

# Welsh Affairs Committee | Inquiry into Prisons, Probation, and Rehabilitation in Wales



### **About Clinks**

Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system. Our aim is to ensure the sector, and those with whom it works, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of people in the criminal justice system and their communities. We do this by providing specialist information and support with a particular focus on smaller voluntary sector organisations, informing them about changes in policy and commissioning, and by helping them to build effective partnerships and to provide innovative services that respond directly to the needs of their service users. Clinks also uses its relationships across government to act as a policy conduit between ministers and officials and the criminal justice voluntary sector.

We are a membership body with over 500 members, including the voluntary sector's largest providers, as well as its smallest. Our wider national network reaches 4,000 voluntary sector contacts. Overall, through our weekly e-bulletin, Light Lunch, and our social media activity, our network reaches thousands of contacts. These include individuals and agencies with an interest in the criminal justice system and the role of the voluntary sector in rehabilitation and resettlement.

Clinks has 37 members who are either based in, or operate significant projects in, Wales. In addition, we have a dedicated member of staff whose role is specifically focussed around supporting the criminal justice voluntary sector in Wales and building relationships with statutory sector stakeholders.

Clinks provides the Chair and secretariat for the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3). This is a formal advisory group to the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service made up of openly recruited senior leaders from the criminal justice voluntary sector. This meets quarterly with government officials to provide guidance and feedback from the sector. The structure of the RR3 ensures that members of the group have a diverse range of knowledge and experience, including guaranteeing representation for the sector operating in Wales, through a specific Welsh seat.

# **About this response**

To inform this response, Clinks held a roundtable with representatives from voluntary organisations operating in Wales. This was attended by 27 people from 20 different organisations, and the insights shared in these discussions form a key part of the evidence Clinks is presenting to the Committee. In addition to this roundtable, Clinks has also drawn on publicly available data, our own research, and our knowledge and intelligence gathered through our regular and ongoing engagement and support to the criminal justice voluntary sector.

# 1. To what extent does UK Government Policy and associated missions, as they relate to offender management, take Wales' public service delivery landscape into account?

Roundtable participants noted that there has been an improvement in the link between UK Government policy and the management of people in the criminal justice system in Wales, through the production of strategies such as the Women's Justice Blueprint in Wales and the Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales. This has ensured greater cohesiveness between HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in Wales and the devolved agencies. Yet it was concurrently argued that there remains a disconnect between HMPPS centrally and the devolved landscape within Wales, marked by a lack of knowledge from HMPPS officials, centrally, with regards to devolved powers in areas such as accommodation, education, and healthcare.

Participants raised specific challenges relating to UK Government policy, as they relate to the management of people in the criminal justice system in Wales, which subsequently impact upon Wales' public service delivery landscape. In particular, the existing funding formula, the Barnett Formula, that allocates UK Government funding across the devolved administrations, was highlighted as having a significant impact on the resources that are available and therefore the public service delivery landscape in Wales. Participants argued that the existing formula does not allocate sufficient resources, in terms of money per capita, and that the financial envelope does not reflect the specific geographical nuances of Wales.

UK-wide commissioned services were also raised as an ongoing issue. Specifically, organisations raised that there was often a lack of recognition of the distinct and different needs of Wales, including the geography and the needs of people accessing services. The commissioning of the Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) was highlighted as a particular example of this. Organisations were particularly concerned about one of the contract lots for the CRS re-commissioning that is going to cover the North Wales and Dyfed Powys policing areas. Participants questioned how such a contract would be able to be delivered across such a vast geographical area. We go into more detail on this issue in our answer to guestion 4.

Participants also highlighted that UK Government policy does not necessarily recognise specific Welsh legislation relevant to people being held in Welsh prisons and their families. The Wales Government's Wellbeing and Future Generations Act was raised, which dictates that all public services must recognise the impact of policy on future generations. It was argued that legislation such as this is not acknowledged in legislation led by the UK Parliament.

