Interventions Alliance response to the Independent Sentencing Review 2024-25

About Interventions Alliance

Interventions Alliance is a trusted leader in justice and social care, delivering transformative, evidence-based interventions that create lasting, positive change for people and communities.

- **Proven delivery:** We manage an award-winning Approved Premises in Bristol providing housing and support for women with multiple complex needs and deliver specialist behaviour change programmes in multiple regions, tackling issues such as domestic abuse, stalking, and youth violence.
- **Person-centred approach:** Our tailored interventions address established and escalating harmful behaviours in adults and young people, demonstrating our commitment to reducing reoffending and enhancing public protection.
- **Led by evidence:** Backed by cutting-edge in-house research and experience partnering with frontline criminal justice organisations, we bring a practical, evidence-driven perspective to achieve better outcomes for society.

Our experience delivering these services puts us in a strong position to contribute to this review. We aim to highlight practical and actionable reforms that better meet the needs of victims, perpetrators and communities.

A summary of our key points in response to this call for evidence:

- The purposes of sentencing are currently imbalanced towards punitive measures - often custody by default – and this outweighs and overshadows other important aims such as rehabilitation and community reparation.
- Short prison sentences lead to higher reoffending rates compared to community orders, showing their ineffectiveness in deterring crime or promoting rehabilitation.
- Repurpose *Pre-Sentencing Reports* as *Sentencing and Rehabilitation Reports* to place more equal weight on the importance of reform as well as sanction to embed a holistic approach to reducing reoffending at the point of sentencing.
- Where behaviour change programmes are available to address offending behaviour (e.g., domestic violence or stalking and harassment), referrals should be automatic and those that can afford to pay for their programme should do so.
- Intervene early to meet the sentencing and rehabilitation needs of different groups of offenders through new orders such as a Young Adult Community Order, Home Custody Order for older offenders, and a Community Sanction and

Rehabilitation Order for women to provide sanction and reform in non-custodial settings. These should be backed using custody in the event of breach.

- Support family-centred solutions through sentencing to maintain family cohesion and deter intergenerational cycles of offending.
- Technology and tailored sentencing offer a path to smart, effective reforms that better align with the statutory purposes of sentencing. Ensure technology complements and supports, rather than replaces, personal engagement between probation officers and offenders.
- Technology should be paired with ongoing interventions to tackle the underlying drivers of criminal behaviour.
- Focus resources on higher-risk and/or the most complex cases while reducing mandatory supervision for low-risk offenders to optimise probation services.

What have been the key drivers in changes in sentencing, and how have these changes met the statutory purposes of sentencing?

The sentencing landscape has undergone significant shifts in recent years and while we do not play a direct role in the sentencing process, we can speak to the effects these changes have had on the people and communities we support.

The increased reliance on custodial sentences, often resulting in longer prison terms, has profound consequences — not only for the individuals involved but for the communities in which they live. There is a substantial opportunity cost when more people are sent to prison. While prison is undoubtedly seen by the public as the most significant means of punishment and a vital deterrent, it is expensive and often diverts resources and focus away from other critical goals of sentencing, such as rehabilitation, reparation to the community, and reducing reoffending.

Government data consistently show that people sentenced to less than 12 months in prison are more likely to reoffend compared to those given community orders[1]. The best probation work can reduce the reoffending rate even further. Research from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) shows that high-quality, engaging probation which supports an offender's desistance results in a reoffending rate 14 points lower than probation work which is less engaging and supportive[2].

---

[1]Eaton, G. & Mews, A. (2019). *The impact of short custodial sentences, community orders and suspended sentence orders on reoffending*. Ministry of Justice. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d1c732ee5274a08cdbe45c4/impact-short-custodial-sentences.pdf

[2]HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2023). *Examining the Links Between Probation Supervision and Positive Outcomes - Completion and Proven Reoffending*. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/08/Examining-

The evidence is clear: short prison sentences may not deter crime, nor do they effectively promote rehabilitation or community reparation. Victims and potential future victims would be better served if many of the people serving short prison sentences were monitored and supported in the community rather than marking time in prison.

Our work with Police and Crime Commissioners in tackling the root causes of offending behaviour shows how future crimes and victims can be prevented while working in the community. A forthcoming evaluation of the Surrey Steps to Change Hub, a centre sponsored by the police and crime commissioner, highlights how integrated victim and perpetrator services can support families and reduce harm from domestic abuse and stalking. The Hub provides perpetrator interventions like Healthy Relationships (HR) and Challenging Unhealthy Relationship Beliefs and Behaviours (CURBB) to address harmful behaviours within intimate relationships. Early results from a small cohort show that five of seven HR participants and seven of eight CURBB participants had no further police contact on completing the programme. Self-report data showed improvements in participants' understanding of harmful behaviour and having more capacity to cope with difficult emotions.

