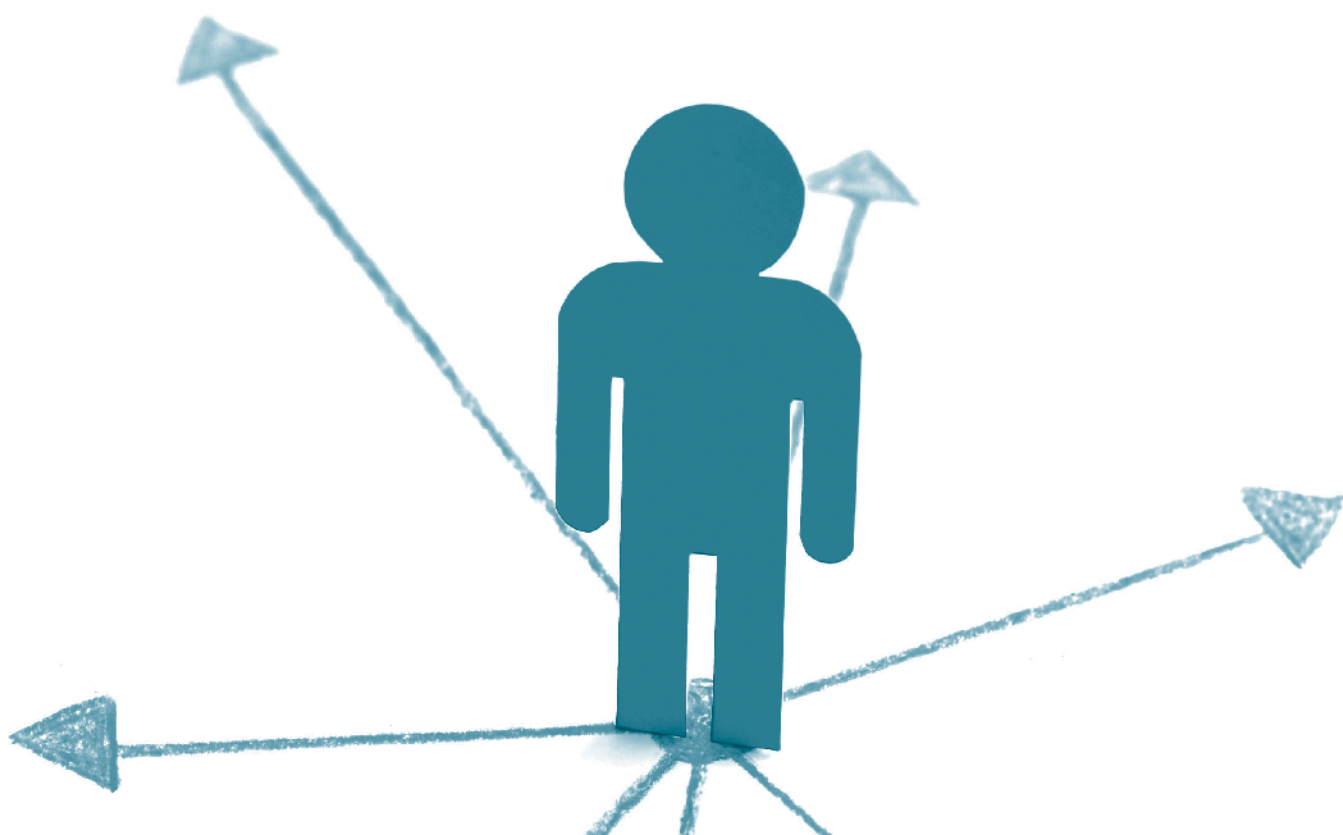


# Reducing reoffending in Scotland

Service Users' Views



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared for the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission  
November 2012

# Auditor General for Scotland

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# Part 1: Introduction and methodology

## Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of a piece of work carried out by Reid Howie Associates for Audit Scotland. The research explored the views of two types of offenders (those on community-based orders and prisoners) through a series of group discussions. These discussions examined a range of issues relating to their perceived needs, the support available to them and the promotion of desistance from offending.
2. The work was commissioned to contribute to an overall performance audit being carried out by Audit Scotland to look at the issue of reoffending in Scotland. The performance audit aimed to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of approaches to reduce reoffending in Scotland, and had a number of related objectives, focusing on: identifying the scale and nature of reoffending and the options for dealing with offenders; identifying the costs of services to offenders and the costs to society of persistent offending; assessing the effectiveness of partnership working; assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of current approaches to reducing reoffending; and identifying the challenges and barriers to further improvements. The full performance audit report can be found on the Audit Scotland website – [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk).
3. The research detailed in this report relates particularly to the objective of identifying the scale and nature of reoffending and clarifying the range of options for dealing with people who offend.

## Methodology

4. Audit Scotland commissioned Reid Howie Associates to speak with two groups of offenders, those on community-based orders and prisoners. The locations of the groups were chosen to coincide with the in-depth fieldwork areas selected by Audit Scotland as part of the wider performance audit.
5. Offenders on community-based orders from four local authority areas took part in focus groups. These were held in: Renfrewshire; Falkirk; Fife; and Aberdeenshire. A total of 22 offenders took part in these focus groups.

6. These groups comprised:

Renfrewshire	6 offenders on Community Payback Orders; Community Service Orders or Probation
Falkirk	7 offenders on Community Payback Orders; Supervised Attendance Orders; Community Service Orders or Probation
Fife	3 offenders on Drug Treatment and Testing Orders
Aberdeenshire	6 offenders on Community Payback Orders or Probation

7. Prisoners in four establishments took part in focus groups. These were held in: HMYOI Polmont; HMP Aberdeen; HMP Perth; and HMP Low Moss. A total of 27 prisoners took part in these focus groups.

8. These groups comprised:

Polmont	7 male young offenders aged 19 and 20, serving 2 to 4 years
Perth	5 adult long term prisoners serving over 4 years
Aberdeen	10 adult short term prisoners serving 6 months to 4 years
Low Moss	5 short term prisoners serving 2 to 4 years

9. Although the offenders were a cross section of those held in their respective establishments or undertaking community-based orders, they are not intended to be representative of all offenders. All participants were volunteers.
10. Two topic guides were developed by Audit Scotland to help structure the discussions. These are contained in Annex 1. Two facilitators were involved in each group (both of whom asked questions and scribed). Extensive notes were taken, with verbatim quotes recorded by the scribe.
11. All of the findings were prepared in Word tables organised by group and question. The material in the Word documents was analysed to identify the overall “themes” pertaining to each topic and any “sub-themes” emerging. Separate analyses were carried out of the material for offenders on community-based orders and prisoners.
12. All of the material is presented unattributed. In some cases, specific details have been excluded as they may allow the offender to be identified. Although quotes have been included, in some cases, a small amount of editing has been done to prevent an offender being identified.
13. The material is presented without comment. It would be inappropriate to correct any matters of fact as the report reflects the views of those who took part about the issues covered.

## The Report

14. The report is in 3 parts, including this section, which has provided a brief introduction and outline of the methodology.

15. Part 2 presents the views of offenders on community-based orders about a number of issues:

- General perceptions of the order.
- The management of the order.
- Support provided through the order.
- Supervision.
- Impact and measures to promote desistance.

16. Part 3 presents the views of prisoners' about a number of issues as follows:

- Issues facing prisoners on conviction / entry to prison.
- The identification of needs.
- Accessing and using services in prison.
- Preparation for release from prison.
- Promoting desistance.

## Part 2: Views of Offenders on Community-Based Orders

17. This section explores the views of offenders on community-based orders about the following:
  - General perceptions of the order.
  - The management of the order.
  - Support provided through the order.
  - Supervision.
  - Impact and measures to promote desistance.
18. As noted in the introduction, offenders who took part in focus groups were undertaking a variety of orders, including: Community Payback Orders (CPOs); Community Service Orders (CSOs); and Supervised Attendance Orders (SAOs). Three offenders were undertaking Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs). Some offenders were also on Probation Orders (POs). Virtually all of those who took part in the groups had experience of a variety of orders, often extending over a number of years.
19. It is worth noting that some offenders appeared to have no clear understanding of the number and type of orders they were subject to at the time of the focus group. Some clearly confused CPOs and CSOs.
20. The material set out below should be taken to relate to any or all types of order unless specifically identified.

### General perceptions of the order

21. Offenders' general perceptions of their order were explored.

### *The purpose of the order*

22. A minority of offenders offered the view that community based orders were simply about punishment. Most identified that orders (of all types) have, or could have additional benefits for offenders. Among the potential benefits identified were:
  - Promoting desistance from offending.
  - Getting a basic education.
  - Learning useful skills through other activity.
  - Address addictions.
  - Access support with housing, benefits or other practical issues.



23. There was a common view that unpaid work undertaken as part of an order was solely a punishment or deterrent (although, as will be set out later, there was also a view among at least some participants that this could be better used to gain other benefits). A small number of offenders (in two groups) suggested that community orders of all types were simply used as a way of “freeing space in jails”.

### ***Views about receiving an order***

24. Offenders who had been sentenced to probation, CPOs and CSOs all recognised that these were an alternative to custody. In several cases, the offender had been warned (either by their agent, or by a social work report writer) that the Sheriff would be likely to impose custody. One participant had been remanded in custody for nearly three months before their court appearance.

*“My lawyer had said that I should expect 4 or 5 years and suggested that I should get things organised with my house, the cat and things like that. I was gobsmacked when the Sheriff gave me a ...”*

25. Most offenders expressed relief that they had been given a community-based, rather than a custodial sentence. The main reasons given for this included:

- Being less disruptive to family members or pets.
- Allowing them to continue as a full time carer for children or an older adult.
- Allowing them to continue to work or attend education.
- Allowing them to continue a programme of support with addiction issues.

26. One offender suggested that:

*“I suppose it was a vote of confidence in me. The Sheriff seemed to think I could do this.”*

27. A small number, however, indicated that they would have preferred custody. Although three indicated that this was to “get it over with quicker”, two had more personal reasons:

- Previous experiences of receiving help with addictions and other issues while in custody.
- A view that they were being “set up to fail”, with a concern that breaching their order would attract a longer sentence than would have been imposed for the original offence.

28. Three offenders (in two different groups and covering different types of order) indicated that they had originally preferred custody, but had changed their views in the light of their experiences of the order.

29. It was noted by some participants that a specific order is not necessarily a single entity. Clients indicated that their “orders” included:
- Unpaid work.
  - Supervision.
  - Good conduct requirements.
  - Specific mandated programmes.
  - Attendance at alcohol counselling.
  - A Compensation Order.
30. A significant minority of offenders expressed wider concerns about perceived unfairness in sentencing. A number of reasons were given for this, particularly comparisons made with sentences given to co-accused, or others known to the offender.