Participants also highlighted certain policy areas within which it was felt that 'Wales might be ahead of England' - with a focus on progress towards eradicating violence against women and girls (VAWG). For example, the Welsh Government's strategy to end violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASC) was referenced as being particularly positive, which has been set out in the VAWDASV National Strategy 2022-2026.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the UK Government's missions, participants questioned to what extent these missions factor in the realities on the ground in Wales, with discussion centring on the safer streets mission. It was agreed that unless there is a wide-ranging understanding of what is happening at a Welsh community level, while enabling grassroots community organisations to feed into the design of policies stemming from UK Government missions, then it will be difficult to both develop and implement effective polices addressing Welsh-specific needs.

Discussion also centred on the NHS and the accompanying UK Government mission of an NHS 'fit for the future.' It was raised that though access to healthcare in the community continues to pose challenges for many people in Wales, there are particular challenges for people leaving custody. Specific cases were highlighted of people struggling to access prescriptions on release from prison, particularly anti-psychotic medications.

## 2. How effective are the intergovernmental relations between the UK and Welsh Governments – and their associated agencies – when it comes to supporting Welsh offenders?

Participants agreed that relations work more effectively at a local level, when compared to relations at a national level. For example, it was highlighted that there are strong relationships between Welsh criminal justice agencies and agendas and the Welsh Government, but weaker relationships between central UK Government agencies and the Welsh Government.

In our previous submission to the Committee, we highlighted our support for the Prisoner Learning Alliance's Submission regarding education provision in Welsh prisons.<sup>2</sup> This submission provided an example of a disconnect in relationships at a national level. Specifically, it highlighted access to digital technology as a 'longstanding issue' given that responsibility for prison infrastructure sits with HMPPS, yet the provision of education is a devolved responsibility.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the 2021 inspection of HMP Usk and HMP and YOI Prescoed saw HM Inspectorate of Prisons report that 'the prison had acquired a few laptops to help [people in prison] complete work in their cells. However, staff found these computers were unsuitable'.<sup>4</sup>

A further challenge for more effective intergovernmental relations stems from the lack of disaggregated Welsh criminal justice data. We provide additional details about this in our answer to question 3.

An example of these stronger, intra-Welsh relationships can be seen in the development of the Criminal Justice Anti-Racism Action Plan for Wales (CJARAP), through which there was considerable collaboration with the Welsh Government.<sup>5</sup> To note, whilst the CJARAP is an entirely separate plan to the Welsh Government's Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP),<sup>6</sup> there is significant alignment in language and desired outcomes. Clinks previously submitted evidence to the Committee, as part of its 2023 inquiry into prisons in Wales, that covered relations between the UK and Welsh Governments, as well as their associated agencies. In that submission, we detailed the following, particularly in light of no final report having been published by the Committee on account of the General Election:

The main point of contact between the devolved and non-devolved bodies to support people in prison at a strategic level occurs at the Criminal Justice Board for Wales (CJBfW). The Board brings together criminal justice partners, including the police, Police and Crime Commissioners, Public Health Wales, Welsh Government, voluntary sector bodies, the Victims Commissioner, and the key justice delivery agencies in Wales. Its aim is to achieve better outcomes and experiences for those that come into contact with the criminal justice system in Wales, whether as victims, witnesses, or people who have committed offences.'7

We noted that the CJBfW operates on 'the continued commitment from senior leaders across criminal justice agencies in Wales and Welsh Government officials.' There is no statutory requirement for the Board to meet, or for its work to be completed, and we therefore wish to reiterate the argument that there is a danger this work could be de-prioritised.<sup>8</sup> We would also like to re-state our previous recommendation that the CJBfW is more formally recognised, possibly through a memorandum of understanding between the Welsh and UK governments. This would be one step towards ensuring more effective intergovernmental relations between the UK and Welsh governments when it comes to supporting people in Welsh prisons.

