



## **Written evidence submitted by Revolving Doors Agency to the Justice Committee's Transforming Rehabilitation Inquiry**

**November 2017**

### **About Revolving Doors**

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1. Revolving Doors Agency is a charity working across England to change systems and improve services for people who face multiple and complex needs, including poor mental health, and come into repeated contact with the police and criminal justice system. We work with policymakers, 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 Birmingham, Manchester and London.
2. People living with multiple and complex needs can often experience several problems at any given time, such as: homelessness, mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic or sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> Due to the complexity of the issues that they face, people often lead chaotic lives, coming into frequent contact with the emergency services and the wider criminal justice system. In the absence of effective support or timely intervention, individuals living with multiple and complex needs can easily fall into a revolving door of crisis and crime.
3. If the Committee would be interested in exploring any of the issues identified in our response, we would be very happy to facilitate a roundtable with members or to invite members to attend one of our lived experience forums. These are held quarterly in Birmingham, London and Manchester. We would also welcome the opportunity to give oral evidence alongside members of our Forum with lived experience.

### **Summary**

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4. Revolving Doors welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry but will limit comments to the aspects of the terms of reference most relevant to Revolving Doors and the groups it advocates on behalf of. We have sought the views of people with lived experience of navigating the probation system under the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation Programme and have based this response on the findings of a detailed consultation with around thirty members of our

Manchester Forum on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November. All members of our Forum have recent experience of the criminal justice system within the last 2 years.

### **About the 'revolving door' group**

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5. The precise size of the revolving door cohort is difficult to quantify. The prevalence of mental ill health among those in contact with the criminal justice system is far higher than among the wider population. The most robust recent estimate 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.<sup>2</sup>
6. This is likely to be an underestimate of multiple and complex needs, indeed many more are at risk or face different combinations of need but 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.
7. There are specific challenges and needs faced by women in contact with the criminal justice system. Women who come into contact with the criminal justice system tend to have a wider range of needs than their male peers, and in many cases more severe needs. Their social and family situation tends to be different as well, with women being far more likely to be sole parents or carers; 25% of female prisoners are lone parents compared to 3% male. This is of particular relevance to this inquiry. For example, women are more likely than men to lose their tenancies whilst in prison,<sup>i, ii</sup> leading to uprooted families and increased vulnerability.<sup>iii</sup> Vulnerabilities associated with a lack of secure housing include (and are not exclusive to) increased likelihood of reoffending;<sup>iv</sup> barriers to regaining children;<sup>v</sup> unemployment;<sup>vi</sup> prostitution;<sup>vii</sup> and returning to abusive relationships.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Inquiry question 2: What impact have the reforms had on ii) recalls to prison?**

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8. Since Transforming Rehabilitation was introduced in 2015, the recall population has increased by almost 1,000 people, and by the end of March 2017, 6,554 people were in prison on recall.<sup>3</sup> This notable increase can be explained, in part, by the introduction of the use of recall for people released from prison after serving short sentences. Of the population recalled to prison, the vast majority are recalled for technical breach of their conditions and not for having committed a new offence. This is supported by figures provided by the Howard League, which indicate that in the 12 months ending September 2016 7,798 people were recalled back to prison for 'failing to keep in touch' and a further 5,228 were recalled for 'failing to reside' at a specific address.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., et al (2014) *Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage – England* London: Lankelly Chase Foundation, p. 13.

