

Independent Review of the Prison System in England and Wales

Submission from LandWorks

Theme 1: Key Outcomes, Risks and Opportunities

Question 1

What do you think are the three most important outcomes that the prison system should deliver?

Selected outcomes

1. Protecting the public
2. Reducing reoffending and rehabilitating offenders
3. Delivering justice for victims

About LandWorks

LandWorks is an award-winning rehabilitation and resettlement charity based in South Devon. Further information about the charity is provided in answer to Question 20 in this submission.

Why do you think these outcomes are the most important?

Protecting the public must be the overriding objective of the prison system. However, the most effective long-term way of protecting the public is to reduce future offending. Every successful rehabilitation represents fewer victims, safer communities and lower costs to the public purse. This means rehabilitation should not be viewed as separate from public protection but as one of the principal means by which it is delivered in the long term.

Our experience is that many people entering prison have experienced severe disadvantage, trauma, poor mental health, addiction, homelessness and exclusion. In the most recent cohort of LandWorks trainees, 97% had experienced adverse childhood experiences or a traumatised childhood, 96% faced mental illness, 90% were living highly chaotic lives and 42% had experienced homelessness. These are not excuses for offending, but they are realities that the criminal justice system must address if it is serious about reducing crime. The prison system should therefore be judged not only by how safely it contains people, but also by whether it equips them to live differently on release.

Our experience over the last decade also suggests that rehabilitation should be viewed as a long-term process rather than something that can be delivered solely during a period of custody. Desistance from crime is often gradual, non-linear and requires sustained support over time. The prison system should therefore be judged by whether it contributes to creating the conditions for long-term change, including ensuring access to accommodation, employment, positive relationships and community support following release. Many former LandWorks trainees have commented that they wish support similar to that provided by our charity had been available to them much earlier in their contact with the criminal justice system.

“If I'd gone to a place like this, it would have probably stopped me going in (prison) the second time.” (LandWorks trainee, 2017)

As one other LandWorks trainee observed:

“If you just chuck people that have been in the system out to fend for themselves, they're going to fail because they're broken people...you can't expect broken people to fix themselves. It doesn't work like that.” (LandWorks trainee, 2022)

This encapsulates the challenge facing the prison system. Rehabilitation is not an optional extra. It is fundamental to public protection and reducing future victims.

Question 2

Looking over the next 5 to 15 years, what are the three biggest risks facing the prison system?

Selected Risks

1. Risks to the ability of prisons to rehabilitate prisoners and reduce reoffending.
2. Demand for prison places against available capacity.
3. The size, capability, wellbeing and retention of the prison workforce.

Why do you think these risks are the most important?

These risks are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Overcrowding and capacity pressures reduce the ability of prisons to provide meaningful activity, education, training and personalised support. Workforce shortages and high workloads make it difficult to build the positive relationships that are known to support rehabilitation. Our experience is that many people in prison perceive sentence planning and rehabilitation provision as inadequate and inconsistent.

LandWorks trainees frequently describe environments lacking meaningful purpose:

“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.” (LandWorks trainee, 2022)

Despite reforms, there has often been criticism of the quality and relevance of vocational opportunities that are provided in prison:

“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?” (LandWorks trainee, 2022)

Another significant risk is that policy discussions become overly focused on prison capacity while neglecting what happens after release. If people leave prison without accommodation, income, positive relationships, employment opportunities or access to support, the pressures on the prison system simply recycle themselves. In our view, one of the greatest strategic risks is failing to recognise the extent to which prison outcomes depend upon successful community reintegration. We welcome reforms to potentially improve transition from custody to the community but the current reality is that the system is failing.

A related strategic risk is that policy decisions about prisons are made separately from decisions about probation, rehabilitation and community support. In our experience, the effectiveness of any sentence is directly related to the quality and availability of the services responsible for delivering it. There is little value in expanding prison capacity or introducing reforms to progression through custody if adequate resources are not available to support rehabilitation and resettlement both in custody and after release. Any long-term prison strategy should therefore be accompanied by an assessment of the rehabilitation infrastructure required to support it.

Question 3

What are the biggest opportunities to address the risks facing the system and improve outcomes?

Opportunity 1

Develop a national network of community rehabilitation and resettlement centres.

Opportunity 2

Expand genuine through-the-gate rehabilitation, including greater use of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL).

Opportunity 3

Provide meaningful vocational pathways linked directly to employment and long-term support.

Why do you think these are the biggest opportunities?

LandWorks welcomes the ambition of this review to take a long-term view of the prison system and the challenges it faces over the next 5 to 15 years.

Our principal message is that the future of prisons cannot be considered separately from the future of rehabilitation and resettlement. It is impossible to build a sustainable prison system if equivalent attention is not given to what happens after release. We believe there is an opportunity to rethink rehabilitation more ambitiously and as a continuum stretching from custody into the community.