### ***Concerns about the Order***

31. Overall, most offenders indicated that they had experienced at least some level of initial concern about their order (regardless of the actual nature of the order itself). The most common concern was about breaching their order, and the perceived consequences of this. This was consistent across all groups, and across all types of order.
- “They just seem to think that because you’ve signed a piece of paper, you must have read it and understood it.”*
32. Some of those expressing these concerns had had previous experience of breaching an order.
33. Offenders in all groups identified comments made by social work staff stressing the need to conform to the rules of the order. A recurrent theme was that offenders had been told that they would face imprisonment if they breached their order. While some saw this as a deterrent, some also perceived this to be a cause of stress when coupled with the view that rules were overly complex and restrictive.
34. One, for example, referred to an instance of having received a warning for using a toilet in a bookmakers’ (stating that they had not realised that this was inappropriate, or that using a toilet elsewhere would have been acceptable).
35. There was also a perception among some offenders (identified as coming from staff) that having their order breached would be “automatic” if they did not conform to conditions. Two spoke of “tripping themselves up” or “being trapped” by breaking rules they felt had not properly been explained or that they had not properly understood.
36. A small number of first offenders and those with no previous experience of unpaid work expressed a more general concern about how they would cope with this, how they would interact with other offenders and how they would be

treated by staff. Two older offenders indicated concern about how they might be treated by younger offenders. Offenders in one group indicated a specific concern about being forced to undertake their unpaid work in a group with drug users.

## **The management of the order**

37. Offenders' views about the management of the order were explored.

### ***Post sentence arrangements***

38. Post-sentence arrangements appeared to have been relatively smooth for nearly all participants. Most recalled being spoken with at court by a member of the court social work team, and most had met with their supervising officer within a few days, and at the most, a week. All considered that they had commenced their order quickly.

*“The Sheriff said to wait in the court and someone would speak to me. After about 10 minutes, somebody from the social work took me outside, took my details and my mobile number. They gave me a card with this address and told me to come over. It wasn't hard”.*

39. All of the participants considered that this was appropriate, apart from one who had been remanded in custody, and who had wished for more time to re-establish contact with family members, seek employment etc.

40. Offenders on DTTOs noted that they met with the sheriff and the social work member of staff allocated as their case manager immediately following the imposition of the order. This was viewed as a positive thing, as it meant that all of the details were made clear immediately, It was also suggested that this lessened the risk that they would not attend for their first supervision session.

41. Some offenders expressed a view that the instructions given to them by the court social worker (which varied from area to area) were not always clear, although none appeared to have failed to comply with these initial requirements. One suggested that they had not been told that the relevant office closed at 4pm, and that they had had to return the following morning. Another, who was not familiar with the location of the social work office, suggested that they could have been provided with a map.

42. One offender (who at the time of the group was still at an early stage of their order) indicated that they had reported for their first unpaid work party as required, only to find that it had been cancelled. They indicated that no staff were on hand to explain to them what they should do in these circumstances. The offender expressed a concern that they might be breached if they did the wrong thing.

### ***Participation in the development of a plan for the order***

43. There were mixed views both within and between groups about the extent to which offenders had been involved in detailed planning of the conduct of their order. Generally those on Probation Orders and DTTOs considered that they had been involved fully in choices about, for example, supervision, treatment and other activity. Among those on CPOs and CSOs views were more mixed. Those who had participated in other activity generally considered that they had been more involved than those who had experienced only unpaid work.
44. There was a general view in the three groups that where participants had experience of unpaid work this offered only limited choices. In one area it was noted that there were only two work parties, and that one (generally seen as better) had a waiting list. In the other areas, offenders effectively had no choice of work party, with only one being available to them. Within this, there was some flexibility in terms of the days of attendance.
45. The group of women offenders noted that, if there were spaces available, they could also choose to join the “male” work party. However, it was noted that this could only be decided on a day by day basis, requiring the offender either to telephone ahead, or attend on a speculative basis.
46. Offenders who had taken part in other activity (whether through probation or a CPO, and where this was not a condition of the order) were generally happy that they had been involved in the specification of this. The only exceptions were in one area where some offenders suggested that they had been required to attend a group by their supervising officer. It is worth noting that these offenders indicated that they would have attended voluntarily and that compulsion (which was said to carry the threat of a warning in the event of non-attendance) was unnecessary and oppressive.
47. In the small number of cases where offenders attended activities specified in their order (largely related to drug or alcohol misuse), all were generally positive about this.

### ***Understanding the detailed basis of an order***

48. Offenders reported mixed views about their understanding of what their order entailed.

*“The Sheriff just reeled off a sea of initials. I never really understood any of it.”*

49. The main source of information about the basis of an order was social work staff, although some offenders also mentioned information being provided by family members and other offenders.

50. Views of the willingness of staff to explain details of the orders varied across groups. In three groups (with some exceptions) staff were described as being willing and ready to offer information, while in the fourth group, at least some staff were generally described as unhelpful.
51. Offenders in all groups indicated that they had difficulty in distinguishing different types of orders. In some cases, this was made worse for them by fact of serving different types of order concurrently, with, in some cases, the same member of staff acting as their supervising officer. Some offenders suggested that there was “no difference” between different types of order.

*“If you [the facilitator} need to know what orders I’m on, you’ll need to ask [supervising officer]. It’s all a blur to me.”*

52. The main exception to this was offenders with DTTOs. In all cases, these offenders indicated that they had been aware of the basis of the order before their court appearance. Each was also clear that the Sheriff had taken time to explain the basis of the order, their responsibilities and the consequences should the order be breached. At the time of the focus groups, all offenders indicated that they understood the broad basis of their order, although some indicated varying levels of concern about specific rules relating to, for example, conduct, attendance, warnings and breach.

### ***Practical arrangements***

53. Few of the offenders identified any specific practical difficulties with fulfilling the terms of their orders. Staff were generally described as flexible, and could accommodate other requirements such as appointments, court appearances, childcare issues etc. A number of examples were provided of offenders who had been able to change their days of attendance (both in terms of supervision and unpaid work).
54. However, in one area some offenders took an opposite view, describing staff as inflexible.

*“On one hand, they’re giving me help because they say my life is a chaotic mess, then I get a warning because I don’t phone in at the right time to say I can’t manage to get to something or other my worker thinks I should go to.”*

55. One issue raised by three offenders in different groups was that limitations in the availability of suitable work, or the regular cancellation of specific work parties, may make it difficult for them to complete their required number of hours of unpaid work within the period specified by the court.
56. Related to this, it was also suggested by some offenders that they would prefer to work their hours more quickly, for example by working 5 days per week. However, it was apparent that, while this was possible in one of the areas, in the other two, it was not. One offender noted:

*“I live not far from the pick up point and they’re generally OK if I just go round. If someone doesn’t show up, I get to go on the van. If they’re full, I go back to bed.”*

57. An issue raised in one area was that offenders were not always clear which activities would, and would not be counted towards their hours. Specific local examples were cited about attendance at employability courses and scheduled meetings with drug workers where offenders suggested that some had, and some had not been able to obtain credit towards their total number of hours.
58. Offenders in three of the four groups raised issues about bus fares, and the cost of attending both supervision appointments and unpaid work. It was noted that bus fares can only be partly refunded when the journey travelled is more than 3 miles. Even then, it was noted that only half of the cost is refunded. It was suggested by some offenders that this exacerbates already difficult financial circumstances for some offenders, particularly those on combination orders (involving supervision and unpaid work) and those on high intensity orders (such as DTTOs).
59. Paradoxically, in one area, the solution provided by the local authority (to collect offenders from multiple locations rather than a central point) was also criticised on the basis of the time some had to spend in the minibus.

### ***Views of unpaid work***

60. All offenders who were subject to unpaid work considered that they had been able to start quickly.
61. The main types of work undertaken by male offenders, and by women choosing to work in squads, were:
  - General manual labour.
  - Litter picking.
  - Ground clearance.
  - Fence maintenance,
  - Tree felling and clearance.
  - Tree planting.
62. As noted earlier, there was generally seen to be little or no choice of work party in each of the areas. A number of offenders indicated that they had been part of work parties which had, for example, cleared areas around care homes, or in one case, a wild bird sanctuary. Generally, work at locations of this type was viewed more positively on the basis of the perception that this was “giving something back”.

*“I suppose we never got given a cup of tea or something like that, but a couple of the residents said that we were doing a good job. You feel a lot better about yourself doing that than picking litter off bits of waste ground.”*

63. The work identified by women offenders was workshop based, and involved making a variety of goods for a range of charitable purposes. This was generally viewed positively by the women both in terms of the nature of the work, and, as above, on the basis that it was making some contribution to society.
64. The main concern expressed by offenders was the number of days when there did not appear to be sufficient work, or where the work identified could only actively engage a small number of those on the work party.

*“We just had to sit there while the supervisor fired up the chain saw and cut down the tree. Then we had to wait until he’d cut it up and then hours later, we had to load the branches into the van. It makes it a really long day.”*

65. Offenders in two areas indicated that they were credited with only 6 hours, even though, with travelling time, this occupied their whole day.
66. Only two offenders identified that they had personal placements. Both viewed the principle of this positively, although in one case, the offender had faced a number of difficulties in securing enough hours to make it possible to complete their order within the period specified by the court.
67. In one area, it was suggested that offenders have to complete three squad-based sessions before being considered for a personal placement. In another area, it was suggested that the perceived inflexibility of the risk assessment process makes it virtually impossible for most offenders to qualify for a personal placement, even though they may feel vulnerable in a squad setting.

*“If they do the form and you come out medium or high risk, you’ve no chance of a decent placement. But that might be based on something you did when you were a daft laddie not what you might do now.”*

68. With some exceptions, offenders viewed the unpaid work element simply as punishment. None of those involved in squads was able to identify any skills that they had learned, nor any value that they had received from the work.

*“It’s using boredom as a deterrent.”*

69. Those who had worked in a workshop were more positive about learning some new skills.
70. Again, there was a clear distinction between those working in squads and those working in workshops (as well as personal placements) about whether or not the offenders felt they were “giving something back”. With the limited exception of sessions spent working for “worthy causes” (identified as disabled or older people, and local voluntary organisations), the work was seen as having no value, and was not seen to contribute anything to the local community.

*“The work is pointless and doesn’t help anybody. You paint a fence knowing fine that it’ll be vandalised an hour later.”*

71. As identified earlier, those engaged in making goods for charitable purposes were much more positive about this.
72. There was a general concern across three of the areas that unpaid work appeared under-funded. The main reasons advanced for this included:
- Too few places available each day.
  - Lack of cover for staff, meaning that sessions could be cancelled at short notice when staff were unwell.
  - Limited choice of activities.
  - Lack of personal placements.
  - Too little work for the number of offenders attending each session.
  - Too few tools for the number of offenders.

