

Criminal Justice System items to note

Meeting on 11.11.25

1. Statistics

1.1 MoJ quarterly CJ statistics for the quarter ending 30 June 2025.

The figures make it clear that the pressures on our failing court, probation and prison systems are only increasing. Headline findings include:

- A total of 1.58m individuals were formally dealt with by the CJS in the year to June (up 6%)
- Out of court disposals increased by 9%
- Prosecutions and convictions increased by 5% and 4% respectively
- The proportion and numbers of defendants remanded in custody also increased
- The average custodial sentence length for all offence types reduced slightly to 19.5 mths and to 21.5 for indictable offences.

Given the relentless rise in the number of indictable offences and the delay in many of these reaching Crown Court, it seems inevitable that next year's figures will reveal even more demand at every stage of the CJS.

1.2 Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin ending 30 June 2025

This shows increasing demand on probation staff. The overall number of people under probation supervision on 30 June was 244,209, up 2% from last year. The court order caseload increased by 2%, with the number of offenders on a community order decreasing by 2% and those on a suspended sentence order with requirements increasing by 8%. Early releases have had an impact. 14,946 were released in this latest quarter, up 12% on last year, and almost 40,000 were released from prison early in the 9 month period, all of whom were required to be subject to probation supervision. 11,041 people were recalled on licence (up 13%) - 74% for non-compliance, 36% for failure to keep in touch, 23% for failure to reside, with only 22% for a charge of further offending. Reoffending rates have been impacted, with the latest proven reoffending rates as follows (based on the October to December 2023 offender cohort):

- An overall rate of 28.3% - up 2%
- Adult offenders 28.2% - up 2%
- Child offenders 32.3% - up 0.9%
- Adults released from custody or starting court orders 36.1% up 2.2%
- Adults released from custodial sentences of <12 months 61.2% - up 4.6%
- Adults released from sentences of < 6 months of 64.7% - up 5.1%

1.3 MoJ prison education statistics 2024-25 (only public sector adult prisons included)

- Literacy and numeracy assessments completed before engagement in education show lower levels among prisoners than in the broader population, with the majority (69% in Maths and 65% in English) at Entry Level 1-Entry Level 3 cf 49% for numeracy and 15% for literacy
- 20% (nearly 10,000 people) were at Entry Level 1 for literacy, the lowest level in the assessment. 57% who took an initial assessment and then enrolled on a course had an LDD
- 10% more participated in courses than in the previous two years, and 7% more for functional skills courses that cover English, Maths, ICT and ESOL. The longer-term picture, however, is still of a reduction in people taking part in education
- 89% of attendees made measurable progress but relatively few are achieving Level 2 in literacy and numeracy each year

So overall, the statistics show a modest improvement in very difficult circumstances which is no mean feat. However, budget cuts means less funding for core education & vocational courses. The Prison Governors' Association has suggested education budgets will be cut by at least 5% in real terms for most prisons

1.4 Public Services performance tracker Policing performance

This takes a data-driven look at the state of nine key public services, examining spending, staffing, demand, productivity and performance. Regarding the police:

- spending has increased but remains below 2009/10, and is increasingly funded by council tax resulting in more deprived areas with smaller funding increases
- As officer numbers have risen, average experience has fallen, and there are gaps in key skills. Over half of officers now have <10 yrs experience; around a third have <5. There is a real shortage of investigative skills with not enough experienced detectives, and junior officers holding complex cases without appropriate supervision. In nearly every force, half of rape and serious sexual offences roles were filled by trainees. Digital forensics is also a major gap
- Crime remains well below the 2000s but is creeping up and is increasingly dominated by domestic abuse and sexual violence. The number of domestic abuse victims has declined steadily (7.4% of women and 3.3% of men were estimated to have been victims in 2023/24, down from 9.2% & 4.1% respectively in 2009/10 to 2023/24). But it has fallen less than other crime types, so now makes up a bigger proportion of crime. It is estimated that domestic abuse victims made up around 40% of all crime victims in 2024. Sexual assault shows a mixed picture, but seems to have risen in the last ten years
- Charges and other positive outcomes have fallen, principally because crime has fallen. It is taking the police much longer to charge offences, driven by the massive increase in digital evidence across almost all cases, and case files now have to be submitted to the CPS for a charging decision 'trial ready', with much more evidence included
- These problems are contributing to a crisis of confidence in policing. 16% of people say they have 'no confidence at all' in the police to deal with crime in their local area, compared to just 4% who have 'a lot of confidence'.

A police reform white paper was promised for spring 2025 with initial announcements including some strong positives, such as better coordination on IT, procurement and data-sharing. But key questions like where the balance will fall between local control vs central direction are still unanswered, which is only making things harder for policing.