We are now in an era where change is possible because evidence-based interventions and advanced technologies create opportunities for smarter, more personalised sentencing. This allows for the development of tailored sentence and rehabilitation plans, that address the specific risks someone poses to their community and their barriers to desistance. A rebalancing of sentencing priorities could significantly improve the outcomes of the justice system.

How might we reform structures and processes to better meet the purposes of sentencing whilst ensuring a sustainable system?

To create a more sustainable and effective justice system, the purposes of sentencing must be rebalanced so that sentences are more responsive to the specific risks and needs individuals pose to their communities.

One way to support a new balance would be to repurpose Pre-Sentencing Reports as Sentencing and Rehabilitation Reports. This would encourage active and explicit deliberation by probation professionals and the courts of how to both protect the public today and prevent victims of crime tomorrow. These reports should outline the support and interventions that are available to address the root causes of offending and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. This change could be achieved through amending the Sentencing Act 2020 and would send a powerful message to offenders, victims,

---

the-links-between-probation-supervision-and-positive-outcomes-completion-and-proven-reoffending.pdf

judiciary, probation services, and communities about a shared commitment to tackling crime and its causes holistically.

Secondly, judges and magistrates need confidence that the criminal justice system can successfully implement and enforce smarter, more tailored sentences. Key steps have already been made in the right direction. The reunification of probation services successfully removed ideological divides, allowing practitioners to focus on delivering practical, evidence-based interventions.

However, some remnants of the previous divided probation system continue to limit the system's potential. For instance, current legislation mandates that anyone who has served even a single day in prison must be supervised in the community for up to one year following their release[3]. While this may be a useful measure for some prolific offenders, it is an inefficient use of resources for those who pose little further risk. Take, for example, people who have served short sentences for minor offences. Supervision in these cases often results in probation officers being stretched thinly, with resources diverted away from those who pose the most risk or need more support. This relic of the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reforms could be revisited to allow for a more targeted approach, ensuring that probation officers can focus on individuals who truly require their attention.

Another critical issue is the imbalance in funding between prison-based and community-based rehabilitation efforts. There is strong evidence that leaving custody with a home and job to go to supports the rehabilitation of people leaving custody. However, the same is true in the community. If people can be supported into a home and a job before their offending escalates, victims may be protected and a custodial sentence averted. With more than three offenders under supervision in the community for each in prison, it makes sense to reapportion funding to support employment, training, and education initiatives towards people in the community. This would not require additional spending but rather a strategic reallocation of existing resources to where they are most needed.

This could also open the way for more cross-departmental work with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and its agencies and partners. A further area that could benefit from reform in approach with the DWP is the prosecution of women for benefit fraud. Research shows that women are overrepresented in convictions for benefit fraud[4] - which are usually investigated and prosecuted by DWP using special powers[5]. These

---

[3]*Offender Rehabilitation Act*. (2014). https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/11/section/2/enacted
[4]Wildman, C. (2024, February 5). *'I am terribly hard up': How looking at historical experiences of women's offending can help to address current problems of benefit fraud*. Policy@Manchester Articles. https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/posts/2024/02/i-am-terribly-hard-up-how-looking-at-historical-experiences-of-womens-offending-can-help-to-address-current-problems-of-benefit-fraud
[5]CPS (n.d.). *Prosecuting Welfare and Health Fraud Cases: Disposals Available to DWP FES Investigators.* https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/prosecuting-welfare-and-health-fraud-cases

cases very often relate to changing personal circumstances such as errors in updating housing benefit details if a partner moves in or out of a property. This leads to prosecutions that disrupt families, potentially resulting in children being taken into care. Such prosecutions waste valuable resources that could be better spent supporting people with community-based support, such as financial counselling or assistance with housing benefit management.

How can we use technology to be innovative in our sentencing options, including considering how we administer sentences and manage offenders in the community?

Technology has the potential to revolutionise the criminal justice system, yet it remains underutilised. Artificial intelligence (AI) and tools like sobriety tags could significantly improve how offenders in the community are supervised, allowing for more precise and effective monitoring and enabling a shift towards personalised sentencing options.