*“We were out at [location]. There was a group of school kids doing litter picking around their school. They all had hi-viz vests, and a litter picker each. I had a look around. We had three litter pickers between us. Two guys were working, and the rest of us just had to sit about. That’s a really slow day.”*

### **Suggestions about the management of orders**

73. A number of suggestions were made about the management of orders and the practical arrangements, including:
- More flexibility in timetabling activities, including supervision sessions.
  - More recognition of the other things that people have to do, including childcare, animal care, other appointments etc.
  - Refunding full bus fares for offenders on benefits, and those living closer than 3 miles.
74. In relation to unpaid work, a number of suggestions were made, including:
- Additional funding to allow more places to be provided so that offenders can complete orders more quickly.
  - Better arrangements for notifying offenders when work parties have been cancelled.
  - Work parties could be extended beyond 6 hours, again to allow offenders to complete their hours more quickly.
  - Some work parties could be designated “drug free”.
  - More flexibility in risk assessments so that specific types of offenders were not excluded from personal placements
75. More generally, across all orders there was suggestion that there could be more focus on providing activities which allowed offenders to learn new skills, particularly skills that could be certificated. One contrasted the experiences of this order with prison:



*“When I was in BarL, I was on VT (vocational training) work parties. I’ve got certificates for industrial cleaning and for painting and decorating. If you can do it in the jail, why can you not do it on probation?”*

76. A small number of offenders suggested that staff could expand the use of personal placements through securing the participation of local companies. It was suggested that, for example, small manufacturing businesses could be approached to provide placements.

*“See [company] across the road. They take on apprentices. They’ve got a lot of work. Has anybody asked them if they’d take on somebody on community service?”*

77. It was also suggested that this would give the offender relevant work experience, and that it may lead to employment at the end of the period of unpaid work.
78. One offender specifically, although others in a more general sense, suggested that much more use could be made of the existing skills of offenders who were prepared to share these, for example, in teaching computer classes or leading arts and crafts production. In the view of the offender, this was “stymied” by a lack of funding, and what they considered to be an “excessive” focus on health and safety.

## **Support provided through the order**

79. Offenders’ views of the support available to them through their order were explored.

### ***The process of identifying support***

80. All offenders (regardless of the nature of their order) indicated that, as part of their initial interview, they had been asked about a variety of issues. Not all were clear about the detail of this, but among the issues identified were:
- Family circumstances.
  - Housing.
  - Addictions.
  - Offending and the reasons for this.
  - Employment issues.
  - Benefits.
81. In some cases, offenders identified that attendance at some forms of support had been specified as a condition of their order. Offenders in one group considered that Sheriffs should make more use of conditions within orders, as a means of ensuring that necessary support would be made available.

82. Again, all offenders were clear that, where issues had been identified, their supervisor had made suggestions about how these could be addressed. Some (again, regardless of the nature of their order), had been referred to other services.
83. Offenders in one group identified that staff in their area also recommended support for issues they had not previously considered themselves, for example, with self-confidence, assertiveness and problem solving. This was viewed positively.
84. Offenders in two groups also suggested that other service providers to whom they had been referred had, on occasion, made suggestions about other forms of support.

*“The guy from the Job Centre was talking about CVs and he also mentioned a computer course. I never thought I could get something like that. I asked [supervising officer] and she’s got me on it. I get my hours as well.”*

85. A small number of offenders (largely, but not exclusively in one group) identified that accessing support may be logistically difficult for some.

*“The course is in [another town]. How am I meant to get there? I get half the fare back, but that still costs me about £4. I’d get 2 hours for the course, but it would take me about 6 hours by the time I get there and back.”*

### ***The nature of other support available***

86. At a basic level, the support identified as being available for offenders was similar across all groups regardless of the nature of the offender’s order.. Among the support identified was:

- Alcohol counselling (generally through a third party organisation).
- Support with drug addiction (in a variety of forms).
- Literacy and numeracy.
- Employability.
- Benefits.
- Referrals to various services to assist with housing issues
- Money advice, including referral to services such as the CAB.
- Sexual health advice.
- Referral to specialist services in relation to domestic abuse.
- Referral to specialist services in relation to childhood sexual abuse.

87. Offenders identified a number of “courses” or “programmes” they had either taken part in, or which they were awaiting referral to. This was more common among those on probation, but a number of offenders with CPOs had also taken part in groups. Among the groups identified were:

- “Change” or the “Caledonian Programme” (specifically for offenders convicted of domestic abuse-related offences).
  - “Constructs” (specifically for male offenders who are persistent offenders, or are assessed as a medium or high risk of reoffending)
  - “Anger management”.
  - Computing courses.
88. In one area, the local authority had implemented a “Lifeskills” group, focusing on a wide range of issues relating both to offending and coping skills. It was noted that the issues covered both in terms of the overall programme, and the specific topics on a session by session basis, were decided by the group. Those involved in this group were very positive about its impact, and particularly about the peer support aspects.

*“I was really sceptical at first. I’ve spent years not talking about anything bothering me. Why would I start now? But now I’m here, I’d say it’s made a big difference. It’s not the group really, it’s the other guys. They treat you alright.”*

89. Offenders in two areas identified that they had either gone on, or been given the opportunity to attend a residential programme run by the Venture Trust. It was suggested that this focused on helping offenders develop personal qualities such as team working, self-confidence and problem solving. One offender noted that they had been disappointed to find that they were excluded from this because of their age, and suggested that a version for older offenders could be provided.

### **Specific support for women offenders**

90. In one area, offenders identified that the local authority had chosen to put in place a system of support for women offenders, which complements individual packages of support. This support is open to women on any form of court order, as well as women who access voluntary throughcare following liberation from prison.
91. The local authority has also appointed a women’s worker (using Scottish Government funding) who was identified as being available to provide support to offenders on a drop in basis. Most participants in the group had received both one to one support and referrals on a range of issues.
92. The worker had also identified a range of common issues affecting women offenders and had implemented a weekly group (which is regarded as other activity for offenders with hours based orders) to explore these. Although the worker had identified the range of issues, offenders were clear that the actual choice of topics was left to them, and that the worker had responded positively to requests made for specific services to attend.

*“We said to [worker] ‘can we get somebody from the Credit Union’ and a couple of weeks later, along they came.”*

93. Offenders identified that they had been able to meet with representatives of a number of key organisations in this setting, including the local college; the housing service; Women’s Aid; a credit union and JobCentre Plus.

*“I got a qualification before I started using, but I was terrified about going to the college now with this criminal record. I got as far as the door, but I couldn’t do it. Having them sitting in the group knowing they’re not looking at me like I’m scum made all the difference. I really think I’ve got a chance of a place.”*

94. Although offenders were very positive about the group in practice, a number indicated that they had been reluctant to engage at the outset. A number identified that a key benefit to them had been peer support.
95. A point made by a small number of offenders who had had experience of serving orders before the current approach was established was that much more support appeared to be available now than previously.

## **DTTOs**

96. Offenders on DTTOs were very positive about the support available to them. It was suggested that “treatment” was a misleading term, and that it did not adequately describe their experience. Each had been referred to what they viewed as relevant services, some relating to drug use, some relating to offending and some relating to practical or coping issues.
97. All had also been receiving support with issues like assertiveness, self confidence, offending behaviour, and each had participated in sessions where they were forced to confront themselves and their actions. Two described this as somewhat unsettling but helpful. All had been referred to an employability programme.
98. One concern that offenders expressed was the delay in starting the substitute prescribing. The perception was that this prolonged the period in which they were likely to offend in order to have to purchase drugs openly. Recognising this, it was noted that Sheriffs may decide to defer dealing with these offences until the end of the period of the order. However, it was suggested that this may increase the pressure felt by the offender while on the order. It was also suggested that offenders may actually face a greater risk of imprisonment due to the number of offences being considered at that time, even although they had completed the order successfully.

## **Overall views of support**

99. Offenders were largely positive about the process of identifying and accessing support, even where their views of staff generally were negative.
100. A small number (spread across different groups) suggested that they had had to push for support, but this was not the general view.
101. Offenders in one area suggested that, even where staff identified support that could be useful, they would not generally make a referral, instead requiring that the offender referred themselves.
102. There were mixed views about “compulsory” support. Some suggested that this was a good thing, but others (particularly in one area) expressed an alternative view.

*“I’m happy to go to [activity]. I know [supervising officer] wants me to go, but it’s wrong that I can get breached if I stop going to something that’s meant to help me. That’s not right.”*

103. It was also suggested by one offender that the simple fact of making something compulsory would make them less likely to do it.
104. Offenders with DTTOs were positive about the “credibility” of most of those providing support to them. It was suggested that, for them, this was perhaps the most crucial aspect of support.
105. It is perhaps worth noting that offenders across each of the groups described attendance at other activity in terms of “getting hours off”, suggesting that they did not view this as integral to the order.

## **Suggestions about support**

106. Offenders made very few suggestions about additional support requirements, or about potential improvements in the way it could be provided. Among the suggestions made were:
  - Courses to be made available in more locations to reduce travelling time.
  - Some account taken of excessive travelling time in calculating the number of hours to be credited to an offender for other activity.
107. Offenders across all groups who had drug problems identified a number of suggestions in relation to support which related to wider NHS policies which were beyond the scope of social work services to address.

## Supervision

108. Offenders views about supervision were explored.

### ***Practical arrangements and the pattern of supervision***

109. Offenders reported that the basis of their supervision varied depending on the nature of their order. It was suggested that supervision could be weekly, fortnightly or monthly, and that this could change depending on the view the supervising officer took of the offender's progress.

*"I started off every week, and now it's every fortnight."*

110. Offenders with multiple orders suggested that they often found it difficult to identify which order individual supervision sessions related to.

111. It is worth noting that a small number of offenders (in two different groups) were unclear what "supervision" meant. They were unclear about the distinctions between a "formal" supervision session, and situations where a worker would ask them about an issue, or enquire about an aspect of their order.

112. Offenders on DTTOs reported a different pattern of supervision, with a minimum of three sessions each week. One was specifically identified as supervision, but the offenders also regarded the other two (one with a nurse and the other connected with drug testing) as being "supervision".

113. The issues identified as being covered in supervision sessions were similar regardless of the nature of the order. These included:

- General enquires about progress.
- Enquiries about family circumstances.
- Offending behaviour, or perceived risks of this.
- Alcohol or drug use.
- Progress in relation to employment or education.