1.5 Sex offender courses MoJ Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2024-2025

Only 1 in 13 people serving prison time for a sexual offence completed a course aimed at tackling their offending behaviour last year - 1,098 people completed an accredited offending behaviour programme targeting sexual offending. The number of sentenced prisoners convicted of sexual offences in March 2025 stood at 14,863. Most courses during the pandemic were suspended due to prisoners being isolated in their cells, and the situation has not recovered. The number of prisoners completing any accredited offending behaviour course – including those intended to combat violence and domestic violence, and the more general Thinking Skills Programme – stood at 4,908 in 2024/25. This was marginally higher than the previous year's total of 4,889, but still below the level pre-Covid. The number of accredited courses taken in prisons has fallen year by year over the past decade.

2. Sentencing

2.1 Sentencing Council

As part of the Sentencing Bill, the Justice Secretary has introduced a democratic lock over the Sentencing Council. There will be a new legal requirement for guidelines to be agreed by the Justice Secretary before they are issued, and the Lady Chief Justice will also need to explicitly approve any new guidelines. This is part of the Government's Plan for Change to build public confidence in the justice system. The Justice Secretary is clear the Council should not be allowed to stray into setting policy without the direction of Parliament and committed to "right the democratic deficit that has been uncovered". Both the Justice Secretary and the Lady Chief Justice will be given individual, and separate, powers requiring them to approve any future guidelines before they can be issued. This comes alongside the Government's prison building programme, the largest expansion in the estate since the Victorian era. The Government has already opened 2,500 new places since taking office, and has invested £7bn in construction, on track to deliver 14,000 places by 2031. Many more offenders will also be tagged and monitored following a probation service increase of up to £700 million by 2028/29, up 45% from the current budget. There will also be a requirement for the Council to seek approval from the Justice Secretary of its annual business plan. The reforms do not interfere with the independence of judges in making individual sentencing decisions.

3. CJS agencies

3.1 Courts

3.1.1 Social mobility amongst senior judges *Sutton Trust Report*

This research found that 62% of senior judges were privately educated, despite only 7% of the general population attending fee-paying schools. The figure has barely shifted from 65% in 2019, despite years of diversity drives across the legal sector. By contrast, just 21% of senior judges attended state comprehensives, compared with nearly 90% of the population. While that figure is up from 13% in 2019 and 4% in 2014, much of the rise appears linked to a decline in those who went to grammar schools. The report also reveals that 75% of senior judges studied at Oxford or Cambridge, making the judiciary the most Oxbridge-heavy profession surveyed. Patterns of university attendance have changed little over the past decade which may reflect the older age profile of judges and the slow rate of turnover at the top. The Sutton Trust said: "It's disappointing to see that the senior judiciary remains one of the most elitist professions in Britain, despite efforts to widen access to the legal sector in recent years. Senior judges wield significant power, so it's crucial that they are more representative of the people that they serve. Increasing diversity in the sector overall is important, but improving access for those entering the profession is only the beginning. Gaps in progression must also be addressed to ensure that socially mobile individuals are able to reach the most influential positions in the legal profession."

3.1.2 Extra funding for courts to deliver speedier justice for victims *Deputy Prime Minister announcement*

This stated that:

- More trials will be heard as an extra 1,250 Crown Court sitting days will be funded
- Funding will help more cases to be heard this year, speeding up justice for victims
- This is part of the Government's Plan for Change to get the justice system back on its feet

Crown Court sittings will be up by 5,000 days compared to last year and reaching the highest levels on record. The Crown Court backlog stands at over 78,000 and behind each case is a real person, waiting years for justice. While extra sitting days will help to bring the backlog down in the short-term, only major reform will address the crisis in our courts. There are now 78,329 Crown Court cases waiting to be heard so victims are often waiting 3 or 4 years for their case to come to trial.

3.2 Parole Board

Increased transparency *a guest post by the Chief Executive of the Parole Board, Cecilia French.*

The justice system can sometimes feel to victims and survivors of crime as though it is designed for everyone other than them. At the Parole Board, we want to do all we can to be more transparent with victims and survivors about the parole process and how it works. We recognise that when an offender has committed a horrific crime, it can be extremely difficult to accept that someone has fundamentally changed or reduced their risk while in prison. The role of the Parole Board is to carry out a thorough, evidence-based risk assessment, once the offender has served the punishment part of their sentence in prison, as handed down by the court. Only if someone meets the legal release test will the Board direct that person is released back to the community, to be supervised by the Probation Service with strict licence conditions which, if breached, can mean they are returned to prison. There is no 'balancing exercise' which weighs an offender's rights against those of protecting the public: the test is solely whether a prisoner is safe to be released.

