

## Prisons Strategy White Paper - Consultation Response

### Introduction

We very much welcome the publication of the White Paper and the opportunity to respond. This response is based on our experience of operating our rehabilitation and resettlement charity over the last nine years and is informed by a focus group of current and former LandWorks trainees that we convened to discuss issues raised in the White Paper. The focus group included five men, ranging from age 25-56, who have served prison sentences across a wide range of regimes. The response focuses on those aspects of the White Paper of most relevance and where we have the most experience and includes general observations as well as specific points in response to the questions raised.

### Background - LandWorks

*"It is, quite simply, the best project of this kind that I am aware of anywhere in the UK."* Professor Nick Hardwick, former Chief Inspector of Prisons

Winner "Outstanding Local or Regional Organisation", Criminal Justice Alliance Awards 2021

Established in 2013, LandWorks is a rehabilitation and resettlement charity that provides a supported route back into the community and employment for people in prison, or at risk of going to prison. Based in Devon, we offer **intensive placements at our training site lasting six months on average**. Placements are followed up with a range of on-going support. We work with men on day-release from the local prison, HMP Channings Wood (suspended over the pandemic), alongside people based in the community, either recently released from custody or subject to community sentences, referred by probation services.

Our placement model is based around a **'working day'** with participants (called 'trainees') taking part in the enterprises we operate on site – including a wood workshop, a sustainably operated market garden and a small pottery - all making produce available for sale to the local community.

Alongside this opportunity to build important vocational and social skills and prepare people for employment, each trainee has an individual **resettlement plan and access to a range of support** to address their needs and build on strengths including counselling, substance misuse sessions, and practical support with housing, finances and seeking future employment. **External specialists** including Citizens Advice, NHS drug and alcohol services, a Job Centre Plus advisor and a housing specialist deliver regular support sessions directly at our site and we have connections with a range of local employers.

More than anything LandWorks seeks to provide a supportive environment where trusted relationships are built and we can get to know each trainee and help them to develop a new confident, crime-free identity. When placements end the vast majority of trainees stay in touch and we provide a range of **ongoing advice and support** tailored to their circumstances. Just knowing we are here to help can be an important factor in maintaining confidence and keeping on track.

While we are a relatively small charity, we believe we have built a model that works - stabilising people's lives and preparing them for employment and life without crime. Our management information shows that only around 5% of our former trainees are reconvicted within one year of finishing their placement at LandWorks and 95% of former trainees seeking employment are in work. **We welcome the work on the Prisons Strategy White Paper and believe there is an opportunity to build on the key elements of LandWorks – real work experience, accessible wraparound support, trusted relationships, through-the-gate access – to help prepare people for employment after prison and to deliver a step change in reducing reoffending rates. This is set out more on page 5, in answer to Question 6.**

**We would be delighted to welcome Ministers and/or officials to visit LandWorks as part of the ongoing work to develop and implement the prisons strategy.**

## **Chapter One – A Roadmap to Building the Future Prison Estate**

In response to Question 1:

We welcome the focus in the White Paper on 'second chances' and providing improved support to help turn around people's lives and reduce the risk of reoffending. We fully support initiatives that will improve education and skills attainment in prison, improve access to mental health and substance misuse services, support maintaining relationships with friends and family, and better prepare people for release.

While we recognise that it is important that there are sufficient prison places to meet the demand from the courts, we would strongly question the decision to focus investment of public funds on increasing prison places by 20,000. Particularly given the lack of correlation between numbers of prison places and overall crime rates, we believe it would be much better to invest available public funds on improving existing prison places and meeting the ambitions set out in the White Paper to improve rehabilitation and resettlement services. Our experience and the feedback from LandWorks trainees who have been through the system is that the ambitions set out in the White Paper are a long distance from the current reality and therefore they will require substantial and sustained investment to be achieved. When done well, rehabilitation and resettlement services work - reducing reoffending, reducing harm and ultimately saving money - and would be a more effective use of the funds available.