While a relatively small charity, we believe that over the last decade, we have demonstrated that a model combining meaningful work, practical support, counselling, trusted relationships and long-term engagement can achieve exceptional outcomes. Our research has described LandWorks as creating a “desistance-supporting community” which gives people hope, structure, skills and confidence to build a new life.

A distinctive feature of the LandWorks model is that support is delivered in one place and through one trusted community. Work experience, counselling, and practical support with a range of issues are combined within a single environment. This reduces barriers to engagement and avoids the fragmentation that many people experience when they are expected to navigate multiple services in different locations. The model is particularly effective for people with complex and multiple needs who are often furthest from employment or stable independent living.

Another important feature of the LandWorks model is that it operates successfully across different parts of the criminal justice system rather than being tied to a single sentence type. Placements are available for people serving community sentences, suspended sentences and those on licence following release from prison. Prior to the pandemic, LandWorks also provided placements for people on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) from HMP Channings Wood, with placements continuing after release. This ability to work across custodial and community pathways allows LandWorks to provide genuine continuity of support and demonstrates that a relational, holistic rehabilitation model can work effectively regardless of sentence type.

We believe there is an opportunity through this review to build on recent reforms 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 and more stable lives.

The prison estate of the future clearly should not be viewed as a standalone institution. Instead, prisons could be connected to a national network of community-based rehabilitation and resettlement centres that support progression from custody into independent living. As we argued in our submission to the Justice Committee for their inquiry into Rehabilitation: “There should be more confidence that rehabilitation works when delivered comprehensively and in a way that fits with the realities of the lives of people in the system.”

These centres could:

- Support individuals before release through structured ROTL placements.
- Continue support seamlessly after release.
- Provide work experience and vocational opportunities.
- Co-locate support services such as housing advice, substance misuse services and benefits support.
- Offer long-term mentoring and practical assistance.
- Support people serving community sentences as a robust alternative to custody.
- Reduce the likelihood of recalls through personalised support

This approach would improve rehabilitation outcomes while helping to reduce future demand on prison places.

Theme 5: Rehabilitation and Resettlement

Question 13

What are the biggest current and future risks relating to rehabilitation and resettlement?

The most significant risk is the ongoing disconnect between prison-based activity and community-based support following release.

Despite many years of policy ambitions around “through-the-gate” provision, our experience is that transitions remain fragmented. Practical barriers and support arrangements still remain unresolved prior to release for too many people. As we know, the first few weeks after release are often decisive. As one LandWorks trainee reflected:

“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...they're going to reoffend, aren't they, the following day.” (LandWorks trainee, 2022).

Another recurring finding from our work is the importance of support networks:

“You need a support network coming out of the gate, don't you?” (LandWorks trainee, 2022)

The greatest danger is therefore not simply inadequate rehabilitation in prison but failure to sustain rehabilitation once people return to the community.

Despite recent reforms, we would also encourage the review to consider further the impact of recall on the long-term sustainability of the prison system. Our experience is that historically many people under supervision view the recall system as unpredictable, unforgiving and insufficiently responsive to individual circumstances, particularly where technical breaches are concerned. We have encountered cases where relatively minor non-compliance has resulted in a return to custody despite an individual's overall progress. We acknowledge recent reforms, but there may be scope to examine further a more graduated responses to non-compliance, supported where appropriate by technology and enhanced supervision and how the system can be structured to provide support that minimises the likelihood of a recall happening.

While recall will always be necessary in some cases to protect the public, our experience suggests that many recalls occur in circumstances where earlier intervention, trusted relationships and practical support may have prevented difficulties escalating. People often struggle not because they are actively seeking to reoffend but because they are facing unstable housing, poor mental health, addiction, debt, family pressures or other crises. Community-based services that provide sustained, relationship-based support can therefore play an important role not only in reducing reoffending but also in helping people remain compliant with licence conditions and avoid unnecessary returns to custody.

Successful engagement with LandWorks has on numerous occasions acted as an alternative to recall, providing additional support and structure at critical moments when individuals may otherwise have returned to custody. The potential contribution of community rehabilitation services to reducing recalls is, in our view, an important but often overlooked aspect of building a more sustainable prison system.

Question 14

What are the biggest opportunities to improve rehabilitation and resettlement outcomes?

LandWorks believes there is an opportunity to fundamentally redesign rehabilitation around continuity, relationships and accessibility. Research and operational experience consistently suggest that successful rehabilitation requires:

- Trusted and consistent relationships.
- Purposeful activity including meaningful work experience and skills development
- Accessible holistic support.
- Long-term engagement.
- Hope and opportunities for a different future.

This is particularly true for people with unstable lives and who are some way from being ready to secure and maintain employment. Too often support remains fragmented across multiple agencies and locations. For people with complex or chaotic lives, navigating these systems can be extremely difficult. The system continues to be too disjointed relying on people to keep appointments across various locations, engaging with too many different professionals, with insufficient contact time and without the consistency to build trusting relationships. LandWorks seeks to address this challenge by acting as a support hub and embedding it within a productive and positive working environment. We believe this approach could inform wider reform.