Key facts

Approximately 90% of people are released automatically from prison each year without a Parole Board assessment. The Parole Board makes around 17,000 decisions pa, of which about a quarter are release decisions. Of those prisoners who are released, the figures suggest that less than 0.5% go on to be convicted of a serious further offence. Despite this, any serious further offence will be deeply distressing and we make sure that these are thoroughly investigated so lessons can be learned. One part of being more transparent has been the introduction of public hearings. We have now held 6 oral hearings in public, allowing victims, the public and the media to see first-hand how thoroughly the panel looks at the evidence before them. In addition, to allow many more victims to attend oral hearings, where cases do not meet the criteria to be held in public, they can now also

apply to observe those hearings still held in private. Most requests from victims to do this have been granted and there is a presumption that the applications will be granted, unless there are exceptional reasons not to. Feedback we have received so far suggests that victims have generally been pleased with the robust approach that the panels take to the risk assessment. A recent Transparency Review recommended that we conduct a pilot to start replacing decision summaries with redacted decision letters, which will offer more detail than a summary would, giving victims a clearer picture of why a decision has been taken. We are looking to start providing these soon, in the first instance for public hearings and then victim-observed hearings.

3.3 Prisons

3.3.1 Release in error *Prison Officers' Association disclosure*

5 other prisoners from five separate prisons were also released by mistake in the same week a convicted Ethiopian sex offender was allowed to walk free from an Essex jail, highlighting the intense pressure on prison staff. His mistaken release inflamed public anger, given his case had already caused unrest across the country over the summer, with many demonstrators rallying against asylum accommodation and voicing anti-immigration sentiments. The MoJ has acknowledged that more prisoners were mistakenly released, but disputed the number. The POA said prison authorities knew the erroneous releases had been a "regular occurrence" for the past year, and that the early release schemes, brought in by the government to tackle jail overcrowding last year, had created "a confusing time for everyone". They are supporting the officer involved in the Ethiopian case, who had been "unfairly" suspended - there had been an error in the paperwork. The justice secretary said that he had been freed in "what appears to have been a human error" and that the government was immediately putting stronger checks in place at prisons across the country. The MoJ said: "Releases in error have been increasing for several years and are another symptom of the prison system crisis inherited by this government." According to government figures published in July, 262 were released in error in 2024/25 – a 128% increase on 115 in the previous 12 months.

3.3.2 Impact of Labour's visa rule *Prison Governors' Association statement*

Hundreds of foreign prison officers will lose their jobs and could be forced to return to their home countries at short notice because of a change in visa rules introduced by Labour. More than 1,000 staff, mainly from African countries, have been sponsored by prisons allowing them to come to the UK on skilled worker visas. But since the rule change in July, overseas prison officers whose contracts need to be renewed have been told that they are no longer eligible for a visa if they are paid below the threshold of £41,700 (most new recruits are paid about £33,000). The POA said the change was "scandalous" and done in haste because the government was "pandering to Reform". "We have written to ministers asking them to reverse this decision and give prison officers an exemption because we need the staff they are forcing out of the country, but they won't give it to us. People from overseas, particularly those from African nations, have accounted for about 80% of applications for prison officer jobs. It costs about £10,000 to recruit and train every prison officer and now governors are having to sack people when their right to work comes to an end. We're losing some good people." The Prison Service has failed to attract suitable UK applicants and so has sponsored skilled worker visas for overseas workers after a change in the rules enabled them to recruit from abroad. In May, it emerged that more than 700 Nigerians had been recruited to work in UK prisons last year, accounting for 29% of job applicants and 12% of staff hired at public-sector prisons. The next most common country of origin was Ghana, with 140 job offers. The prisons minister said that the government could not provide individuals with immigration advice or support with personal financial costs for maintaining their right to work in the UK. "I recognise that this is a difficult situation for individuals who may have been seeking sponsorship for a skilled worker visa". The rules are already affecting the lives of prison officers who are being forced to return home.

3.3.3 HMP Hewell unannounced inspection June 2025 Report

A critical challenge for the prison has been the need to address a lack of continuity in leadership, with four governors in three years undoubtedly unhelpful to stability. A new, experienced governor had only been in post for 3 weeks at the time of the visit, but had already shown a clear understanding of the issues and had a real long-term commitment to the prison and a willingness to

learn from inspection findings. The new leadership team were competent and capable and had an opportunity to bring the stability needed and drive improvement. 13 key concerns were identified, of which five should be treated as priorities ie those that are most important to improving outcomes for prisoners. They require immediate attention by leaders and managers:

- The regime and support offered to new arrivals was too limited. They could not go to work, training or education or get to the library or gym. They also waited far too long for telephone numbers to be added to their account, which delayed contact with family and friends
- The mentally unwell continued to wait far too long to transfer to a community mental health unit
- Not all health care clinical areas met infection prevention standards
- Not all prisoners received effective % timely induction to ensure they were allocated to activities swiftly
- Resettlement support for those on remand was far too limited. Their needs were not always assessed on arrival or reviewed in the lead up to release, so they did not have a resettlement plan and received little help.