For new prisons that are built, we welcome the focus on ensuring they are designed to support rehabilitation and cut crime drawing on evidence of what works. We welcome the proposals to expand the use of digital facilities in prisons, including IT in cells. A simple but important point that came out of our focus group is that it is vital that there are sufficient resources available to maintain IT systems and speedily fix them when they are faulty. Without this, important services can become unavailable and it can become a source of acute tension within the prison. The example was given of faulty self-service kiosks on landings.

*"It's good, but then again, they're known for breaking. Once it's broken, you're not going to have someone come in and fix it straightaway. You've got like 10 people lined up to one...it's stupid."*

Furthermore, and particularly given the recognition in the White Paper of the importance of officers building positive relationships with people in prison, it is vital that IT systems do not become a replacement for human interaction. While we can see that modernised buildings and infrastructure can be important for enhancing the sense of purpose and hope in prison, there are some other relatively basic measures that may also address this aim and enhance a sense of dignity in prison. A common complaint is unsuitable reused clothing, and also a recognition that basic hygiene and cleanliness is fundamental to how a prison feels.

*"The only thing that is actually fresh is the f@#king socks."*

## **Chapter Two – Tackling Violence and Reducing Harm**

In response to Questions 2 to 5:

We absolutely agree with the vision that prisons should be safe, orderly and decent places for both prisoners and staff, and provide environments that generate hope and provide opportunities for prisoners to turn their lives around. And it is critical that the system is properly resourced so that it has enough trained and skilled staff, in order to build positive relationships and deliver regimes that are structured and tailored to individuals. While we agree that a more personalised, structured approach to how people in prison spend their day and that encourages people to take more responsibility for the causes of their offending behaviour is required, our experience and the feedback from LandWorks trainees, is that this is far from the current reality.

*"You need to accept that there's going to be drugs, there's going to be some violence there, it's how you box it off...to the best of your ability."*

There is an acceptance that whatever changes are made there will be some drugs in prison. Participants in our focus group were quick to point out that measures need to focus on staff as well as those held inside, if efforts to reduce drug availability are to be effective.

In terms of reducing violence and disorder, it is recognised that there can be a wide range of triggers. Ensuring that basic decent standards are maintained, and that people are treated with respect are seen as important factors to reduce avoidable tensions. It is also recognised that there may be more that can be done to separate different types of people in prison:

*“There’s different types of people that go to jail. You’ve got people who don’t know how to handle it and never been in a situation like that. So, really and truly, you want all the first timers or beginners or people that don’t handle things well, all in one area of the prison...most of the time, all of the arguments and stuff like that happens from everyone being around the wrong people.”*

One proposal made in our focus group is that more use is made of extended induction, in order to help orientate and prepare people for prison life. This could also help with officers and other support staff having time to build up a thorough understanding of each person’s characteristics, life stories and needs, including factors that can result in psychological difficulties:

*“For people that have just started off and come into the prison, they should stay on induction for longer, until they’ve experienced jail to a point where they think, yeah, I can go into normal population...you need to separate it more.”*

The importance of recognising potential vulnerabilities and the state of mind of individual prisoners is widely recognised as important:

*“I think, without sounding kind of condescending, I think for a lot of people it would probably be helpful if they were treated like humans...and people just starting out in life, even if they have been around for a long time, because at the end of the day they’re just starting out and they’re miserable, they’ve got no motivation. They’re like a teenager again, so it’s easy just to fail at the first hurdle. They really do need that little push and support”*

The importance of providing counselling in prison for people who have gone through traumatic experiences is recognised by our trainees. And while it is recognised that it could be viewed as controversial, this can include addressing the experiences that led to the prison sentence – an example given is of someone involved in a serious motoring offence that led to the death and injury of other people.

Overall, a key concern raised related to the overall regime is the lack of focus and purpose there can be to daily prison life. This clearly has been exacerbated by the restrictions during the pandemic. In general, more structured activity is thought important to creating a more positive and safer environment.

