

## Written evidence from LandWorks

### Introduction

1. We are responding on behalf of LandWorks, an offender resettlement charity based in South Devon. We have seven years' experience in providing work-based training placements to serving prisoners through Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) and to those under the supervision of the National Probation Service (NPS) and the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) in the community.
2. Since July 2013, we have supported over 100 people back into employment and away from crime and have an exemplary track record of success. Our 'trainees' typically stay with LandWorks for around six months, with ongoing support provided to trainees after they finish their placements. Our employment rate for former trainees is c.90% and our overall one-year reoffending for former trainees is c.5%
3. LandWorks provides individually-tailored placements, developing trainees' practical skills (in woodworking, vegetable production, construction, cooking and arts & crafts), alongside practical support for life after the project (employment, housing, benefits, debt, family, addiction, and mental health). Underpinning everything is building trainees' self-worth, confidence, and responsibility so that they can lead independent lives after crime. LandWorks provides counselling sessions and advice surgeries delivered on site by expert agencies and offers longer-term support. Trainees stay in touch long beyond their time with the project and therefore, unusually, we can track their outcomes long after they have completed their placement.
4. The response is set out from the perspective of a small but successful local charity and informed by our experience of working within the criminal justice system. We are only responding to the terms of reference that are most relevant to our knowledge and experience

### The Model

Q1: What are your views on the decision to end the competition for Probation Delivery Partners, and bring those services back into NPS delivery?

5. We welcome the decision to end the competition and to bring those services back into NPS delivery. There is no doubt that the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms created a disjointed and complex system that hindered rather than assisted rehabilitation, with confusing accountability, decision making and service delivery responsibilities and there was a risk of elements of that continuing with the proposed probation delivery partners. However, the new model and the 'renationalisation' of the system will not be enough by itself to address the problems faced and create a system truly focused on delivering rehabilitation. There needs to be a broader cultural change, and development of a system that can truly provide tailored, joined up interventions that reflect the realities of the lives of people in the system. While the reforms are welcome, ultimately the new model will only really address the issue of confidence in community sentences, if the delivery of community sentences are seen to be improved and more effectively address the range of issues involved when seeking to aid rehabilitation and reduce reoffending.

Q5: The new model aims to strengthen integration between prisons and probation by integrating through-the-gate roles, processes and products with sentence management. What is your view on this? Do you anticipate any gaps/challenges?

6. It is critical that through-the-gate provision is improved. Despite committed staff, we are a long way from seeing the 'seamless' transition from prison to community that has often been

heralded, but never delivered in practice. In our experience, ‘through the gate’ communication between agencies is wholly inadequate. And we are concerned that far too many people fail to receive meaningful interventions inside prison preparing them for release, and with concerns that agencies have in past ‘cherry picked’ those most likely to get them results, in terms of their contracts.

7. More than anything else, there remain some quite straightforward, practical barriers to the successful resettlement of prisoners on release and that make reoffending much more likely. Much more work is needed to be done to have the necessary arrangements in place when people leave prison.
8. A recurring issue that we have previously highlighted is that benefits are not in place at the point of release and therefore there is often *at least* a 2-3 week period where the individual has only his or her minimal discharge grant on which to live (and which has remained static at £46 since the 1990s). And there are a series of obstacles to overcome before an individual can make a successful benefits claim, many of which have an associated cost (such as obtaining a valid ID document and having access to phones/computers). The reality is that very few prisoners have recourse to any savings. LandWorks provides support to trainees to help them make their claims and it can often be a complicated and time-consuming process.
9. If we are to address the realities of people leaving prison, either the system needs to be reformed so that benefits are in place prior to release, or the discharge grant has to be increased so that it provides a meaningful amount to live on, while waiting for benefits to be arranged. To do neither is simply self-defeating in terms of the aim of reducing the risk of reoffending.
10. Allied to this, too frequently we know of prisoners being released without accommodation in place, or hostel places that are far from the supportive atmosphere required to aid rehabilitation. Again, LandWorks provides assistance in sourcing accommodation for trainees, but the system needs to be transformed so that suitable accommodation is arranged in advance of release.
11. The reality is that the initial days following release is a high-risk period in terms of reoffending, and the system must become better geared to sort in advance some of the practical arrangements that can make reoffending much less likely and that help to set released prisoners on the right initial path. While LandWorks, and project like ours, help to fill the gaps, there is an opportunity now to make sure that the statutory system really is much better focused on preparing for release. While reforming delivery structures may assist with this, there is no getting away from the fact that it also requires capacity and sufficient resources to be in place.
12. As set out in previous evidence to the Committee, to have a chance of resettlement at the point of release, people leaving prison require
  - a safe place to sleep, from the day of release
  - access to enough money to meet basic needs including food, clothing, and transport
  - active and co-ordinated links into services that can assist with other key needs, including substance misuse and mental health services.