However, it's crucial that technology doesn't simply replicate the punitive aspects of the justice system. It should be used to strengthen rehabilitation, not only compliance monitoring.

One of the most important predictors of successful rehabilitation is a strong working alliance between offenders and their probation officers[6]. Research has shown that when there is clear communication, collaboration, and an empathetic connection between an offender and their supervisor, outcomes improve. There is also evidence to suggest that relationships are more influential than any specific method or technique to promote desistance[7]. Technology that reduces personal contact, such as facial recognition for compliance or monitoring checks, undermines this relationship and should be avoided. Instead, technology should facilitate deeper engagement between offenders and their support teams thereby complement the rehabilitation process.

Furthermore, technology must be part of a comprehensive approach that tackles the root causes of offending. Sobriety tags help people to address issues like alcohol dependency, but evaluations show that wearers are anxious about what happens after the tool for compliance is removed[8]. Support from professionals can reduce the chances of relapse or reoffending at these transition points more effectively. In this way,

---

[6]Durnescu, I. (2022). Building up the working alliance with radicalized offenders. [Presentation]. Confederation of European Probation. https://www.cep-probation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Building-up-a-working-alliance-with-radicalized-offenders-Ioan-Durnescu.pdf

[7]Council of Europe. (2010). European Committee on Crime Problems. https://search.coe.int/cm?i=09000016805cff79

[8]Roberts, E., Turley, C., Piggott, H., Lynch-Huggins, S., Wishart, R., and Kerr, J. (2019). *Evaluation of the AAMR tagging pilot: Year 2 process evaluation findings*. https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Evaluation-of-the-AAMR-tagging-pilot.pdf

technology can support productive alliances between offenders and probation workers, alongside the right interventions and support.

How should we reform the use of community sentences and other alternatives to custody to deliver justice and improve outcomes for offenders, victims and communities?

Deterring further crime and sanctioning those who cause harm to victims and communities is critical in maintaining public confidence in the justice system. As part of the sanctions process, we also need to distinguish between those who pose a continued and significant danger to society and those where the right help and support creates a path to desistance. This distinction is critical in delivering justice that promotes positive outcomes for offenders, victims, and communities alike. The advantage of community sentencing is that it allows for sanctions to be placed on the offender and at the same time put in place measures to support them towards a better future.

1. Offender contribution to rehabilitation

The principle of offenders paying for rehabilitation courses is well established in the UK in reference to driving offences. In other jurisdictions, the same principle applies to perpetrator behaviour change programmes. For example, in Canada, domestic abuse perpetrators are required to fund their own intervention programs[9]. Fees are paid on a sliding scale depending on ability to pay. This approach could be adapted in England and Wales, where those who can afford to pay for their rehabilitation or intervention programs do so, while others are supported through means-tested arrangements.

This approach ensures that offenders take responsibility for their rehabilitation, alleviating the burden on the taxpayer and increasing funding for evidence-based behaviour change programmes. It also provides a sense of ownership for offenders in the rehabilitation process as they are invested in the process of change. This system could be particularly impactful for high-profile offenders who should not receive special treatment or be allowed to avoid the costs of their rehabilitation.

2. Focus on Families Together

Research repeatedly shows that offending runs in families, with children of offenders more likely to enter the criminal justice system[10]. This intergenerational offending needs to be tackled with targeted interventions that address the root causes. A dedicated focus on this issue, including a task group dedicated to intergenerational offending,

---

[9] *Men's Programs — Changing Ways*. (n.d.). Changing Ways. https://www.changingways.on.ca/mens-programs

[10] HM Inspectorate of Probation (n.d.). Family relationships. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/research/the-evidence-base-probation/specific-areas-of-delivery/family-relationships

would be a valuable step. For example, a new Positive Pathway programme for families that cause the greatest harm to themselves, and their communities, could guide families towards constructive change and reducing harm.

The Steps to Change Hub in Surrey offers some insight into how holistic, family-centred services could work. The Hub is commissioned by Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner and with Interventions Alliance, providing programmes to address abusive behaviour, YUVA (part of Waythrough), supporting people aged 11-18 to identify their abusive behaviours and learn alternative ways of expressing difficult emotions and Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership providing trauma-informed survivor services. A forthcoming evaluation will show behavioural improvements among perpetrators post-intervention and police data suggesting reduced re-arrest rates for participants that complete programmes. There is improved coordination among agencies, with each referral very often surfacing more victims and potentially additional perpetrators and so enabling more people to be supported and treated.