Key concerns included: too little was done to promote positive behaviour; support for prisoners at risk of suicide or self-harm was limited; Assessment, care in custody and teamwork plans did not always include all actions needed and support often ended without the prisoners' vulnerabilities being addressed; just over half were living in overcrowded conditions, with two sharing a cell originally designed for one; support for foreign national prisoners was lacking; there was very little use of professional interpretation services, which left some prisoners feeling isolated; many got very little time out of their cells (about 40% were locked in their cells for more than 21 hours a day); the quality of teaching in functional skills for English and maths was not closely monitored and leaders needed to take action to make sure it was consistently good; and far too many prisoners were released homeless or without sustainable accommodation.

3.3.4 Prison Education cuts in education spending

Prisons are to cut spending on education courses by up to 50%. In one prison, there will be a reduction in the number of basic English and maths courses, including cuts to the hours of a specialist teacher who helps illiterate prisoners to read. While the overall education budget has remained the same, the cost of course contracts has soared. Dame Sally Coates, who conducted a landmark independent review into prison education in 2016, said: "Prison education is already underfunded and to cut it even more seems a disaster. If we as a country prioritised education and training in prisons, there would be far less reoffending." Changes to prison education budgets are authorised by the MoJ. The Guardian has submitted FOI requests to find out more about how prisons will be affected but has been told that the MoJ does not hold data about the budgets of individual prisons. "This government inherited a prison system in crisis and is working at pace to fix it. This includes changing how prison education works so that it is more effective and so that we also focus resources on building prisoners' vocational skills like construction, retail and hospitality, where there is demand for labour. The national budget for education services has not been reduced."

3.3.5 HMI Prisons Thematic review 'Just passing time': A review of work and training provision in adult prisons

This reveals a deeply concerning picture of far too few activity spaces for the prison population, poor attendance in classes and work, and a failure to make sure prisoners develop the skills that will help them to stop reoffending. The Chief Inspector warns that this "already unacceptable situation" is only likely to get worse as real-terms cuts begin to eat into already stretched education provision. The review points out that the lack of adequate purposeful activity has been a failing in prisons for many years, and since the pandemic, outcomes have deteriorated further: in the last three years HMI Prisons has rated provision in 94 of 104 closed prisons as 'poor' or 'not sufficiently good'. Despite pockets of effective provision delivered by dedicated, creative staff, too many prisoners spend their days locked in their cells, and overcrowding, a lack of workshop space and instructors, equipment failures and ageing infrastructure have compounded the situation. The review cites 10 specific concerns and concluded: "We found some examples of effective work and training provision, but the reality was that only a handful of prisoners were benefitting. Far too many spent their days locked in their cells, often in squalid, overcrowded conditions with nothing to do but take drugs and watch

daytime TV. I have serious concerns about the impact of real-terms education budget cuts on already inadequate provision and about the lack of real appetite and ambition for improvement that this represents. The prison service has a duty to protect the public by making prisoners less likely to reoffend when they are released, but too often it is failing to fulfil this responsibility. There is little doubt that many prisoners already leave jail and return to criminality, creating more victims of crime. These devastating cuts are likely to make this situation worse.” It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the prison service’s own measures indicate that at least two-thirds of prisoners are not in work or training 6 months after release. Looming cuts to education delivery in prisons are likely to make matters even worse. The Inspectorate has been told that most jails are facing at least a 20% reduction in their budget and some governors are expecting up to 50%, meaning many teachers and instructors are being made redundant.

3.3.6 Prisoners repair their own prison

An open prison has trumpeted the success of a scheme under which its residents are granted ‘day release’ to carry out repair work and earn a full wage – without leaving the jail. HMP Leyhill devised the scheme in partnership with the prison maintenance contractor Gov Facility Services Limited. They say it marks a “significant step forward in the national effort to reduce reoffending and support prisoner rehabilitation by demonstrating the positive impact of employment opportunities for serving prisoners”. Now 9 mths into operation, the initiative allows suitably qualified prisoners to be employed on ROTL within the prison boundaries, working directly in fully-paid trade positions. Through this partnership individuals have gained hands-on work experience “while directly contributing to the maintenance and improvement of the prison environment”. Currently, two serving prisoners are employed with the team earning a full-time wage, in painter/decorator and mechanical engineer roles. Although some amendments to the roles are necessary for those still serving a sentence, for the most part the employment is equal to that of a standard employee. Efforts have been made to treat and pay ROTL employments in the same way as regular employees, with the exception of pay deductions to pay a victim levy which are required by law whenever prisoners work on ROTL. The pay is much higher than men would receive from ordinary prison jobs, helping to increase their chances of resettling successfully on release. This collaboration provides prisoners with valued, paid work in custody and demonstrates a model which can be replicated elsewhere in the prison estate. The Governor expressed pride in the partnership, stating: “The scheme has been in place for six months and has proven to be a resounding success.”