114. There were mixed views about the usefulness of the supervision sessions. Overall, those on probation, or who had previously been subject to a Probation Order, were less positive. It was suggested by a number of offenders that meetings were often short, and did not cover issues in detail.

115. One suggested that their supervising officer appeared to be using a workbook as a way of guiding their sessions, but noted that most of the content did not apply to them. One offender noted:

*"Probation is a complete waste of space. Ten minutes a fortnight. Same old questions. What's the point of that?"*

116. Offenders who had had experience of both probation and CPOs with supervision were generally more positive about the latter, although even with CPOs, there were mixed views about how useful supervision was to them.
117. More generally, however, there was also a recognition that the supervision process was a way of raising concerns, and a means of requesting additional help where this was seen to be required.
118. Offenders in one area raised concerns about what was viewed as considerable variation in the approach of different supervising officers. Some were seen as helpful, while some were not. There was also a view that there were differences between supervising officers in terms of their overall approach to discipline, and in the use of both warnings and breach procedures.
119. One participant who had had Probation Orders in 3 separate local authority areas including 2 in the area covered by the group, suggested that all of their orders had been managed in such different ways she felt that she had been almost misled in terms of understanding what a Probation Order would entail by the relatively lax supervision she had experienced on her first order.

*“The things I did in [other local authority area] would get me breached here, but the stupid thing is that I completed that order and I kept getting told I was doing well.”*

120. A common view was that something which appeared acceptable to one officer was an immediate cause of breach to another officer.

### **Review processes within a DTTO**

121. Offenders described three parts to the review process. Offenders meet with their social workers on a weekly basis and this focuses on two aspects: whether they have reoffended and the risks of this; and how they are progressing generally against their plan. There was general agreement that these are highly participative sessions and that there is no sense in which they are unable to say what they thought about issues. Staff were described as being flexible and were able to accommodate changes in the overall DTTO plan, for example, by adding in additional supports when these were required.
122. The second part identified was testing. All participants had to complete two mandatory tests per week. It was clear from their views that this was the area where they had most discomfort in terms of lack of awareness of rules and lack of confidence in the accuracy of the tests.

*“Somebody said you can challenge the test in court. What chance have you got when the court has you and an expert. Who are they going to believe?”*

123. Although it was said that a positive test would not necessarily mean a breach, staff had stressed that this was a possibility and at the very least, their

supervision would be tightened. It was noted that all DTTO clients were subject to random drug tests at no notice. This was not said to cause any additional stress in itself.

124. The third part of the process identified was review by the Sheriff. One described this as “weird and unsettling” as they had spent years being told never to speak to the Sheriff and found it difficult to speak when asked questions. The frequency of the review was set by the Sheriff and was described as being for 2 purposes: firstly to discuss progress and secondly to consider deferred matters. One cause of stress identified by offenders was that the Sheriff has the power to revoke the order at any point and send them to prison.
125. All participants were very positive about the approach of the Sheriffs concerned, who asked questions and both listened to and were responsive to answers given. All three had experience of Sheriffs who had used the process of admonishing them on some of their deferred matters as a means of recognising their good progress.

*“... when he said that he wanted to consider this charge and that charge now, I thought he was going to leave them all to the end and I was sure I was going to jail. He said I’d been making a lot of progress and there was no need to keep these hanging over me. It was an amazing feeling. I felt like I’d really done something for the first time in years.”*

### **Suggestions about supervision**

126. Offenders made a small number of suggestions about supervision including:

- More consistency of approach between different staff members.
- More clarity in terms of the application of the rules relevant to individual orders.
- In Probation Orders, a greater focus on issues facing the offender.
- That staff should be more proactive in supporting offenders to access services, rather than simply making referrals.

### **Impact and measures to promote desistance**

127. Offenders views about the impact of their order, and more widely, the measures which might be required to help them desist from offending were explored.



## ***Impact of the order***

128. As might be expected, there were contrasting views about the impact of orders on individuals. Some offenders, including all of one group, and around half of another, believed that their order had had no impact on them.

129. Others were more positive. It was clear that the main factor in these more positive views was that the order had been a stepping stone to addressing life or coping issues. One offender provided a clear example of this:

*“I begged the sheriff to make alcohol counselling mandatory and he did. That’s saved my life. But what it’s also done is meant that I got a lot of other help from the social work I’d never have bothered with, or not been in a state to take in. It’s meant that I’ve got my family back and that’s what’s going to stop me reoffending. I never want to lose them again.”*

130. Offenders on DTTOs were particularly positive about the opportunities offered to them through the order, and particularly the accelerated access to services that otherwise would have required them to join long waiting lists.

*“I got referred to [service] and got accepted straight away. I’d heard there was a 9, 12 month waiting list so I never bothered putting my name down because I figured I’d probably be dead by then.”*

131. Women who had participated in other activity were generally positive about the impact of this. Several made the point that accessing support services, and particularly being able to meet with outreach staff from the local college, had given them “hope”. A number also identified (in various ways), that they had become more confident, or that their self-esteem had been increased. Most expressed a view that they might be more likely to be able to access, and sustain a college place or work.

132. However, it is also worth recording that a number of offenders, across three groups, identified that the management of their order, their lack of understanding of the detail of rules, and what they perceived as a constant threat of being breached and hence being imprisoned, was a cause of considerable stress and anxiety.

*“You shouldn’t be terrified while you are on an order. While you recognise you are here to be punished there is no need for staff to approach things in the way they do.”*

133. Offenders in two groups also identified the impact of either pending charges, or of deferred matters, on their order. It was clear from the views expressed by these offenders that they were unclear about the impact of a fresh conviction on their order, and at least two suggested that they expected their current order to be breached (even though the offences appeared to have been committed prior to its imposition).

*“It’s difficult to focus on anything with this hanging over you.”*

134. Offenders with DTTOs recognised that the basis of the order involves the deferment of all pending matters at the discretion of the Sheriff, but it was clear from views expressed that this was also a cause of stress and anxiety, although none believed that this would adversely impact on their likelihood of completing the order.

### **Promoting desistance**

135. There was a general view across all groups that promoting desistance was unlikely to be simple. One noted:

*“It’s never going to be just one thing. It might be different things, at different times. Everybody’s got their own buttons.”*

136. Offenders across all groups acknowledged that the process of desistance may take time, and may require multiple interventions addressing apparently the same issue (with drugs and alcohol misuse) being cited.
137. There were mixed views about whether any community-based order could promote desistance. Some, as noted earlier, were positive about the impact of other activity, and particularly about external forms of support, but others were more sceptical.
138. At a broader level, the most common view expressed was that more could be done to help offenders seek employment. Mentioned in this context were:
- More use of skills training (with, as noted earlier, more use of the skills of offenders sentenced to unpaid work).
  - More opportunities for certification.
  - More placements with employers as part of probation or unpaid work.
  - More practical help to find jobs.
  - Where necessary, support continuing when the offender had moved into employment.
139. An offender with a very high number of hours of unpaid work suggested that it would be more useful to spend the same number of hours at a college as this would allow them to complete a number of units towards an SQA qualification.
140. It was suggested that more could be done to use offenders as a way of promoting a “crime-free” lifestyle among children. Offenders also suggested that more could be done to involve those with drug problems in helping to ensure that children did not become involved.
141. Offenders across all four groups identified a range of broader changes seen as required. By some margin, the most commonly mentioned was that offenders

should be treated with more respect, by police and sentencers, social work staff and service delivers, and by members of the public.

*“People are very judgemental. Once a crook ...”*

## Part 3: Views of Prisoners

142. This section explores prisoners' views of the following:

- Issues facing prisoners on conviction / entry to prison.
- The identification of needs.
- Accessing and using services in prison.
- Preparation for release from prison.
- Promoting desistance.

### Issues facing prisoners on conviction / entry to prison

143. The main issues identified by prisoners on entering prison were: housing; finance; difficulties in maintaining family contact and, to a lesser extent, health.

#### *Housing*

144. Housing was identified in all of the prisons as a problem, and a number of housing issues were identified which prisoners faced when first sent to prison. Many of these related specifically to giving up housing because of a prisoner's sentence length, and several participants in different groups had experience of this.

145. Issues identified relating to this included a general lack of clarity about the procedures for giving up a tenancy and difficulties in physically surrendering keys to a landlord. A further issue highlighted was that prisoners faced problems in clearing a property on conviction, with the suggestion that no real help is available for this, and that the prisoner has to rely on family members to do so.

146. There were also seen to be problems in storing property. One prisoner stated that, although the social work service had said they could store possessions, they did not. It was also suggested that:

*“Local authority or housing association clearance generally means a skip”.*

147. Some prisoners suggested that the only option for storage appeared to be private sector units at market rates, which were seen to be prohibitively expensive.

148. More generally, difficulties were identified for prisoners in securing advice from a housing specialist about what they needed to do in relation to their housing when imprisoned.

149. Two main consequences were identified as arising from the housing issues described, both of which were seen to have a subsequent impact on liberation. These were:

- Accrual of rent arrears.
- Loss of possessions.

150. It was suggested that prisoners can accrue significant rent arrears (or add to existing arrears) by not terminating their tenancy early enough, by not being able to return keys, or by not knowing or following the correct procedures. It was stated that the presence of rent arrears then has a subsequent impact on being accepted either for a tenancy, or even onto a waiting list on liberation.

151. A number of prisoners reported losing all of their possessions either as a result of: an inability to store these (with one, for example stating that all of their possessions went to charity); their houses being ransacked by others; or houses being cleared by councils or housing associations. As one stated:

*“When you go out, you go out with nothing”.*

152. Some prisoners also suggested that benefit providers appeared to make “random” decisions about whether to make a grant or loan to a prisoner on liberation to replace some of these items.

## **Finance**

153. The main financial issues identified on remand or conviction related to a lack of money to meet prisoners’ immediate needs, or a lack of goods. A number of problems were highlighted.

154. A common issue identified was that there is a lead time for convicted prisoners between their reception and being paid. There may also be delays in families being able to provide money for a Prisoner’s Personal Cash (PPC), and even where a prisoner does have money, it may take up to a week for items ordered through the prison’s canteen process to be actioned.

155. A specific issue identified for prisoners on remand was that they cannot work and do not receive a cell wage<sup>1</sup>. If they have no-one to provide money, they are effectively reliant on a minimal canteen pack. Such prisoners are also provided with one second class stamp per week. One group also stated that benefits are only paid to remand prisoners for a limited period.

156. A further concern relating to the lack of money was that prisoners, on conviction, are given a 30p phone credit. It was noted that this may not even be sufficient to reach the end of an answering machine message:

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<sup>1</sup> A “cell wage” is the sum paid only to convicted prisoners who do not work, or take part in specified education or training activities.