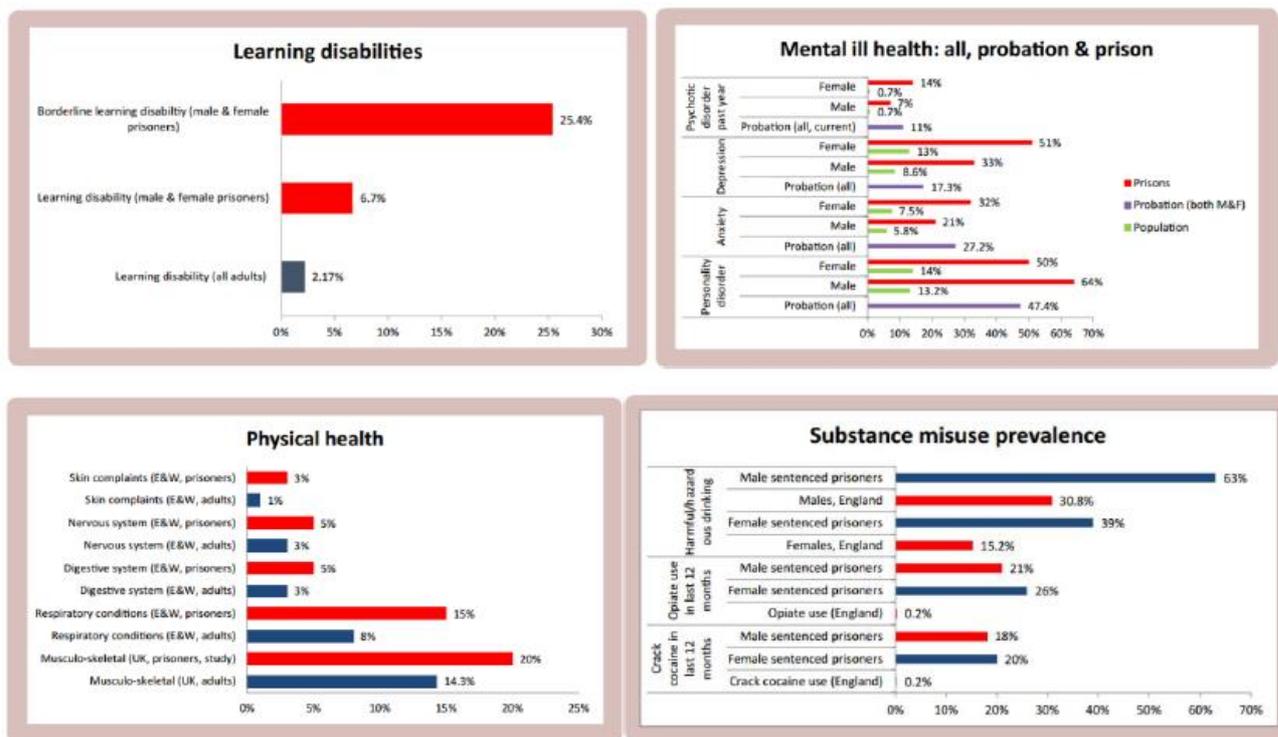
<sup>3</sup> Table 1.1, Ministry of Justice (2017) *Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2016*, London: Ministry of Justice.

<sup>4</sup> The Howard League for Penal Reform (2017) *The 3 R's of Prison Reform: Recall to Prison* <http://howardleague.org/what-you-can-do/the-3-rs-of-prison-reform/recall-to-prison/>  
Accessed: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017