The need for more effective relations between the UK and Welsh governments was highlighted by participants, with a general agreement that there remains a lack of transparency with regards to existing links (between the Welsh Government and UK Government). It was argued that in many instances work between the two continues to give the impression of 'being done to, as opposed to working with.' Further, challenges around accessing disaggregated data to support strengthened relationships continue to exist.

# 3. How suitable is the Welsh prison estate for keeping prisoners healthy, safe and ensuring they can access effective rehabilitation?

As noted in our previous submission to the Committee regarding prisons in Wales, we understand that the situation facing people in prison in Wales is broadly similar to that of people in England.<sup>9</sup> The most significant challenges relate to the issue of prison overcrowding and the subsequent impact this has on the ability of prisons to deliver truly rehabilitative regimes. According to Dr Rob Jones' Prisons and Sentencing in Wales 2023 Factfile 'the Welsh prisoner population increased to its highest level (5,034) in 2023 since the Wales Governance Centre began collecting disaggregated data.' Additionally, the 'in-country rate of imprisonment in Wales increased to 171 per 100,000 in 2023', compared to 'a rate of 140 per 100,000 in England.'<sup>10</sup> It is also important to note that Wales has the second and third largest prisons in the UK, by capacity – HMP Berwyn and Parc Prison. Given the scale of these populations, participants highlighted the issue of people simply being 'warehoused' in prison, with a resulting impact on their ability to access rehabilitative services.

Despite these challenges, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, in its 2024 inspection report on HMP Cardiff, found that 'Cardiff was doing significantly better than comparable institutions' and that 'despite some deterioration in the provision of purposeful activity', outcomes were judged to be 'reasonably good against all four tests' - which look at safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement.<sup>11</sup>

Participants referenced Parc Prison and the significant number of deaths at the prison. As highlighted by the Prison and Sentencing in Wales 2023 Factfile 'of the 13 deaths recorded across the Welsh prison estate in the six months to June 2024, 12 were at HMP Parc.' Additionally, 'the largest increases in assaults on staff (109 percent), self-harm (113 percent) and self-harm incidents requiring hospital treatment (190 percent) were all recorded at HMP Parc in 2023.'<sup>12</sup>

It was also highlighted that conditions within prisons can make it very difficult for people to access appropriate healthcare. This includes challenges due to a lack of staff, as well as with inter-prison transfers, and poor communication or inadequate continuity of care on release. As such, if people are not able to have their healthcare needs met, it makes it much more challenging for them to effectively engage with their rehabilitation. This is exacerbated by the lack of a joined-up strategy covering healthcare provision in Welsh prisons, which is essential given that provision across the Welsh prison estate was described as 'very disjointed.' One recommendation was for all prison healthcare to come under a national structure, with ultimate oversight placed within NHS Cymru.

One participant did highlight positive areas of practice to address healthcare needs, such as Brainkind's Brain Injury Linkworker (BIL) service.<sup>13</sup>

Participants agreed that a significant barrier to being able to effectively measure success in 'keeping prisoners healthy, safe and ensuring they can access effective rehabilitation services' is the continued lack of disaggregated data covering people in Welsh prisons. We covered the impact of the lack of disaggregated data, in detail, in our previous submission to the Committee. We noted that it impacts how accurately the overall situation in Welsh prisons can be understood, and whether there are any unique challenges or areas of good practice. It also makes it difficult to understand whether issues highlighted in one prison are localised or are more prevalent across the Welsh estate.<sup>14</sup>

Further, we noted that this lack of Wales-only data creates barriers to understanding issues that involve devolved areas of Government and particularly attempts to explore the impact that action taken in devolved areas may be having on people in prison in Wales.<sup>15</sup> Disaggregated data would therefore enable a better understanding of specific measures that apply in Wales, and more effectively identify good practice.

# 4. How effective are offender management services – both in custody and the community – in reducing reoffending and keeping offenders and the public safe, and are Welsh perspectives sufficiently accounted for during the commissioning of such services?