*“I think there should be more work, rather than, you know, when you’re going to wake up in the morning, you’re just going to sit here all day and watch tv.”*

### **Chapter Three – The Role of Prisons and Probation in Cutting Crime and Protecting the Public**

In response to Questions 6 to 13 (with a specific section set out below on Question 6)

We absolutely support the ambitions set out in the White Paper to enhance rehabilitation and resettlement provision both in custody and after release, including improved drug treatment, enhanced prison education and support to find employment on release. The reality is that the current system is very far from meeting these aspirations.

Our focus group was very critical about the level and type of support they personally received in prison and on release.

There is a lot of scepticism about offending behaviour courses currently provided, with too much of a ‘tick-box’ approach and a failure to recognise the impact of mixing people who want to change with others who just feel forced to participate:

*“...what you’re doing is forcing people to go and do something. I’ve done it loads of times. I’ve done therapy. I’ve been in there trying to do a bit of therapy, someone’s come in there because he’s been told to go in there, so now he’s going to cause problems. Do you know what I mean?...They don’t think it through.”*

There is a lot of criticism about a lack of meaningful vocational training opportunities in prison and a sense that the situation has got worse in recent times not better, and many courses are of low value. There is broad agreement that more meaningful training with robust qualifications that genuinely prepare people for skilled work on release really could be a game changer and provide the foundation of a new life. Some of our focus group went as far as suggesting that if there were genuine opportunities to develop new vocational skills in prison, then progress made with the training could be linked to time served inside and opportunities for early release – if you don’t participate and make progress you serve more of your sentence.

*“Training, I mean proper training. So, you come out and you’ve got skills and if you’ve got skills, you’ve got options, haven’t you?”*

Our focus group was also highly critical of the whole sentence planning process and the support provided to prepare for release and following release. The general sense given is of an overburdened system with too little resource to provide meaningful support. The expectations from resettlement support in prison and from probation on release are very low - although it is recognised that there are individual probation officers who go above and beyond:

*“My sentence plan was I had to do a self-awareness course, which was four two-hour sessions. That was it in three and a half years.”*

*“You had stuff you needed to sort out like where you’re going to live, and you were constantly chasing the person in jail to be with them, because they’re the only ones that can help you sort it out. You couldn’t find them because somebody else needed to see them...I suppose its resources of people working there.”*

*“I didn’t see them once in 4 months.”*

*“I think there are things that probation will do but only if you really sort of pester them about it. I think that’s what they’re banking on.”*

There was very strong support in our focus group for the Resettlement Passport proposal set out in the White Paper and in particular the focus on ensuring the ‘basics’ are in place before release. A lot of LandWorks’ resettlement support has been filling these gaps in the system, including arranging IDs, bank accounts, access to IT and email, and supporting Universal Credit and PIP applications.

*“That’s what you need. It’s a massive help. ID, bank account and the Universal Credit and that sorted before you come out. That would be a great help.”*

It is absolutely self-defeating not to arrange for finances to be in place before release and we would fully support measures that ensure this now happens. Furthermore, having appropriate accommodation in place is vital, and has also been a key focus of LandWorks’ resettlement support, due to inadequate statutory arrangements.

*“You’ve got to have stuff in place, haven’t you? There’s no point coming out that gate with a few quid in your pocket, nowhere to live, because you’ll blow that money within the first hour of being out of jail, won’t you, and then you’ve got to wait for six weeks for Universal Credit to come through, it’s just not going to happen, is it? They’re going to reoffend, aren’t they, the following day.”*

It is widely recognised that people have need access to on-going support networks on release, and this can be the key to effective resettlement and people without networks need additional support.