3.3.7 Major safety boost for frontline prison staff Minister of Justice statement

Thousands of prison staff will be safer thanks to a new £15m investment in protective body armour and tasers as part of the Government’s Plan for Change. Up to 10,000 more officers are to get protective body armour (stab proof vests), and hundreds given tasers. This will dramatically increase the number of vests from 750 to up to 10,000 staff to better protect them from violence – with 5,000 specifically for every officer working in long term and high-security prisons. It will also see up to 500 prison officers trained up to use tasers, significantly scaling up the initial trial announced this summer for 20 specialist staff. Once triggered, the devices generate 1,500 volts of electricity to incapacitate an attacker instantly – at distance – protecting staff and other prisoners from harm.

3.4 Probation

3.4.1 Significant barriers for released long term prisoners Prison Reform Trust report

This highlights the need for enhanced support and policy reform to assist individuals on release after serving long-term prison sentences. Based on in depth interviews with 20 people now living in the community, the report provides rare and detailed insights into their experience. It outlines the complex process of re-entry in the community after a long-term prison sentence, highlighting gaps in pre- and post- release support. The report highlights five key themes.

- **Multiplicity of barriers** People who serve long periods of time in custody face significant re-entry barriers, with the challenges of securing suitable and stable accommodation or employment, and rebuilding relationships often proving difficult or overwhelming. These were compounded by the length of time they had been away, and the stigma (related to their crimes) they faced, making mental and social adjustment even more daunting eg adapting to

technological, cultural, and societal changes that occurred during their absence, leading to feelings of isolation and disorientation in the outside world. Society's reluctance to forgive or offer somebody a second chance created an enduring barrier to acceptance

- *The experience of being supervised by probation* One of the main barriers was the requirement to be on licence (for some, for the remainder of their lives) and to attend probation supervision. Whilst a few described their encounters with probation positively, the majority voiced frustrations and anxieties that surrounded attending supervision and living on licence eg feeling infantilised by the requirement to constantly ask for permission to engage in day-to-day activities. Participants also criticised what they considered to be deliberately vague or unclear licence conditions, that afforded probation officers an uncomfortable amount of discretion over their lives in the community. Describing supervision as a 'box ticking exercise', interactions with probation were experienced as superficial and perfunctory, lacking sufficient depth or meaningful engagement to make a realistic assessment of risk or to offer support
- *Release not the same as freedom* Hyperaware of the strict licence conditions they were subject to, and also the potential to be recalled to prison, people described lacking control or autonomy over their lives to truly feel 'free' and feared they never would. The threat of being sent back to prison constantly loomed over them, creating a pervasive sense of anxiety that also prevented them from feeling 'settled' in the community, even many years post release
- *Barriers change over time* For many, the barriers eased over time but for others, these challenges only got harder, becoming more difficult or unbearable as time went on, whilst new ones could also emerge eg the continued need to attend probation even after almost a decade in the community, or how a change in probation officer could result in an increased frequency of supervision which felt like they were going backwards rather than progressing
- *Little support* Participants described receiving very little, if any, support to overcome these barriers post-release as well as very little preparation pre-release to adequately face these challenges. As a result, people described being 'set up to fail' in the community or as if they were not being given a fair opportunity to restart their lives. Those with families or other support networks to return to did describe how their social connections could provide material and emotional support during the early stages of release. However, many had lost family members and loved ones throughout the sentence or as a result of their conviction, and felt abandoned in their re-entry journey, isolated and helpless in a world unfamiliar to them.

The report calls for comprehensive reforms by HMPPS and partner agencies to address these challenges and makes a number of key recommendations for change, including:

- Developing more comprehensive pre-release training with a focus on technology, employment and practical skills
- Introducing dedicated prison resettlement teams to develop robust resettlement plans
- Improving through-the-gate support, including care packages and immediate post-release assistance
- Training for probation officers on the specific needs of long-sentence prisoners.
- Reforming recall policies by including an independent judicial review at the point of recall
- Strengthening partnerships with local agencies to facilitate stable housing and employment opportunities

3.4.2 New remote face scanning tech to monitor offenders and cut crime MoJ announcement

As part of a new pilot, offenders will have to answer to remote check-in surveillance on their own mobile devices. This is in addition to their tough licence conditions, like GPS tags and in person appointments with their probation officer. The tough new measure will also require offenders to record short videos of themselves and use artificial intelligence to confirm their identity. They will also have to answer questions about their behaviour and recent activities. Any attempts to thwart the AI ID matching or concerning answers will result in an instant red alert being sent to the Probation Service for immediate intervention, helping prevent crimes before they happen. This technology is part of a new £8m drive by the Lord Chancellor to enhance criminal surveillance and deliver safer streets for communities blighted by prolific reoffending.