Participants provided feedback on the general 'culture' of services managing people in the criminal justice system in Wales and questioned whether these services are directed towards rehabilitation, as opposed to what was perceived as the current, more punitive approach. Areas of current best practice were highlighted, specifically through Brainkind's research on women, brain injury, and the criminal justice system in Wales. Within this research, it was found that services that are effective in managing people in the criminal justice system in Wales included those that were able to provide holistic and person-centre support, with access to a consistent, keyworker. Such services help to support and to mitigate any underlying issues that can lead to both offending in the first instance, and subsequent re-offending, such as poverty, substance misuse, mental health, or housing.<sup>16</sup>

Grand Avenues, a project that works with adult men on probation from the Ely and Caerau areas of Cardiff, was also highlighted as being an example of existing good practice. The service supports people on probation, locally, within community hubs. It is a further example of holistic and more responsive support, and it illustrates the importance of local voluntary organisations that are embedded within the communities in which they deliver their services. Participants noted that despite the good models that do exist, services continued to be restricted by funding, particularly continuity of funding, challenges. This was highlighted in Clinks' 2023 State of the Sector research, in which 61% of organisations surveyed said they 'did not achieve full cost recovery on at least some of their contracts.'<sup>17</sup>

As referenced earlier in this submission, there continue to be commissioning-related challenges regarding services available for people leaving prison. Specifically, it was highlighted that there is a misunderstanding of Welsh geography when services are commissioned at the central level. For example, the commissioning of CRS does not account for the vast distances people need to travel across rural areas such as Dyfed Powys. It was highlighted that a localised approach would ensure more effective regional delivery of these services. Specific examples provided included the greater efficacy of providing a service in Llanelli (Dyfed Powys) from Swansea (South Wales) than it would be to provide a service that covers Llanelli and Newtown (both in Dyfed Powys).

With regards to engaging with probation services, the challenge of geography was raised unanimously by participants. One participant noted how 'there is a real challenge for people being able to access probation, particularly if their local probation isn't what could be classed as local.' The solution presented was to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to what contact with probation looks like, particularly given that these issues can be specific to people leaving prison in Wales (or resettling back to Wales). Subsequently, there must be an acknowledgement of these geographic realities reflected in the design and implementation of policy. To achieve this, we want to emphasise the importance of localised decision-making regarding services delivered in Wales. We wish to note the three options proposed for the devolution of probation to Wales in the Wales Centre for Public Policy's report Building a Welsh Probation service, with a devolved Welsh probation service allowing for more localised decision making.<sup>18</sup>

It was also recommended that a more strategic approach to commissioning would be beneficial in order to improve existing 'offender management' services, in addition to the provision of more opportunities for co-commissioned services between the Welsh Government, NHS Cymru & Health Boards, Police & Crime Commissioners and HMPPS. The result would ensure better local planning and more integrated service provision.

# 5. Is there sufficient clarity, co-ordination and co-operation between government agencies, the private and third sectors organisations involved in offender management and rehabilitation in Wales?

Participants agreed that there needs to be a greater focus on ensuring clarity, coordination and cooperation between government agencies and the private and third sectors. The overarching argument was that more work needs to be done to ensure that a person's journey through the system is better integrated.

Practically, it was highlighted that identifying any gaps in current provision is particularly difficult given that there are different understandings of what services exist and what they provide, depending on the prison. Further, this extends to information on what services offer, at what stage of the criminal justice process, and what organisations can and cannot do. The result, as one participant noted, is that 'it doesn't feel very joined up.' One participant noted that 'there is no consistency, and there is no funding of coordination. There needs to be more focus on breaking down siloes.'

This theme of funding for more effective coordination across the sector was reinforced by another participant who called for 'more thematic events to ensure better coordination between agencies, as well as wholesale mapping of existing provision.' This is in addition to more general resource challenges, described as 'particularly acute' - with organisations all having to do 'more for less.' It was also noted that existing problems are 'fixed' by short-term funding pots which, once ended, result in organisations being forced to resort to competing with each other for resources and funding, limiting opportunities for innovative partnership working. Participants therefore called for greater co-production of services in Wales, led by the communities being served.