*“You’re on the phone 10 seconds and if it goes to voice mail your money is gone”.*

157. It was also noted, however, that some staff in first night centres may be sympathetic to allowing access to a phone.
158. No prisoners reported issues with state or housing benefits on entering prison. It was stated that these are cancelled automatically. This was viewed as positive, as it prevented any possibility of overpayment.
159. The lack of money experienced as a result of the issues identified above was seen to have a number of potential consequences for prisoners. These included:
  - Difficulties staying in touch with families in the early stages of a sentence.
  - A need to choose between different essential actions (for example, trying to arrange for the termination of a tenancy and clearance of their home, or calling a family member).
  - Shortage of items, particularly tobacco.
  - Risk of exploitation or debt, particularly for first time prisoners and vulnerable prisoners, who do not know who to ask for help, or who may be scared to do so.
  - Risk of manipulation or bullying as a result of debts to other prisoners.

### ***Family contact***

160. Difficulties with family contact on entry to prison were also identified across all of the prisoner groups. As noted above, at a basic level, prisoners may find it difficult, in practical terms, to tell their family where they are as a result of difficulties in making telephone contact. One prisoner also stated that all of their contact information was contained within their mobile phone, and that the loss of access to this meant loss of access to the information.
161. Some issues were also raised in relation to families’ access to prisoners. For example, it was suggested that they may be unaware of visiting issues. It was also suggested that they may be unaware of the things they can (and cannot) do in relation to property and PPC (for example, in terms of handing in money, clothes, CD, books etc).
162. A specific issue identified for prisoners at national establishments was that it may be very difficult for families to visit a prisoner at an early stage in their sentence, if they live a long distance away.
163. A specific issue identified in one prison related to the need for family members to have photographic identification. Prisoners stated that, in other prisons, families without this were given a three week grace period where they would be provided with a temporary SPS identification to allow them to visit. However,

one prisoner group stated that this had been withdrawn in that prison. An example was given of where a first offender's family had been turned away and subsequently refused a visit because of the lack of identification. This had caused considerable distress, and had been eventually resolved by a Family Contact Officer (FCO) identifying a way of securing suitable photo identification.

164. One group highlighted the importance of family contact, as well as the high level of reliance on their families by many prisoners. It was also suggested that:

*"If you have no family, you can lose everything".*

165. Prisoners identified the personal impact of difficulties in family contact, given the importance of this. Some specific additional consequences were also identified, which included that such problems could:

- Compound the difficulties identified above in relation to issues such as a lack of money, or a need for action such as house clearance.
- Increase isolation, particularly for young prisoners or first time prisoners.

## ***Health***

166. A small number of health issues were also identified for prisoners entering prison. Where prisoners had non-mainstream conditions, particularly mental health issues, for example, it was suggested that there could be delays in securing treatment. In one prison, for example, there was a concern about the speed of prescription of anti-depressants for continuation. In another, it was suggested that medication generally could take a while to sort out, for example:

*"You have to wait and get put back onto things."*

167. It was also suggested that there could be delays in transitioning to non-opiate based pain management regimes.

168. No particular issues were reported in these groups, however, with the transfer of medical notes, or particularly with methadone prescriptions.

## ***Suggested improvements to support on entering prison***

169. A small number of improvements to support on entering prison were suggested specifically in the groups.

170. In relation to housing issues, the main suggestion was the early identification of housing issues and access to a specialist housing officer. This was seen to link to all of the problems identified, as it would help to address these and to prevent, for example, the accumulation of arrears and the loss of possessions.

171. A few suggestions were also made relating to financial issues. These included:

- Access to more than 30p phone credit on conviction.
- Access to a hardship fund for destitute prisoners, to allow them to get settled either on remand, or when awaiting their first wage.
- Increased awareness of the need to avoid incurring debts to other prisoners.
- Continuation of benefits during a period of remand.

172. More generally, it was suggested that there should be awareness raising of the need to address all of the problems faced by prisoners on entry to jail.

## **The identification of needs**

173. Prisoners in all of the groups identified issues relating to needs assessment, in terms of processes and practices.

### ***Processes for needs assessment***

174. A number of ways were identified in which needs are identified and assessed.

175. Some prisoners stated that needs are identified by staff in the following ways:

- As part of an induction process (mentioned by a number of prisoners, although with mixed views of this).
- In a first night centre (where these exist).
- In a hall.
- As part of a core screen process.

176. It was also suggested that needs can be identified by prisoners themselves, by other prisoners and by family members.

177. The other main means of identifying needs were through contact with other services (e.g. addictions or social work), where a referral was made to them, or information passed to them.

### ***Effectiveness of needs assessment in prison***

178. There were mixed views about the effectiveness of prison in identifying prisoners' needs. Some prisoners felt that the process was effective, while others were less positive.

179. A number made comments on the induction process, including the views that:



- It is difficult to identify issues at that stage in imprisonment, when there is a lot of information provided and it is an unsettling time.
- The length of induction is not always appropriate to do this and can be rushed.
- The process may not cover the specific individual needs which prisoners have (e.g. housing).

180. Some comments were also made on the role of staff. These included that there can be a lack of staff awareness of the processes for identifying prisoners' needs or providing support. A further issue raised was that variations in staff attitudes, or variations in how proactive they are willing to be, can lead to differences in the extent to which the staff try to identify prisoners' needs. For example, one prisoner stated that:

*"Most prison officers don't seem to care. You get to know who does".*

181. It was also suggested that there can be an assumption that prisoners who have been in prison before are aware of how to identify and make their needs known, and no action needs to be taken with them. Some variations were also highlighted between prisons in terms of the effectiveness of the processes of identifying needs.

182. Some prisoners stated that information about some issues, particularly addictions, appeared to be more readily identified than others. Another stated that the process of assessment, where this was undertaken was a "tick box exercise". It was also suggested that there can be limited specialist knowledge available about some issues.

183. There was a common view from the groups that often prisoners have to identify and raise their own needs (often working on the basis of advice and information from other prisoners or seen on a notice board). They may then seek input from others. As one stated for example:

*"You have to do it yourself. You have to ask."*

184. One group stated that they often learned from previous poor experiences (e.g. of losing a tenancy) that they should highlight and address their own needs at an early stage.

185. It was also suggested that, even where issues are identified, they are not always followed up unless a prisoner is willing to "push" this (discussed further later). A specific problem was highlighted for remand prisoners, where it was suggested that little is done with them, even where they are fully committed.

186. At a more general level, a number of prisoners expressed the view that the whole process of identifying needs was sporadic. For example:

*"It seems totally by chance usually – there's no grand plan".*

187. At a basic level, these difficulties were seen to lead to a lack of identification of needs for some prisoners. Some prisoners were seen to be at a particular disadvantage (e.g. new prisoners, prisoners who are vulnerable, first offenders, young prisoners and others). It was suggested that these prisoners may be unaware of how to have their needs identified, or may be unable or unwilling to speak up, and that prisoners who are unaware of the “system” may assume that things are happening, when they are not. As such, they may not have their needs identified or met.
188. However, it was also argued that prisoners who have been in prison before may not have their needs identified (even when these have changed) because of the assumption that they know what to do and will take action themselves.

### ***Suggestions for improvements to needs assessment***

189. A number of suggestions were made about potential improvements to the identification of needs.
190. These included that staff could be more proactive and more consistent in their approach to identifying needs and in their attitudes. One group stated that there should be awareness raising among staff about their role in identifying needs.
191. A specific suggestion was that prisoners with extensive or complex needs could be allocated a personal officer very early in their sentence, in order to minimise the knock-on consequences of imprisonment.
192. One group also believed that prisoners should have access to a “handbook”, setting out some of the issues they may face, and how to go about identifying and highlighting these, with a view to getting them resolved.
193. More generally, one group suggested that there should be a more structured approach to identifying prisoners’ needs, over an appropriate period, to ensure that this is always done. It was suggested that, related to this, there should also be:

*“A proper approach to rehabilitation”.*

### **Accessing and using services in prison**

194. Prisoners reported accessing a range of services in prison, which included:
- Health, including physical health, dental health and mental health.
  - Work parties, including work parties with a vocational element, such as industrial cleaners.
  - Education.
  - Courses.
  - Addictions services.

- Housing.
- Benefits.
- Job centre plus.
- A small number of voluntary sector-led services in all four prisons.
- Canteen.
- Visits.

195. Although these are not all “services” in the traditional sense, prisoners did not make any distinction between them in terms of whether they constituted “services” to them. A number also mentioned canteen, visits and recreation in the same context as “services”, and it was clear that prisoners’ views of what constituted “services” generally included a range of forms of input to them to address their needs.

### ***Finding out about services in prison***

196. Across the prisoner groups, it was clear that the most common way of finding out about services was from other prisoners. The other common way was through the identification of a sympathetic prison officer, who would then become the main route to information.

197. Other means highlighted included:

- Induction.
- Notices and leaflets.
- In-prison magazines.
- First night centres.
- Other staff.
- Visits by services to provide information.

198. Prisoners reported mixed views about the ease with which they could find out about services. Prisoners in two groups considered it to be easy. Those in the other two groups stated that it was not easy. Some prisoners stated that some services were easy to find out about, while others were harder. It was also suggested, on the basis of prisoners’ experiences, that some prisons appeared more “open” than others in terms of provision of information about services.

199. A number of difficulties in becoming aware of, or finding out about services were identified. As with the identification of needs, although induction was mentioned frequently, the problems highlighted previously were also noted here. As one stated, for example:

*“You’re not in a good place to know at that time”.*

200. A number of prisoners suggested that the system was not proactive in making prisoners aware of what they are, or may be entitled to. Similarly, staff were seen as not always being proactive, and it was suggested that they would often fail to obtain information, or to pass on referrals. One group also suggested that some staff lack awareness of services themselves.

201. As was found to be the case with identifying prisoners' needs, there was a general view that the identification of services was largely up to the prisoners to "chase up". For example:

*"For all of it you need to put your hand up and ask and you have to keep hassling them. If you don't ask, you won't get. Unless you're in the know, you get nothing."*

202. A further issue identified (as is clear from the actual means used by prisoners to find out about services), was that there is generally no "one place" to get information.

203. There were also seen to be variations between prisons in the actual services available. One group stated that, although there had been information about services in an in-prison magazine, the services identified were not currently being provided.

204. As with other issues, there was a concern that some prisoners would be likely to miss out on accessing services as a result of their not knowing about their entitlements, or what they may be able to access.