3.4.3 Risk Assessments *Launch of a 6 month inquiry by HMIP*

This will look into failings in public protection based on inspection outcomes, with all usual inspections of probation offices being suspended for 6 months to concentrate on this. The Chief Inspector said “The Probation Service is failing to monitor and assess tens of thousands of offenders who pose a serious risk to women and girls, and it was inevitable there would be more murders, rapes and serious sexual offences without an improvement.” Several inspections had found that about a third of offenders released into the community were not properly assessed. Plans were outlined in the sentencing bill to increase the number of offenders monitored through electronic tagging. Last week, the government announced that up to 22,000 more offenders would be tagged each year. The Chief Inspector said that tagging should not be seen as easy to oversee or a way of reducing serious crime, and that the ability to share information was vital for improving public protection. The MoJ stated: “This government inherited a Probation Service under immense pressure, with hard-working staff burdened with high workloads. We are fixing it, with 1,000 new trainee probation officers recruited last year and plans to recruit a further 1,300 by April. We are also increasing the probation budget by 45% over the next three years and investing in new technology to reduce admin so staff can focus on working with offenders and protecting the public.”

3.4.4 Approved Premises Inspections *The first HMIP Approved Premises report published*

The national network of APs is one of the least visible and least well-known corners of the CJS, yet they provide essential support for people leaving prison who are assessed as a risk of serious harm. These individuals require an increased level of monitoring in the community and APs help them to rehabilitate and resettle while ensuring the public are protected during those early months back in the community. The launch of the inspection programme comes at a pivotal point for the Probation Service. The number of places available in APs has been under pressure in recent years, and this is likely to increase with changes. Public protection is routinely found to be an area of weakness in inspections, with insufficient work being done to keep victims and the public safe from harm. The role APs play in public protection cannot be underestimated. Currently, APs face no accountability to the public through inspection processes to see how far they are achieving their aims. The Chief Inspector states: “I am delighted to announce the Southview Approved Premises, the first service inspected in the programme, has been rated ‘Outstanding’. While in our regular inspections we routinely find concerning public protection work, at Southview our inspection team found no areas for improvement relating to this. Inspectors spoke enthusiastically about the leadership and staff working on the premises.

3.4.5 Strengthening Probation *HMIP concerns*

Past failures mean that concerns are well founded eg an inquest found that “omissions” by probation officers contributed to a situation in which an offender was able to kill his pregnant partner and three children. Probation officers’ lack of experience was a factor in a several cases. The Metropolitan police chief said in May that some increase in crime should be expected when more offenders are released. He raised concerns about the need for new resources jointly with the heads of MI5 and the National Crime Agency. Such risks must not be overstated. Sentencing reform takes courage, and ministers should stand by their pledge to tackle prison overcrowding. Probation has rarely been treated with the seriousness it deserves. The Tories’ attempt to privatise it was a disaster. There have been 11 justice secretaries in a decade. Some experts think probation and prisons should never have been merged into one organisation, and that probation needs stronger links to councils and housing providers. This is challenging work, the dangers of which were underlined last month when a probation officer in Preston was stabbed. It needs investment, but also human capital in the form of experienced staff who can build relationships with offenders and younger recruits. HMIP’s cry for help on behalf of the service must be heard.

3.4.6 Naming & Shaming *Response to Sentencing Bill*

Ministers are pushing through powers to photograph, name and shame offenders who have been ordered to complete unpaid community work. The sentencing bill will for the first time give probation officers “a legal power” to take and publish the names and pictures of individuals ordered by courts to tidy grass verges, litter-pick or scrub graffiti. The move, pushed through by the government “to

build confidence” in community sentences, has sparked concern that it could instead be used to humiliate and embarrass offenders’ partners and children. HMIP said it could result in more offenders dropping out: “I am very concerned about seeking to name and shame people undertaking unpaid work. I think it could act as a disincentive to rehabilitation and some may refuse to turn up. If offenders are turning up to do the work I do not see a reason why they should also have their images published, particularly when the evidence shows that reintegration back into communities and employment are key to preventing reoffending.” It comes as the government plans to rapidly expand “community payback” as an alternative to custodial sentences, as part of a plan to divert offenders away from overcrowded prisons. During their initial appointment, practitioners will assess whether an individual’s circumstances pose a risk to themselves or others that justifies an exemption. Over 20 charities and experts have written an open letter to Ministers calling for the clause to be withdrawn from the legislation. Nacro has said the government was making a grave mistake: “Naming and shaming those on community payback doesn’t deliver justice. Instead, it risks pushing people further to the margins, making it harder for them to find work, rebuild their lives and move away from crime. Stable housing, access to recovery, employment opportunities and wellbeing services are proven to reduce reoffending. If we want to break the cycle, we must invest in people’s potential – not just punish their past.” PACT stated: “Not only would it do little to foster rehabilitation, it would also greatly worsen the stigma faced by the families of people in the CJS. In particular, it would have the potential to expose children and young people to bullying, emotional and psychological harm, and even threats of violence or vigilantism.”