## **Commissioning: Dynamic Framework**

Q8: Does the new model offer a level playing field for small and specialist voluntary and third sector organisations in regard to the commissioning? Given the challenges in the previous model, how will a new national service secure input from smaller providers?

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Q9: What is the anticipated effect of procuring resettlement and rehabilitative services using a dynamic framework?

13. While we very much welcome the ambition to ensure that small and specialist voluntary sector organisations have opportunities to be involved in the new arrangements, including through the Dynamic Framework, we share many of the concerns that have been expressed in the sector, and set out recently by CLINKS following a recent survey.<sup>1</sup>

14. Despite attempts to keep the process as simple as possible, for smaller organisations the Dynamic Framework process feels far from light touch in practice, and inevitably given the size of the initial contracts and the nature of the framework, the process will be dominated by larger providers who have the resources and regional reach to compete for the initial contracts.

15. Furthermore, the initial contracts expected to be commissioned do not gear themselves to smaller, local services like LandWorks that seek to provide relationship-based, holistic services meeting the wide range of rehabilitation needs through one project, rather than focusing on an individual area of need. We agree with the charity Switchback, as set out in their article in Probation Quarterly earlier in the year<sup>2</sup>, that more localised commissioning models are required to truly involve smaller, specialist relationship-based charities, and that there needs to be the flexibility for probation services to be able to involve charities like ours outside of formal contracts where necessary, including through grant funding. We have seen reference to the introduction of a Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund that may allow some flexibility, including for delivering longer term support, and we hope that this is taken forward. In general, we need to have in place commissioning system that allows providers to be flexible in meeting the rehabilitation and resettlement needs of individuals, and that does not embed disjointed provision.

16. The fear for charities like ourselves is that on the one hand, statutory contacts are out of reach and do not fit with our delivery models, and on the other hand there will be a shrinking fundraising market following the coronavirus pandemic, with many Trusts and Foundations having reduced funding pots, and there being an even more competitive market for the funds that are available.

## Workforce

Q15: Does the new model address workload issues, e.g. high caseloads, recruitment/retention?

17. The evidence, allied with our experience, is that a key to encouraging desistance is for offenders to develop trusting relationships with positive, pro-social role models. We maintain the view that increasing the number of highly trained frontline staff in probation services is required in order to allow consistency in relationships and could significantly help to reduce reoffending. The system needs enough capacity to be able to provide consistency in probation support and allow officers to build relationships with their clients. This would be a fundamental building block of a successful system.

<sup>1</sup> see: <https://www.clinks.org/community/blog-posts/your-key-concerns-about-probation-reforms-and-support-were-providing>

<sup>2</sup> Probation Quarterly, Issue 15, March 2020 – Page 22

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ec3ce97a1716758c54691b7/t/5ec3e45e2316c84378a06f58/1589896316035/PQ15.pdf>

## **Covid-19**

Q17: What impact has Covid-19 had on the probation service?

18. Our experience is that the pandemic is still having huge impact on probation services, with very limited face to face contact with clients, and a more disjointed service. Phone-based interviews can be inadequate, and we are sure impact on the quality of risk assessment. Despite the best efforts of individual officers and teams, we are concerned that the working arrangements and high caseloads means that communication between overstretched officers about individual clients has deteriorated in general.
19. Our understanding is that there are considerable backlogs building up and slow progress being made on cases. For example, our experience is that the system for processing individuals subject to Unpaid Hours requirements is much slower and this is impacting on referrals to LandWorks. It is hard to see how the backlogs will be resolved in the short to medium term.
20. These challenges are occurring alongside an increased level of need among people in the system, following the pandemic. While we have relatively small numbers in our trainee and graduate cohorts, our experience is of increased substance misuse and mental health issues, and alongside some concerns about whether there has been an impact on levels of domestic violence.

## **Other**

Q19: Are there any other areas relating to the Probation Reform Programme that you would like to brief the Committee on, that are not already covered by the Terms of Reference above? (If yes, please provide information)

21. Our key message is that it is critical that the opportunity provided by the new probation reforms is used to foster a system that genuinely provides joined up interventions that reflect the reality of people's lives in order to reduce reoffending and better protect the public.
22. The reforms need to address the long-standing problem that we have previously highlighted that support for offenders locally tends to be piecemeal and not joined-up. It relies on people in the system to keep appointments across various locations, engage with too many different professionals, with insufficient contact time and without the consistency to build trusting relationships. For those with chaotic lives, (and little money for transport), it is almost impossible for offenders to engage with the support they so vitally need across different locations.
23. LandWorks, admittedly on a small-scale, has sought to address these problems by emphasising consistency in relationships and building its own 'hub' of support at our site, with integrated support across a broad range of issues, including advice surgeries delivered on site by agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and Citizens Advice. We believe this is a model that learnt from and built on more broadly, and in particular when working with prisoners prior to and on release.

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