9. We believe that the significantly increased use of recall for people who have not committed a further offence represents a failure of the Transforming Rehabilitation program. It is a practice that can cause huge disruption not only to the lives of those subject to recall but also their wider family. For example, people can lose their housing when they go back to prison on recall or find their treatment programme disrupted or ended. This in turn further exacerbates people's multiple, complex needs and increases chaos. Therefore, we call upon the Committee to undertake a review of the use of recall for people who have been released after serving a short sentence. We also call upon the Committee to examine the use of recall for those who have not committed a further offence and to find ways to reduce this..
10. In relation to recall to prison, Forum members raised a number of important points. One of the most common issues raised by participants was poor communication, with each member having their own individual experience. Often this took the form of incorrect information being sent and received between multiple key organisations. Other Forum members reported having to chase down key workers because they had failed to establish initial contact as scheduled, which put them on 'the back foot' for important appointments. The cumulative effect of poor communication and miscommunication between organisations was missed appointments and failed assessments which put participants at risk of being recalled to prison.
11. On the topic of miscommunication, one participant told the forum that once released from prison, he presented to his probation officer who had received incorrect information about the length of his sentence. His probation officer subsequently believed that he had served an 18-month sentence, when in fact, he had just finished serving an 8-month sentence. Such obvious errors were not only frustrating to Forum members but also had very real consequences for them when left uncorrected. The same Forum member summarised his feelings in the following quotation ... "It's like the right-hand doesn't know what the left ones doing" ... highlighting his mistrust of a system that he felt had repeatedly failed him.
12. Finally, a number of participants expressed concern about the lack of sign-posting when attempting to navigate the new probation system. For participants with multiple and complex needs, being released from prison without receiving appropriate guidance to navigate the probation system left them feeling overwhelmed as they scrambled to attend multiple appointments for important services, such as: housing, mental health, substance misuse support services and the benefits system. Again, missed appointments and failed assessments as a result of an overall lack of clarity, left these particularly vulnerable participants at risk of being recalled to prison.
13. This poor communication and increased rate of recall is particularly important given that we know people in contact with the criminal justice system face multiple and complex needs, and significant health inequalities. Our recent report *Rebalancing Act*<sup>5</sup> highlighted some of these health inequalities faced by people with multiple and complex needs who are involved in the criminal justice system. While it is widely known that many people in contact with the criminal justice system experience higher rates of mental ill health, it is important to note that health inequalities run practically the full breadth of the system. Some selected findings from *Rebalancing Act* are presented below.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/blog/rebalancing-act>



14. To prevent further recalls to prison happening as the result of missed appointments and system confusion, Forum members tabled a number of innovative suggestions. One Forum member suggested that a 'secret shopper' system be set up to monitor the performance of CRC's and the NPS. She proposed that random covert inspections be carried out within probation services on a quarterly basis, as a way of gathering information on the quality and performance of services across the country. She also proposed that, as a way of combatting poor performance, services that had received a particularly high number of complaints could be specifically targeted by 'secret shoppers' to assess staff performance and ensure that the quality of the service is improved. Forum members felt particularly strongly about this suggestion, as many of them expressed concerns over their ability to criticise or complain about the probation service. This was because they feared that they would be failed by probation staff or flagged as a 'troublemaker', thus hindering their chance to exit the system for good.

15. In summary, spending short amount of time in prison as a consequence of recall is unlikely to do much more than further disrupt already chaotic lives, and is likely to deliver worse personal, social and reoffending outcomes for many offenders than community alternatives.

**Inquiry question 5: How can Through- the- Gate provision be improved so that people in prison get the right help before their release from prison and afterwards?**

16. Forum members felt that there needed to be a stronger focus on employability and employment opportunities whilst preparing for release. Before release from prison, participants expressed the need for opportunities to develop their CV writing, facilitate links with institutions where they could further their education (e.g. colleges and universities) and raise awareness of their employment prospects. One Forum member suggested that this could take the form of a

webpage or booklet, with detailed information and links, made available to prisoners preparing for release. After release from prison, participants expressed the need for the provision of a directory of certified employers who would offer them prospective employment.