3.4.7 Building an effective and resilient Probation Service NAO Report

This says that the Government must actively manage its plan to boost weak Probation Service performance. The scale of the challenge is evident from two key facts in the report:

- In 2024-25, HMPPS met only 26% of its targets, a drop of 24% since 2021-22
- HMPPS has been recruiting more probation staff, but in 2024 found it had underestimated the number required to provide sentence management tasks by around a third (5,400 staff).

Since (re-)unification, the Probation Service has remained under significant strain, with staffing shortfalls, increasing pressures and continuing poor performance. HMPPS has sought to decrease staff workloads by reducing supervision activity and intervention for some lower- and medium-risk offenders in April 2024, and then again in April 2025 (Impact). Greater use of alternatives to prison will likely increase pressures on probation further. To enable it to cope with increased demand and improve performance, HMPPS has set up a programme to further transform the service, to reduce workloads by 25% across the service through improving existing processes and changing the scope of probation supervision. It has adopted what the NAO terms as a high risk appetite for the programme, with the aim of increasing capacity in response to policy changes that are likely to put further pressures on the service. The report assesses MoJ and HMPPS’s progress in transforming the service and sets out what more it needs to do to achieve its future aims. While the probation caseload has remained relatively stable post-unification (around 242,000 in 2025), the proportion of higher-risk cases which can only be handled by qualified POs has increased from 12% in June 2021 to 22% in Dec. 2024. At the same time, staffing shortages have persisted in the PO grade. In March 2025, there were 5,636 FTE POs in the Probation Service, some 79% of its target staffing level, leaving a shortfall. The proportion of inexperienced staff (with <4 years’ experience) has increased by 10%. Despite increasing trainee recruitment and introducing measures to improve retention, its plans were insufficient to address staffing shortfalls. The NAO has recently stated that the probation service was officially thought to need an extra 3,150 staff to be able to deliver a basic standard of sentence management. It now looks like even that startling figure will be an under-estimate.

3.5 Youth Justice

3.5.1 From exploited to exploiter? Alliance for Youth Justice briefing paper

This examines what happens as exploited children turn 18, exploring how responses across safeguarding and CJ fail to keep pace with ongoing risk and harm. Child criminal exploitation is a serious and growing concern. Children are often subjected to violence and coercion, and drawn into contact with the CJS, with lifelong consequences. The harms do not stop at 18: as children grow up and become young adults entrenched in exploitative environments. Their victimisation continues

with young people being seen as perpetrators rather than victims, and at worst as exploiters rather than exploited. The response to criminal exploitation sits uncomfortably between safeguarding and CJ systems. Although victims should be protected and supported, both children and young adults harmed by this often continue to be further harmed by facing a severe CJ response. This risk of criminalisation is influenced by race, class and gender-based biases. Key findings include:

- At 18, young adults are no longer viewed and treated as vulnerable, failing to reflect the complex reality of exploitation
- At 18, protections diminish, criteria for being treated as a victim tighten, perceptions of culpability shift, and the risk of being criminalised increases
- Opportunities to safeguard are missed due to low professional awareness, siloed policy and services, harmful victim–perpetrator binaries, and weak information sharing
- Harmful perceptions of who is and isn't a victim may be influenced by race, gender, class, neurodivergence, and care experience

Recommendations include:

- Extend safeguarding up to 25 with a distinct, developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed approach for criminally exploited young adults
- A cross-government taskforce and concordat on criminal exploitation, to tackle policy silos and ensure multi-agency working
- Sustainable voluntary sector support to provide trusted, long-term relationships into adulthood
- Ensure police and CPS focus on those who exploit and put safeguarding first for children and young adults

3.5.2 HMI Prisons annual report on children in custody Article by Rob Allen

This analyses the perceptions of 12-18 year olds of their experiences in STCs and YOIs. It found children were locked up for too long in most establishments, with many unable to take part in any productive activity during their time in custody. The overwhelming majority of children in custody are boys and nearly all are above the age of 15. Key findings include:

- children in YOIs and STCs differ dramatically from the population in the community. Of those surveyed in 2024–25, 65% had previously been in local authority care, 46% had health problems and 33% reported being disabled, highlighting the difficult start many of them have before they encounter the CJS
- One in 10 reported being parents themselves. 8% were from the traveller community which continued to be the most overrepresented group in children's custody
- Only 61% said they got more than 2 hours out of their cell on weekdays, & 45% at weekends
- When children make it to education or other activities, the quality on offer is rarely good enough and sessions are often restricted or curtailed because of staff shortages
- Levels of violence remain much higher than in the adult estate, which makes it unsurprising that children's perceptions of safety have not improved. There has been a failure to introduce and use effective behaviour management systems, and a worryingly low number of children say they are supported and motivated to behave
- Lack of supportive relationships with staff - just 49% feel cared for by most staff. Despite there being many more staff than children at every establishment, one in three said there was no one to turn to if they had a problem
- 40% are on remand, often for short periods of time, so there is not enough time to build the strong, supportive relationships that are essential if these troubled children are to be rehabilitated.

