for staff wishing to improve their involvement of people with lived experience in probation. See also guides to peer research in the criminal justice system and improving involvement in prisons.

Service user involvement and co-production (2016)

Commissioned by Clinks and written by Revolving Doors and people with lived experience.



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