*“The thing is, there are people that are on probation that come out of jail, where they have got no connection with anybody...they’re the ones that really need help because they’ve got nothing.”*

*“You need a support network coming out of the gate, don’t you?”*

The importance of maintaining support for substance misuse on release is seen as critical, and it needs to be recognised that some people will not be ready for going straight into employment:

*“Going straight into work from jail with addiction problems could be a good thing, yeah, but there’s a good chance you’re going to go back onto it. You need a bit of time, a bit of therapy, a bit of this and that, to get maximum kind of help through addiction and recovery.”*

In terms of building networks on release, we welcome the NHS-led Reconnect project that is operating in our region. LandWorks has been supporting referrals via the scheme and two of our former trainees have secured jobs with Reconnect providing lived experience and mentoring support. We have noticed a desire to ‘give back’ from several of our former trainees and it is an area worth investigating more, including how more opportunities can be provided:

*“So, you’ve got someone like me, I’ve been to prison nine times and I’ve offended all my life, and now I work for the NHS, which is phenomenal really, that they even accepted me.”*

*“Putting something back...I feel a little bit like that with my job. It’s like putting something back. Do you know what I mean?” - “I can really relate to that.”*

**Question 6. “Where can we go further to give prisoners the skills to secure stable employment on release? Specifically, we would like to hear from charities, employers and training providers working with prison leavers or who would like to support our mission of getting more prisoners into jobs...”**

LandWorks’ experience is that in order to truly support people to change their lives and to successfully enter and maintain employment, there needs to be holistic and sustained support, built on trusting relationships and delivered in a highly accessible way.

For many of the people we have worked with, it has been vital to work across a range of issues in order to stabilise their lives and get them to the point when they are ready for real and lasting change. Education and developing vocational skills are important but equally important, often more so, is working closely with individuals to help them develop the social skills and build the confidence required for entering employment and for creating a new crime free identity. We have had several people at LandWorks that have never done a (legitimate) day’s work in their life and need a lot of support to be ready for employment.

Also, gaining employment is far from the end of the story. Desistance from offending is an uneven journey, with even those in employment often facing severe setbacks from time to time. Having sustained support and somewhere to turn to in those circumstances can be vital.

While we very much welcome a focus on improving the provision of services while people are in prison, our experience is that for many of the most challenging and vulnerable people, it is critical that holistic support is delivered on release. This is especially the case with short prison sentences when only so much can be done inside. However, the current support on release is wholly inadequate - probation caseloads remain unsustainably high and the support that is available is often disjointed and does not work with the reality of people’s lives - multiple appointments in multiple locations are a real barrier to engagement.

**We believe there is an opportunity through the new prisons strategy to go further by drawing on the experience of LandWorks and the other charities in the sector that are providing comprehensive models of support.** Although the models vary, the core elements – holistic, relationship-based, through-the-gate, sustained support – appear to be working and can be the key to turning around the lives of prison leavers and preparing them for employment. One proposal, drawing on the LandWorks model, is to pilot ‘**Prison Leaver Centres**’ that combine work-experience and skills development with a range of other practical and personal support, all on one site. Like LandWorks they could be accessed both via ROTL and following release from custody, with a focus on stabilising people’s lives and preparing them for employment. The proposed Employability Innovation Fund may be one mechanism for testing such an approach.

The more opportunities there are to provide sustained support and simplify the arrangements for people released from prison the better. And we absolutely support the principle set out in the White Paper that there should be clarity about who is accountable for providing different rehabilitation and resettlement services and holds accountability for outcomes to reduce reoffending.

## **Chapter Five – Our People**

It is absolutely vital that there is increased numbers of prison officers and support staff in order to meet the aspirations of the White Paper. There is a general sense that prisons are currently running on the bare minimum required and it will be impossible to meet the aspirations set out of a more relationship-based, personalised approach to rehabilitation without substantial new recruitment. Our trainees' experience is of a highly stretched service, and with many officers relatively new in post and with limited experience:

*“The workload's too big, isn't it?”*

*“They might be able to open doors, shut doors, but that's it...”*

*“So, young officers haven't got much training or experience, but the older officers have all that experience and a lot of that's gone.”*

## **Chapter Six – Delivering Better Outcomes in Prisons**

Our main concerns in relation to the proposed performance framework and KPIs is to ensure that it does not inadvertently encourage the system to focus on the relatively 'low hanging fruit' in terms of rehabilitation services - that it has often felt previous performance systems and contract arrangements have encouraged. And it is important that the framework genuinely monitors and incentivises through-the-gate support and greater alignment across prisons and probation.

## **LandWorks**

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