### ***Referral processes and practical arrangements***

205. No particular issues were raised about referral processes. These were reported to vary across services and across prisons, but were generally viewed as working effectively. The main route in most prisons (as has become clear) was seen to be through self-referral (sometimes verbally, sometimes through the use of a specific form).

206. The only consistent concern raised was about staff not appearing to do things they had agreed to do in relation to, for example, countersigning documents, passing on referrals or feeding back decisions.

207. Issues about the practical arrangements for accessing services were raised in only one group, where it was suggested that:

*"The first hurdle is if you make a mistake or use the wrong form, and the staff just reject it".*

208. In the others, prisoners seemed content that they were not unduly restricted in accessing services as a result of the regime, or the method used. It was suggested that the system of holding prisoners back for appointments appeared to work well.

209. The Link Centres appeared to be well-understood, with many of the services being provided there. These were generally seen to be a good idea, providing a base for services, and the opportunity for services to communicate with each other. No concerns were identified in relation to accessing the Link Centres (although comments were made about the perceived low quality of the facilities in one prison).

## ***Overall availability of services and gaps***

210. Most of the services within prisons were seen to be available to all prisoners in the establishment (although they were not necessarily seen to be accessible, nor of a high quality, as noted above).
211. There were also seen to be variations between prisons in the actual services available and one group believed that provision in their own establishment was at a very low level compared to others. Some specific prisons were identified in which there was perceived to be a higher level of provision. The variation in provision between establishments was seen to include variation in: the issues addressed; the services provided; the availability of local organisations to deliver services; and the level of structure / organisation in the approach to service delivery.
212. Even where a service was nominally available within a prison, in some cases, this was not necessarily available to all. For example, there were seen to be difficulties with:
- Access to housing services, particularly in relation to homelessness, which was considered to be a “postcode lottery” in terms of what could, and what could not be done prior to liberation (with a range of knock-on issues arising).
  - Access to services and activities for prisoners on short sentences, either because: they could only be concluded after liberation; waiting lists were too long; or provision was seen to be geared to the needs of those on longer sentences.
  - Access to voluntary sector services which were tied to particular local authority areas.
213. One group also highlighted difficulties in accessing local authority services for out-of-area prisoners, with specific difficulties in getting someone from a local authority to visit, requiring telephone contact and hence incurring costs. Differential access to services was generally perceived as unfair.
214. A small number of services were also identified which prisoners had not been able to get access to in some way, and which they considered would be useful to them. These included:
- Some vocational qualifications, the perception being that these had been withdrawn. The most commonly mentioned (albeit by small numbers) were plumbing, painting and decorating, and particularly bricklaying.
  - A “trade” or “apprenticeship”, mentioned by two long term and small number of short term prisoners.
  - Some establishment-specific services that prisoners had experienced in other jails, or about which they had knowledge.

- The Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card<sup>2</sup>.
- For some long term prisoners, access to open conditions at an early enough stage to properly benefit from this (for example by building up a work record).
- Some form of certification, or reference scheme, for positive participation in work parties in prison.
- Bereavement counselling.

215. Prisoners stated that they were not generally asked for their views of provision, nor involved in designing services, suggesting that the approach usually taken was that:

*“SPS knows best”.*

216. Prisoners in one group expressed the view that if they complained, they would be likely to be transferred.

217. In another group, however, participants identified that there had been a consultation carried out with long term prisoners about aspects of the regime. They believed that this had led to changes which had then had an adverse impact on short term prisoners (which they considered to be unfair).

### ***Access to, and use of specific services***

218. Prisoners’ views about access to, and the use and value of specific services were also explored, and a number of issues were raised.

### ***Health***

219. Most of the prisoners in the groups had used health services, but perceptions of these were generally very negative. A number of concerns were expressed about various aspects of provision, and prisoners provided individual examples of difficulties they had experienced.

220. In terms of specific issues highlighted, concerns were expressed about waiting times, particularly for dentists, but also for doctors. It was suggested that doctors lack time and have a large number of prisoners to deal with. It was also suggested that there can be difficulties in accessing follow up appointments for both doctors and dentists. In one group, prisoners stated that even where there was a medical emergency there could be a lengthy wait after pressing a bell.

221. Concerns were also expressed about the triage role played by nurses and the length of time, in some cases, before being seen by a nurse. In two groups it

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<sup>2</sup> “The Construction Skills Certification Scheme keeps a database of those working in construction that achieve, or can demonstrate they have already attained an agreed level of occupational competence. Successful applicants are issued with a card giving them a means of identification and proof of their achievements” (source: <http://www.cscs.uk.com>).

was also suggested that other staff who had no specialist knowledge of health issues were acting as gatekeepers to healthcare provision and making crucial decisions about this. Concerns were also raised about a lack of privacy in relation to medical issues.

222. Some prisoners believed that the quality of healthcare provided was poor and that there was a “two paracetamol” approach to health complaints. A participant in one group stated that they had been required to buy a product for a condition (which they felt would have been prescribed had they not been in custody). One prisoner stated that there were specific issues for those requiring regular medication, as:

*“If you can’t get an officer to take you to get it, you just don’t get it”.*

223. In terms of dental care, one prisoner who had been receiving ongoing dental treatment stated that they had been told that they could not see a dentist two weeks running. Another indicated that he had been told to use a salt water mouthwash for an infection, but he had been unable to buy salt through his canteen, nor was it provided by staff.
224. A number of prisoners raised the issue of pain management in the absence of opiates, and two suggested that they felt that they were not fully aware of the wider consequences of some the alternatives being prescribed. One prisoner stated that inadequate pain relief could lead to their inability to work, and to the loss of a job.

### *Work parties*

225. Most of the prisoners had experience of work parties and many were working. The importance of work was stressed, and a number of concerns were raised.
226. In most of the groups, issues were identified about there not being enough work to go round, and this was clearly a source of concern (and linked to the opportunity to earn a working wage). In one prison, a specific issue was identified for first offenders, with the suggestion that they could find it difficult to get a work party, or a good work party, as they did not know how the “system” worked. They might also be afraid to ask. It was also stated that there was no work for prisoners on remand.
227. In most of the groups, concerns were expressed about the lack of supervision by staff, combined with the limited work available, which appeared to allow some prisoners to “skive” or play cards. As one prisoner stated:

*“It makes it a long day for people who want to work”.*

228. Issues were also identified about the value of the work and training undertaken. Most of the prisoners identified concerns about apparent cutbacks to vocational training-based work parties. Examples were provided of work parties where the

number of SVQ modules which could be covered had been scaled back, seeming to leave prisoners with no effective certification. Further issues linked to vocational training and certification are discussed below in relation to education, training and courses, but the perceived lack of access to vocational training and what were perceived as “useful skills” was identified as an issue of widespread concern.

229. In one group, however, prisoners argued that, even if certificates were achieved, the skills obtained did not “stand you in good stead” for subsequent work in the community.
230. In three of the prisons, concerns were expressed about the ending of support for the CSCS card, which was seen to be an important route to access to construction work on liberation.

### *Education and training*

231. A number of the participants had participated in education, and two prisoners noted that they had learned to read and write in prison. These prisoners were highly positive about the tutors, and the wider impact of this on their lives. Several prisoners had done some SQA modules.
232. A small number of issues were raised about education. In one prison, the group members expressed the view that the level of educational input was low, for example:
- “it’s just the basics – if you try to take it further you’ve no chance”.*
233. Members in another group argued that the SQA modules available were limited, with prisoners having “no real chance” of a college place. In a further group, two prisoners identified specific establishments in which they had been able to gain certificates and experience which had allowed them to get jobs on liberation. However, they stated that this was unavailable to them in their current prison.
234. One prisoner described an individual difficulty in accessing education, where they had applied themselves for an external course, but had identified that they needed approval. They stated that, having prepared the paperwork for this, they found out six months later that it had never been sent.
235. In one group, prisoners expressed concerns about delays in obtaining certification from the education provider (or the absence of certificates being sent on following release or a move). Some prisoners also stated that there had been large cutbacks in education and vocational training.
236. There seemed to be few problems in finding out about courses, and in one prison it was stated that they were well-advertised on sheets. It was argued, however, that prisoners with literacy difficulties might struggle to find out about



courses in this way and might be embarrassed to ask. Prisoners in two establishments suggested that it was “too easy” to get on courses, or that prisoners only did courses to secure progression, or to “look good” for the parole board.

237. The Constructs (and Cognitive Skills in the past) courses were generally viewed positively, but a general concern was expressed about the difficulties which “learners” faced when in a class with prisoners who were there because of the perceived “tick a box” mentality (i.e. complete a course in order to progress). One group also identified a concern that prison officers deliver these courses.

*“You’ve got them barking at you one minute, the next they’re cosy up trying to get you to talk about your problems.”*

### *Addictions services*

238. Only a small number of prisoners had experience of addictions services. The only issue raised (in one group) about provision to tackle addictions was that support was not provided to enable a prisoner to reduce their methadone use as quickly as they wanted to.

### *Housing*

239. Very few of the prisoners in the groups had accessed housing support. As noted previously, prisoners were highly negative about access to housing services.

240. Among the issues raised included lengthy waiting times to see a Housing Officer. As one stated, for example:

*“You can wait a month to see a Housing Officer as they are only in once a week. You may wait 4-5 weeks and you’re getting letters saying you’re getting arrears. Your hands are tied.”*

241. Other access problems included: the workload of the housing staff; the number of prisoners requiring support; and the time available to individual prisoners to speak with housing services once the prison officers have brought them to the service provider.

242. Members in one of the groups believed that the actual quality of housing support was poor, and gave an example where the worker would not help a prisoner to fill in a form. There was also seen to be little follow up action where issues were identified:

*“They listen, write your name down and forget about you”.*

243. These issues will be covered in more detail later in the context of preparation for release.

### *Jobcentre Plus / access to benefits*

244. Relatively few prisoners had experience of Job Centre Plus, although some had been involved in beginning work on their benefit claims. There were mixed views of the support that they had received from Jobcentre Plus, and some described having had positive help, while others suggested it had been a waste of time. Members in one group suggested that Jobcentre Plus had neither sufficient staff nor time.

245. The initiative to commence benefit claims before liberation, however, was generally viewed very positively. There was, however, clearly very limited awareness of this in one of the prisoner groups.

### *Voluntary sector services*

246. Some prisoners had experience of working with a small number of voluntary sector projects, and some of these were identified as being particularly positive. One of those highlighted was “Glasgow Passport”, a project in Polmont providing throughcare support to young men returning to Glasgow. Another was “Roots and Shoots”, a project in Aberdeen providing horticulture work to prisoners while in prison and for a period of six months in the community.

247. However, not all projects were viewed positively. Another, however (which will not be identified specifically) was described as being a “joke” and a “waste of time”.