These findings are not only dismal and extremely concerning, they are also deeply frustrating. Unlike the rest of the prison estate, YOIs and the STC do not suffer from under-staffing or lack of resources. Perhaps the most infuriating aspect (which has been true for many years now) is that while these grim circumstances are the norm, HM YOI Parc consistently provides a much better quality of care. Secure Schools were supposed to be the answer to this problem but only one was finally opened last year only to be (temporarily) shut again recently. The only Ofsted inspection to date judged that the school required improvement to be good and the effectiveness of its leaders and managers was inadequate. The prospects of most children in custody being supported to turn their lives around seems bleak indeed.

3.5.3 The effectiveness of youth diversion *Joint Inspection Report from HMIP & and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services*

Its overall conclusion is that the current system for diverting children from the CJS is fragmented and inconsistent, creating a 'post-code lottery for outcomes. There has been a substantial and sustained increase in its usage alongside a notable shift in the types of disposals being issued. The profile of children receiving them has also changed. Inspectors observed committed staff using creative approaches to engage children and families, but they require a more tailored and intensive approach than is currently being delivered. Policing practices are inconsistent and in need of greater oversight. The absence of a clear and consistent national framework has created varied approaches in local areas which raises concerns about fairness and public confidence in the system. The report called for a more consistent approach with stronger governance and clearer guidance.

4. Other issues

4.1 Domestic abuse in the Family Justice System *Research by Loughborough University*

Physical, psychological or sexual abuse of a member of the family or household was uncovered in 87% of Family Court cases, according to a review ordered by the domestic abuse commissioner. This was frequently not recognised as an "active issue" or taken seriously with regard to the type of contact children would have with the abusive parent. Over half of the cases reviewed, unsupervised overnight contact was ordered. Survivors repeatedly described how they were dissuaded from raising allegations of domestic abuse due to the suggestion that it would have "no impact" on whether the abusive parent would be granted contact. Others said they felt that pressure had been put on them to accept potentially unsafe child arrangement orders out of fear that, if they contested, an even worse outcome would be granted. The report highlights how outdated views on domestic abuse among some legal professionals means physical violence is taken more seriously but coercive and controlling behaviour – which often underpins physical abuse and is an offence in itself – is frequently dismissed. A recent report by Women's Aid detailed how 19 children had been killed over 9 years by adults who had been allowed contact with them despite a history of violence. In March, MPs discussed the presumption of parental involvement, and heard from a mother whose two sons were murdered by their abusive father during court-ordered unsupervised contact. The justice minister said: "The horrors that domestic abuse can bring on children are unspeakable, scarring them for life, and as a government we want to do everything in our power to stop this epidemic. That's why we're improving family courts by helping families get the support they need faster, with our reformed model reducing case times by 11 weeks on average, and ensuring children's voices are heard. This is about protecting children, standing up for victims, and making sure justice works for all those who need it."

4.2 Victims Appointment of Victims' Commissioner

The Lord Chancellor & Secretary of State for Justice, in consultation with the Attorney General and the Home Secretary, has approved the appointment of Claire Waxman OBE as Victims' Commissioner from 1 January 2026 for 3 years. The role is to promote the interests of victims and witnesses of crime and anti-social behaviour, to encourage good practice in their treatment, and to keep under review the operation of the Victims' Code, which sets out the services victims can expect to receive from the CJS. Claire Waxman is the Victims' Commissioner for London, and since her appointment by the Mayor of London in 2017 has undertaken an ambitious programme of work. She works alongside victims and survivors, amplifying their voices and promoting their interests throughout the CJ journey; ensuring their experiences are used to inform and shape practices, policies, and service provision. Her achievements in the role include convening London's first ever Victims' Summit, the first of three; publishing the Victims' Code of Practice Review, two London Rape Reviews, and the London Stalking Review; holding a series of roundtables to better understand the experiences of specific groups of victims; and successfully lobbying for key changes to legislation including the Domestic Abuse Act, Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act, and Victims and Prisoners Act. She recently published the Victim Attrition Review, commissioned especially to better understand when and why victims are withdrawing from the CJ process.