17. Connected to this, Forum members challenged the quality and sustainability of courses that were made available to them in prison to prepare them for release. They expressed concerns about the sustainability of courses that they had completed in prison, stating that often it was difficult to maintain any progress made once released from prison and to continue the development of any skills gained. Questions were also raised about the quality of the courses offered in prison, centering on the practicality of the courses that were offered to participants. Many expressed their desire for courses that would equip them with the skills that they needed to find a job upon release- such as CV writing clinics. A number of Forum members also vocalised the need for courses in the area of 're-lapse prevention', as many felt that upon release the absence of an effective support network left them vulnerable to slipping into old habits.
18. Participants questioned the current provision of local services, expressing the need for the services that they engage with to be, geographically, within a reasonable distance. One Forum member provided an account of his personal experience, in which he served a 15-month prison sentence in Scotland but was released to his hometown - a northern English city. However, upon being released to this city he was informed by probation that his local connection would be in Scotland. This was despite only having spent time in Scotland as a prisoner and having no real personal connection to the location. He felt that the allocation of Scotland as his local service provider was not only inappropriate but damaging to his attempts to re-integrate back into society.
19. Worryingly, a number of participants had had negative experiences whilst engaging with staff from different organisations, including prisons, probation, social services and welfare courts. These experiences took various forms, ranging from feeling degraded and belittled to the feeling that they could not protest inappropriate treatment for fear of being sent back to prison. Participants went on to suggest that this could be combatted by providing service staff with accredited training around interpersonal skills, empathy and compassion when interacting with service users. They expressed the importance of 'the right people with the right attitude' in aiding their transition from prison to becoming active members of society.
20. On a positive note, most of the Forum members had had a positive experience of the service provided by non-profit and charitable organisations, stating that such organisations had treated them 'like human beings' and that they trusted the staff they had engaged with.
21. Peer mentorship as a mechanism for aiding Through-the-gate provision was a theme that Forum members consistently raised and showed great enthusiasm towards. Many participants vocalised concerns that the current system did not provide enough guidance and appropriate signposting, which had left them feeling overwhelmed when they were eventually released from prison. They went on to suggest that the provision of a national peer mentorship system would allow for previous service users to use their expertise to help guide individuals through the probation service and beyond. This would not only provide individuals with practical support, but also emotional support from a peer with shared understanding of the 'road ahead'. However, some Forum members were keen to raise the point that peer mentorship could only function in the long-term if it was offered as a 'proper career route' with professional training and a qualifications system. This was because they felt that few service users could afford to

volunteer for free, but more importantly, that the mentorship scheme would not be of a high enough quality if it was not professionalised.

22. Forum members felt very strongly about the topic of housing provision for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they expressed the need for housing to be organised *before* release by having access to the list of available property options/ housing providers whilst still in prison. This was because many of the participants had experienced homelessness upon release from prison as the result of poor organisation with regards to housing. This had generated a great deal of anguish for some participants, as they were forced into inappropriate living situations which created further instability after the rigour of prison life. Secondly, the need for *appropriate* housing was considered to be vital to re-integration and the prevention of re-offending. For example, participants with young children communicated the need for housing which was both large and safe enough for their children to visit. Similarly, some participants explained that the right location for the housing could be crucial to their recovery and rehabilitation due to past experiences where close proximity to former acquaintances put them at risk of adopting old behaviour patterns.

For more information, or to discuss these issues with members of our Service User Forum, please contact:

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<sup>i</sup> Gelsthorpe, L., and Sharpe, G. (2007) Women and Resettlement in A. Hucklesby and L. Hagley-Dickinson (eds) Prisoner Resettlement. Policy and Practice. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

<sup>ii</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, London: Social Exclusion Unit

<sup>iii</sup> Masson, I. (2014) The Long-Term Impact of Short Periods of Imprisonment on Mothers, PhD Thesis, King's College London (pages 149 – 150)

<sup>iv</sup> Shelter (2015) Prison Leavers and Homelessness, IRISS Insights Series No 29, Glasgow: IRISS

<sup>v</sup> Corston, *op. cit.*, p.4

<sup>vi</sup> Nottingham City Council (2006) Research into current housing provision, housing pathways and support needs of women seeking to exit prostitution, to inform future provision, Nottingham: Nottingham City Council

<sup>vii</sup> DrugScope and Ava (2013). The Challenge of Change: Improving services for women involved in prostitution and substance use, available at: <http://www.drugwise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Challenge-of-change-policy-briefing.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Prison Reform Trust, *op. cit.*, p.4