### *Other in-prison issues*

248. One prisoner suggested that too much of the work in prisons is focused on preventing reoffending, and suggested that much more could be directed towards “life” skills. In his view, this would be more likely to achieve the overall goal of reducing the risk of reoffending.

249. Prisoners were generally negative about their canteen, with the main issues raised being a lack of choice and relatively high prices. It was also suggested that initial access to this was slow.

250. Visits were identified as very important to the prisoners, and some of the concerns about access to family members were noted earlier. A small number of additional issues were raised, one of which was the difficulty of visiting (throughout a sentence) for people who lived a long distance from the establishment. In one group, prisoners identified issues with timing, stating that sometimes prisoners’ food would be delivered at the same time as they have to

leave for visits. A further issue identified in another group was that prisoners in segregation had limited access to visits. One prisoner stated that:

*“I know it’s a punishment, but it’s the family that are getting punished”.*

251. Some specific issues were raised in relation to procedures for visits, with prisoners in one establishment particularly critical of these (in terms of issues such as the booking procedure; perceived inflexibility; and perceived “oppressive security”). The high cost of regular visiting in some cases was also identified.
252. In one prison, the group members expressed very positive views about the Family Contact Officers, with examples of how they had assisted in addressing individual problems with family contact.
253. In one prison, the importance of access to recreation and exercise was emphasised. Group members stated that the opportunity for exercise was provided at inappropriate times. In another group, members stated that the “count” of prisoners took up part of the recreation period.
254. Most of the prisoners across the groups raised issues about the level of wages, and the consequences of this. Among the issues raised were:
  - The level of the cell wage makes it difficult for prisoners in a number of ways, particularly where their only contact with family members is through the family member’s mobile phone.
  - The level of wage for some work parties can mean that there is little incentive to work, contributing to some prisoners stagnating.
  - The bonus system being operated by shed, not by work done, meaning that those who do not work are still rewarded.
  - The overall level of wages makes it difficult to save anything towards essentials on liberation (and this, combined with other factors, was seen by some to make a return to crime, and potentially, a return to prison, inevitable).
255. A specific issue raised in Polmont was that prisoners on a basic level of privilege could only spend a maximum of £5 per week, regardless of the amount in their PPC. This was described by two prisoners as punishing their families, as much as them.

### ***Planning and review of needs and provision***

256. Overall, prisoners did not believe that their time in prison was in any way planned. None believed that they had a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve, or could achieve through being in prison, and considered that the activities they undertook (unless being directed by their sentence, or the needs of either parole or progression), were only on the basis of their own knowledge, and their instinct for what might help. Several expressed the view that:

*“It’s just wasted time.”*

257. Few felt that any staff member checked up on whether their identified or unidentified needs were being met, or whether anything that could be done to promote desistance was being undertaken. There was a view among some prisoners that this would be impossible due to the lack of resources, and the high prisoner to staff ratios.
258. In one group, one of the prisoners who had experience of a long sentence stated that, at that time, the personal officer system had worked well for him. In the same group, however, although the prisoners appeared to have had personal officers allocated to them, some did not know who they were. Even among those who did know, it was stated that these staff may only be available two or three days out of a fortnight because of shifts. One prisoner indicated that they had waited four weeks to speak with their PO.

### *Integrated case management (ICM)*

259. Only a few prisoners in two of the groups had experience of ICM<sup>3</sup>, and there appeared to be limited awareness of this even among some of those who were subject to it. For example:

*“A lot of the processes are not really clear – you don’t know what everyone does.”*

260. None viewed this as being for their benefit, nor a plan for their liberation. One prisoner (with an otherwise positive view of most services) described it as a way of establishing control, and another as a way of:

*“social workers running your life ... they force you into things and try to sort your life out”.*

261. There was also a view that the ICM process was somewhat impersonal, with one prisoner suggesting that he had been approached by two staff he had never met to be assessed. Two suggested that they felt that no real account had been taken of what they wanted, nor what they felt would be good for them. One prisoner suggested that a specific action within his plan was, in his view, potentially detrimental to his likelihood of desisting from offending.
262. A small number of prisoners stated that they had had experience of meeting their post-liberation worker before liberation. One identified that they had been visited once per month, another once in their sentence.

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<sup>3</sup> “Integrated Case Management is a multi agency approach that is focused on reducing re-offending by ensuring, where possible, risks are identified and a plan is in place for each prisoner to reduce those risks in a sequenced and co-ordinated manner” (source ICM Practice Guidance Manual, Scottish Executive, 2007).

## ***Suggested improvements to in-prison services***

263. Few specific improvements to services were suggested, although prisoners generally expressed the view that all of the issues identified should be addressed.

264. Generally, there was a strong view that prisoners should have equal access to services. As one stated, for example:

*“Everybody should get access to all the things – we’ve all done crimes so all should get the same, but it’s all about cutbacks”.*

265. There was also a strong view among prisoners that the actual services provided, including those run by voluntary sector providers, should be universal and consistent across all prisons.

266. Other individual suggestions included:

- Improved access to some services.
- Improved quality of some services.
- Increased wages, with the overall limit on expenditure held, and the excess being made available only on liberation.
- Access to more vocational qualifications and to “whole” qualifications.
- More relevant work, access to vocational work parties, apprenticeships and provision of references.
- More access to high quality voluntary sector provision.

## **Preparation for release from prison**

267. Prisoners’ views of preparation for release from prison were also explored, in terms of the nature of their concerns and experiences of support.

### ***Concerns pre-liberation***

268. Most of the prisoners expressed concerns about issues that they would face on liberation, with some variations between young offenders and older prisoners. The main areas of concern identified were: housing; financial issues; and employment (all of which were seen to be inter-related).

### ***Housing***

269. For adult prisoners, housing was identified as a major issue (young offenders expressed a different view – see para 278). A number stated that they had prior

experience of presenting as homeless on liberation, and around half expected to be in the same situation on liberation from their current sentence. There was a strong view that there was very little chance of ex-prisoners securing tenancies in the areas they were returning to.

270. There was also a clear view that the current system in place in some local authorities, with prisoners forced to present as homeless on return to their home areas without any prior involvement of the relevant housing service, was a cause of additional stress. There were also a number of related concerns.
271. For some prisoners, it was suggested that being unable to identify whether they would have suitable accommodation on liberation was a barrier to carrying out any other planning (for example, in relation to trying to secure employment). Prisoners in one group stated that access to some services was reliant on having an address. Several prisoners expressed the specific view that it would be virtually impossible to get work while homeless.
272. For some prisoners, it was suggested that they could have nowhere appropriate to sleep on release. Some, for example, had had experience of presenting as homeless on their day of liberation to be told that the hostels were full, and that there was no suitable accommodation. A staff member who provided an escort to the research team supported this, noting that, during last winter, they had had reports of prisoners being issued with sleeping bags on liberation, and being asked to sleep on the floor in common areas in a hostel. Prisoners in one group stated that there is a particular lack of homeless accommodation and suitable housing in smaller areas. One prisoner (in response to another prisoner stating that he intended to go to a hostel in his home town) stated that the facility was nearly always full and that the other prisoner would be:

*“Sent to Glasgow with just your bus fare”.*

273. For prisoners with post-liberation supervision arrangements, it was suggested that they are generally required to attend a social work interview immediately on liberation, and that this would delay their opportunity to present as homeless. This, in turn, would make securing appropriate accommodation more difficult.
274. There was a general view that hostels provide a poor environment for a prisoner on liberation, and that they represent a significant risk to attempts to desist from offending.
275. A small number of prisoners indicated that they would not formally present themselves as homeless, but would rely instead on friends. One stated, however, that “good families don’t take in ex-cons”, and indicated that these housing arrangements (i.e. with friends) would be likely to bring him immediately into contact with “others up to no good”.
276. Prisoners from city areas reported that the option of private lets could be open to them, but suggested that the lack of means to provide a deposit could make this option very difficult in practice.

277. All of the young offenders stated that they would be returning to live with family members upon release. Even among this group, however, participants recognised that there would be serious problems for ex-prisoners who did not have a home. Some also said that, if they did seek their own housing, they may be restricted to private lets due to the nature of their convictions or their receipt of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO).

### *Financial issues*

278. Again, there was some variation between adult and young offenders in their views of money on liberation, with money being much more of a concern to adults than to younger people.

279. In terms of specific concerns, the main focus of prisoners' perceived problems was a lack of money on release and a lack of sufficient resources to meet their needs.

280. One of the main issues highlighted was the level of the release grant. It was stated that prisoners are liberated with a grant of £64, and one prisoner noted that this sum had barely changed in a number of years.

281. Among other issues raised relating to a lack of money was the impact of imprisonment upon their resources. A number of prisoners referred back to their circumstances upon entry to prison, and particularly the loss of their housing, the accrual of rent arrears and the loss of all of their possessions. One indicated that he was going out with much less he had when he came in, while another said:

*“Some guys have to go out with just a carrier bag. It's all they have left in the world”.*

282. Some prisoners stated that they did not have appropriate non-prison clothes as a result of gaining or losing weight within prison, and would have no means to replace these.

283. It was stated that some prisoners will have lost their mobile phones (as a result, for example, of a seizure of assets, or through having had their homes ransacked). It was argued that they would have no legitimate means of securing a new phone, which, in turn, was seen as essential for trying to secure work, make housing arrangements etc.

284. It was also suggested that there was little opportunity in prison to save money to prepare for release. One, for example, stated that he was able to save £4 - £5 per week at the most, but this would not begin to meet the level of expenses he was likely to have.

285. Prisoners in two groups stated that the provision of crisis loans appeared to be inconsistent. It was further suggested in one of the groups that the provision of

assistance to get working clothes was also inconsistent. As one stated, for example:

*“You hear from other cons about things you can apply for. You can get grants, but I don’t know why some people get them and some don’t”.*

286. There were also seen to be links between lack of money and other issues such as housing (which in turn was seen to impact upon the opportunity to seek and obtain employment). For example, prisoners in one group stated that debts had to be cleared before an individual would be accepted onto the housing waiting list. Some prisoners argued that, even where a prisoner was able to secure a tenancy, or even a room in a bed and breakfast establishment, they may not have any money for the basic essentials. As noted above, the lack of money was also seen to cause barriers to securing a private let.

### *Employment, education and training*

287. A further area of concern was the lack of access to employment. Several prisoners identified the importance of employment upon release, but there appeared to be an expectation among most prisoners that there would be no realistic likelihood of their securing employment on release. This was perhaps most marked among young offenders, but appeared to be more or less universal. The exceptions to this were a small number of prisoners who were involved with projects working to provide support to them while in prison, and also following liberation (described as “through the gate” projects).