Our recommendation is that the review explores the creation of a national network of community rehabilitation and resettlement centres based on the principles demonstrated by LandWorks and similar organisations provided holistic and relationship-based support. They could provide a genuine bridge between prison and community, reduce recalls, strengthen the delivery of alternatives to custody and support a reduction in reoffending.

The case for investment in community rehabilitation becomes even stronger in light of recent sentencing reforms and the increasing policy emphasis on robust community-based alternatives to custody. If community sentences are to play a greater role in the future justice system, there must be sufficient high-quality provision available to support them. The system need access to interventions that can address the underlying causes of offending while providing structure, accountability and practical support. Without corresponding investment in rehabilitation and resettlement infrastructure, there is a risk that aspirations for greater use of community-based sentencing cannot be fully realised.

The LandWorks model demonstrates one approach for how this can look in practice. It provides a structured and credible intervention that can support community orders, suspended sentences, post-custodial licences and, potentially, expanded ROTL pathways. We believe a network of centres based on these principles could become an important component of future sentencing and prisons strategy, helping to reduce reoffending, reduce recalls, improve compliance with community supervision and ultimately reduce demand for prison places.

We believe there is also scope to rethink the relationship between prisons and communities more fundamentally. During our research and engagement with people who have experienced custody, concerns have repeatedly been raised about the scale and impersonal nature of much of the prison estate. We would encourage the review to consider whether greater use of smaller custodial units and stronger links with local communities could improve progression through custody and preparation for release. Community rehabilitation centres could form an important part of this approach, creating a clearer pathway between custody and independent living.

Greater use of structured ROTL linked directly to community rehabilitation placements could also be particularly effective. Prior to the pandemic, LandWorks successfully supported people through ROTL placements that continued after release, providing a genuine through-the-gate model. We believe this approach has considerable potential as part of a future prison strategy that is focused on reducing reoffending and supporting successful reintegration.

Theme 10: Best Practice

Question 20.

Are there any further examples of best practice in prisons in England and Wales that the review should consider?

About LandWorks

LandWorks is an award-winning rehabilitation and resettlement charity based in South Devon. Established in 2013, we provide a supported route back into employment and the community for people leaving prison or serving community sentences and at risk of further offending. Our model combines meaningful work experience, personalised support, counselling, and long-term relationship-based support. LandWorks was awarded the 2024 Charity Awards Overall Award for Excellence and has previously been recognised by the Criminal Justice Alliance for its work in reducing reoffending.

Placements at LandWorks typically last between six and twelve months and are centred around a structured working day involving participation in our social enterprises. Alongside this, we work with people on placement to provide and facilitate access to practical and personal support. Importantly, relationships with the charity continue long after placements end.

LandWorks has supported more than 300 people directly, with our management information showing that around just 6% are reconvicted within one year of leaving the project and over 90% of those available for work are in employment at any one time. This year the Ministry of Justice's Justice Data Lab undertook an analysis of a cohort of people who had been on placement at LandWorks and identified statistically significant reductions in reoffending as a result of participation in the charity's programme.

Our response to this consultation is informed by over a decade of operational experience and by more than 150 research interviews conducted through the LandWorks PeN Research Project with current and former trainees. Our central message is simple: a long-term strategy for the prison system cannot be developed successfully in isolation from the services, resources and opportunities available to people when they return to the community. The prison system and the community rehabilitation system are interdependent. If government wishes to create a sustainable prison system over the next 5 to 15 years, it must invest and develop not only prisons themselves but also in the community-based infrastructure that enables people to desist from crime.

LandWorks' experience over more than a decade demonstrates that relational, holistic rehabilitation can work. Effective community rehabilitation provision not only has the potential to reduce reoffending but can also help reduce recalls to prison by providing support and stability during periods of difficulty, contributing directly to the long-term sustainability of the prison system.

We believe that long-term reform could include investment in a network of community rehabilitation and resettlement centres, drawing on proven voluntary sector models including LandWorks. By combining meaningful work, trusted relationships, practical support and long-term engagement, these centres could help create a genuinely integrated rehabilitation system stretching from custody into the community. These centres could support people approaching release through ROTL, people on licence following release, and those serving community sentences and at risk of further offending.

Ultimately, the most effective way to reduce pressure on prisons is to reduce the number of people who return to them. Investing in community rehabilitation is therefore not separate from prison reform; it is an essential part of it. A long-term prison strategy should therefore be accompanied by a long-term strategy for community rehabilitation, resettlement and desistance, recognising that the sustainability of one depends upon the effectiveness of the other.

More information about LandWorks can be found at www.landworks.org.uk and an award-winning short film about the project can be viewed at www.landworks.org.uk/one-day-film-about-landworks/

ENDS

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