There are areas of good practice such as the commissioning and collaboration forum, which supports work around the commissioning pipeline. The example of the Women's Whole System Pathfinder Approach, working with women in Wales who come into contact with the criminal justice system, was also highlighted, on account of its integrated and multi-agency focus.<sup>19</sup>

Further, women's centres were also said to facilitate effective coordination between statutory and non-statutory services, across the range of support services.

# 6. How does the lack of a women's prison in Wales impact upon the experiences and rehabilitation of Welsh women offenders?

There are a range of challenges that result from the lack of a women's prison in Wales. From the outset, it is important to note that the policy solution to rectify these challenges would not be to build a women's prison in Wales. Participants agreed that the focus must be on why so many women from Wales are being sent to custody, in the first instance. Services attached to mechanisms such as the Women's Justice Blueprint must be resourced appropriately in order to affect change and address why women are being sent to custody, given the hugely detrimental impact of sending Welsh women to prison in another country. In particular, participants called for diverting women away from custody and towards community alternatives.

The challenges raised by participants included:

- » Long distances to travel for visiting Welsh women being held in English prisons; this impacts the connection women can have to their family in Wales and the challenges associated with ensuring regular visits can impact on the wellbeing of children, and particularly young children
  - The logistics involved in accessing certain women's prisons is particularly challenging. For example, Styal is very rural, making it difficult for women to receive family visits.
- » Difficulties ensuring effective reintegration on release, with a particular challenge around housing upon release
  - Women with more complex license conditions often do not fulfil the criteria for hostels, which can make the sourcing of suitable accommodation very challenging
  - Limited access to public transport further compounds this issue, making it difficult for women to return home from prison, to attend probation appointments and to comply with license conditions
- » Transferring of information, such as prescriptions, between two countries, leading to delays, both when in custody and on release
- » Welsh women have also said staff in English prisons are predominantly English, which can impact on their feelings of Welsh identity and culture.

Participants recommended that the mitigation of these challenges should be approached in line with the aims of the Women's Justice Blueprint for Wales.<sup>20</sup> This joint Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government approach 'sets out to improve experiences and outcomes of women in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system in Wales'.<sup>21</sup>

As part of this approach, one of the ambitions is to provide alternatives to custody, alongside improved community support such as the residential women's centre. Women's Centres were highlighted by participants as 'excellent examples' of collaboration and coordination. Instead of increasing the supply of prison places, participants argued that more focus should be placed on preventing women from entering the justice system in the first instance.

A further challenge highlighted was the lack of Approved Premises (APs) for women in Wales, with the provision APs one recommendation to help mitigate barriers to effective reintegration, post-release.

Participants did acknowledge that work remains ongoing, via the Blueprint, to improve understanding of the specific barriers for women in accessing accommodation, including commissioned research and working towards a bespoke accommodation offer specific for women. It was agreed that the development of a bespoke accommodation offer for women would be more effective in managing the issues related to the resettlement of women back into Wales.

# 7. To what extent is there parity between the services available to prisoners in England and those available to prisoners in Wales, including access to Welsh language services?

Participants emphasised that consideration needs to be given to how Welsh people in English prisons get access to Welsh services, alongside how to ensure continuity of care and how to ensure that Welsh language provision is accepted, understood, and facilitated. Specific examples were given in relation to the challenges in booking video links. This is particularly challenging for Welsh people in English prisons being resettled back to Wales, as people in Wales are often able to access face-to-face appointments.

### **End notes**

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# **End notes (cont.)**

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### **Our vision**

Our vision is of a vibrant, independent and resilient voluntary sector that enables people to transform their lives.

### **Our mission**

To support, represent and advocate for the voluntary sector in criminal justice, enabling it to provide the best possible opportunities for individuals and their families.

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