288. This view seemed to be based largely on the assumption that employers would be unwilling to take on ex-prisoners, particularly in the current financial climate. Participants in one group also highlighted the general lack of employment opportunities, for example:

*“There won’t be 800 labouring jobs for all of the guys in here”.*

289. It was also suggested that there were practical barriers to arranging employment, including issues such as the lack of availability of postage stamps, or the use of a phonecard to make contact. As one prisoner stated, for example:

*“Imagine if you phoned up about a job and it said ‘this is a call from a prisoner’. You’d have no chance after that”.*

290. One group raised the specific issue of the need for Disclosure Scotland checks for some employment, and believed that, if they provided information about their convictions, this would be a further barrier to employment. Some stated that their only option was to withhold the information.

291. Participants in one of the groups also stated that, while there might have been an option of casual construction work for ex-prisoners in the past, this was now



limited because of the lack of opportunity to obtain a CSCS card. Another stated that, where prisoners had a period in open conditions prior to their release, this was too late in some cases to enable them to build up a relevant work history.

292. Similarly, in relation to education and training, only one prisoner (a young offender) suggested that they had any expectation of going to college. One group suggested that a specific barrier to securing access to further education was that it was impossible to arrange this without assistance.

### ***Experiences of provision pre- and post-release***

293. Prisoners also provided details of their actual experiences of provision pre- and post-release, and their views of this.

### ***Housing***

294. A very small number of prisoners had had contact with housing services prior to liberation. One had been told that they could put their name on a waiting list for social housing 3 months before liberation. Another had had advice about clearing rent arrears. However, both prisoners indicated that they had found it difficult to engage with housing services as they had had to do this in their own time, and using their own phone credits. The perceived difficulties with access to, and receipt of housing support were discussed previously.
295. Two prisoners in one establishment had arranged to go to a homeless hostel run by a charity on liberation. Both were positive about this, as the charity was seen to specialise in providing support to ex-prisoners with, for example, physical and mental health needs. It is worth noting that both had done this on their own initiative (one had lived in the area, and was aware of the service, and the other had made their application as a result of the positive feedback from the first prisoner).

### ***Financial issues***

296. A number of prisoners, as noted previously, had experience of beginning the process of making a benefit claim prior to release. This was viewed very positively, although one group believed that the reason for this development related to Government policy rather to an initiative by SPS. A number of prisoners stated that they were being encouraged to complete these state benefit applications prior to their liberation. Two older prisoners contrasted this approach to previous times when they had been liberated, when they had had to process benefit claims while homeless.
297. As noted previously, however, there was limited awareness of the process for making benefit applications prior to release in one of the prisons, where this

work did not appear to have been done with any of the prisoners involved. Additionally, one prisoner stated that he had no wish to sign on, but that there seemed to be a presumption that this was what all prisoners would do. There was also little awareness of overall recent changes to benefits, although some of the young offenders who had contact with a voluntary sector project had been given information about the Work Programme.

### *Employment, education and training*

298. There was very limited experience of receiving employment support. Prisoners in one group had experience of “employability days” although it was suggested that different parts of the day had been of varying value. For example, prisoners expressed negative views about the fact that the employer who visited the prison to talk about the kind of work they could offer actually had no vacancies. They were more positive about the part of the day that focused on providing support with preparing a CV.
299. As noted previously, a number of issues were raised about the perceived relevance of the work available to prisoners while in jail, in terms of helping them to secure employment on release. A number of concerns were raised about access within prison to vocational training and qualifications (as noted earlier).
300. Two prisoners in one of the groups, however, stated that they had left previous sentences with certificates and some support with finding employment, and both were very positive about this. One had managed to secure a fork lift truck driving job in a supermarket on the basis of a certificate obtained while in a previous establishment.
301. There was little recognition or awareness of post-liberation support services and participants in one group stated, for example:
- “It just feels like starting again and it’s up to you to do it”.*
302. There was again a strong view that there was little provision of information about the services and support available.
303. There were a very small number of exceptions to this. One was in relation to addictions support, where participants in one group stated that they were quite clear about how they would secure support on release.
304. Additionally, among the young offenders, some were aware of employment-related organisations such as Glasgow Works, the Passport Project or the Princes Trust, and a few had positive experiences of these. Few adult prisoners identified such services for them, although participants in one group identified Routes Out of Prison, and expressed positive views of this.

305. In the few cases where prisoners had experience of post-liberation supervision, most did not generally consider this to be “supportive”, but viewed it more as part of a “control” process.

## **Suggestions for promoting desistance**

306. Adult prisoners and young offenders made a number of suggestions about ways in which both the prison “system” and community-based agencies could improve the chance of prisoners not offending in the future.

307. Suggestions related to:

- The general focus of the period of imprisonment.
- Planning for release.
- Improvements to support in prison, pre- and post-release.
- Restorative justice and victim empathy.

### ***The general focus of the period of imprisonment***

308. In terms of the focus of the period of imprisonment, members of one group suggested that this should be presented as a positive, proactive approach to identifying and addressing prisoners’ needs relating to “life skills” (rather than presenting this simply as “preventing reoffending”).

309. Participants in another group stated that preparation for release should start on day one, with an emphasis throughout on rehabilitation.

310. It was also suggested that a key element of the focus during imprisonment should be upon maintaining links with families, with the provision of more support (for example, financial and personal) to make this possible.

### ***Planning for release***

311. In terms of the pre-liberation planning process, it was suggested that this should be started earlier than 6 weeks prior to liberation. It was also suggested that it should be more structured, with easier access to information about what is available (and less reliance on prisoners’ own knowledge).

### ***Improvements to support pre- and post-release***

312. There was a general view that the issues and concerns raised throughout the report should be addressed. Many of the suggestions related to issues raised throughout this part of the report, in terms of addressing the identification of needs; the nature of services provided; and the provision of appropriate

preparation and support for release. There was a particular focus on housing, finance and education, employment and training support, all of which were seen to have a key role in promoting desistance.

### *Housing*

313. In terms of specific suggestions, there was a strong view that housing services should engage with prisoners prior to liberation, and that the process should be started at a much earlier stage. Many prisoners also stated that they should also be allowed to present themselves as homeless prior to liberation. It was argued that this would allow all of the relevant paperwork to be completed, and in particular that it would guarantee a prisoner a place in a suitable location (with a number expressing a preference for bed and breakfast establishments rather than other forms of provision).

### *Financial issues*

314. In terms of financial issues, it was suggested that prisoners should be allowed to earn enough to save money for liberation. A further issue raised was that the liberation grant should be increased. Participants in one group suggested the development of a housing deposit scheme to assist people with securing private rented accommodation.
315. It was also suggested that all prisoners should be made aware of the process for making benefits applications prior to their release. One prisoner also stated that more help should be given to those who do not wish to sign on. This relates to other suggestions made about the provision of support to secure employment, education and training.

### *Employment, education and training*

316. In terms of employment, education and training, it was suggested that there should be more use of the time in prison to learn transferable skills, undertake an apprenticeship or gain other vocational qualifications in trades such as plumbing or bricklaying. It was also suggested that participation in work programmes should be logged and certificated. Participants in one group suggested that there could be:

*“More work placements in training for freedom kind of things”.*

317. One group suggested that links should be developed between SPS and large companies who could take on ex-offenders. Participants in another group stated that there could be scope for developing contact through employability days, if employers were able to identify suitable vacancies. For example, as one prisoner stated:

*“These kind of things would be a good idea if they were done right. If someone was going to employ you”.*

318. Participants in one group also stated that more college places should be made available to ex-offenders.
319. It was also suggested that there should be more “through the gate” projects such as “Roots and Shoots” or Glasgow Passport, and make these open to any prisoner, regardless of postcode.
320. A further potential development which was identified was the provision of more awareness raising and information about the availability of support, both within prison and for ex-prisoners within the community. Participants in one group suggested that presentations from other ex-prisoners could be very helpful. Alongside this, it was suggested that there should be a more proactive approach from staff both within the establishments and in the community and measures to promote consistent attitudes to the provision of support and access to support .
321. Two of the adult prisoners indicated that, in their view, the root of many issues for them lay in the lack of interventions and lack of support they had experienced while they were young offenders. One suggested that more focus on gaining skills at that time may have made it less likely that he would have carried on offending.

### ***Restorative justice / victim empathy***

322. A few comments were also made on the role of restorative justice in promoting desistance, with clear variation in whether or not prisoners were aware of what this involved. There were also mixed views of the value of this among all prisoners.
323. No prisoners had been involved in direct contact with victims of their crimes. A very small number of prisoners in two of the groups had experience of some form of victim empathy course. Those who had been involved in such courses generally believed that they had provided some insight into the issues and had made them think. However there were also some criticisms of the courses, including that: they were only partial in that there was no opportunity to speak with victims; their availability was limited; and the victims highlighted by the course were on a video and American, with no real relevance to prisoners in Scotland.
324. There were a number of negative views expressed about the concept of restorative justice at a personal level. Participants in one group, for example, stated that there was no real motivation for this and that they would have no interest in identifying the impact on the victim. One participant in another group said of victims:

*“They’re never going to get the answers they want anyway, so what’s the use of that?”*

325. Several prisoners stated that they, themselves, had been victims of crime and did not believe they needed contact with other victims to know the impact. As one stated, for example:

*“Everyone gets something wrong done to them sometime, so I don’t see the point”.*

326. Several also expressed the view that most offences were committed not by strangers, but by people known to a victim, and that any attempt to promote contact between victim and perpetrator could lead to further violence.

327. A small number of prisoners, however, expressed the view that some work to make offenders more aware of the impact of some types of crime (e.g. where the victim was a stranger and where the offender was considered “ready”) might have some benefits. A small number of prisoners also suggested that a stronger focus on the needs of the victims and offenders might be helpful in some instances.

## **Overall issues**

328. There was a very clear view that the consequence of not addressing the issues prisoners faced (at all stages) would be further offending, and a return to prison. Most of those involved in the focus groups were repeat offenders, and recognised the difficulties that they had faced during and following previous sentences. They also made links between these difficulties and their subsequent experiences.

329. Several prisoners also expressed the overall view that they themselves had a key role in desistance.

330. The general importance, however, of effective support with the issues considered relevant by the prisoners, made available at an appropriate stage in a sentence, was emphasised strongly throughout the discussions. It was one of the main overall messages from the groups and one prisoner summarised a common conclusion from participants as follows:

*“Just now they’re just setting people up to fail. You’ve debts, no money, no housing, no chance of a job. You end up back in the same life and back in here. And no wonder.”*

# Reducing reoffending in Scotland

## Service Users' Views

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