Approaches like this could bring more positive outcomes for victims, offenders and communities. Families who face challenges such as intergenerational unemployment, educational disadvantage, and poor health outcomes need comprehensive support—not just for the individual who is offending, but for the whole family. Mentorship programs for parents, educational support for children, and targeted interventions to improve family dynamics would create the long-term conditions necessary for breaking the cycle of crime.

3. Greater Use of Diversion from Custody

Most Approved Premises (APs) are used as part of a plan to return people from prison to their communities. However, they can also be used as a diversion from custody for people in the community and our experience managing an Approved Premises for women suggests APs are underused for this function. This is partly down to limited space in APs – in May 2024, there were just 104 in England and Wales, with 95 designated for men and nine for women. Importantly, there are no APs for women in Wales[11]. A thematic inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation shows that APs successfully balance public protection with rehabilitation efforts[12] and provide a supportive environment that addresses the complex needs of residents.

[11]HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2024). *Consultation on the inspection of Approved Premises*. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2024/05/DESIGNED-AP-consultation-DRAFT-v2.11-240524-FINAL.pdf
[12]HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2017). *Probation Hostels' (Approved Premises) Contribution to Public Protection, Rehabilitation and Resettlement*. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/07/Probation-Hostels-2017-report.pdf

More supported accommodation placements would reduce the burden on existing APs. They would also create more spaces for people to be diverted from custody to receive intensive sanction and support in the community.

4. Bridging the Gap Between Justice and Social Care

Many people who enter the criminal justice system are grappling with complex social and personal issues such as poor mental health, addiction, or the effects of intergenerational trauma. While NHS Liaison and Diversion, RECONNECT and Mental Health Treatment Requirements are part of the current solution, they are only available for specific cohorts at specific points in the criminal justice system process. By recognising the need for a more integrated approach, we can ensure that people who need help are supported in a way that addresses their underlying issues, rather than simply being punished. This means creating pathways where social care interventions—such as mental health support, addiction services, and housing assistance—are integrated into community sentences for example through a Sentencing and Rehabilitation Report as suggested in our response to section 2.

How should custodial sentences be reformed to deliver justice and improve outcomes for offenders, victims and communities?

We have nothing to add to this section beyond noting that that the shift to longer sentences, which is a key factor in the growth of the prison population, is shown by research not to serve a deterrent effect.

The deterrent effect of prison is tied to the certainty of being caught, not the severity of the subsequent legal consequences[13]. There are two important implications backed by evidence; sentence length may serve a public protection function but does not enhance deterrent effects and secondly that police, probation and parole services can exert a stronger deterrent effect than the threat of prison[14]. If sentences are to be reformed it is important to note that the evidence shows that sentence length does not necessarily alter the deterrent effect of prison. If resources are instead directed to police, parole and probation this evidence shows the deterrent effect would be enhanced, not weakened.

How should we reform the way offenders progress through their custodial sentences to ensure we are delivering justice and improving outcomes for offenders, victims and communities?

Our primary focus is work in the community, but we also recognise the critical role of interventions delivered in prison to set people up for success on release. By delivering

[13]Nagin, D. (2013). Deterrence in the twenty-first century. *Crime and justice*, *42*(1), 199-263.
[14]Durlauf, S. & Nagin, D. (2010). The deterrent effect of imprisonment. In *Controlling crime: Strategies and tradeoffs* (pp. 43-94). University of Chicago Press.

targeted programmes just prior to release, we address underlying challenges that may not directly align with their convictions but significantly impact their rehabilitation.

For instance, many people in prison may not have been convicted of domestic abuse or family violence, yet they often struggle with maintaining healthy relationships. While Thinking Skills Programme, currently delivered in prisons has shown to be beneficial in helping emotional regulation[15], it does not specifically target the development of positive relationships. Programmes that promote healthy relationships equip people with essential skills, fostering better decision-making and behaviour change. These interventions serve a dual purpose: they leverage the unique opportunity of a captive audience while providing essential preparation for reintegration into the community.

The value of these programmes cannot be overstated. They enhance public safety by reducing the likelihood of reoffending and pave the way for smoother transitions out of custody. However, their delivery often depends on the discretion of prison governors or local police and crime commissioners, creating inconsistency in access.

To unlock the full potential of these interventions, there is a need for increased funding and a systematic approach to their implementation. By investing in these programmes, we can ensure that more prison leavers have the tools to rebuild their lives.

What, if any, changes are needed in sentencing to meet the individual needs of different victims and offenders and to drive better outcomes?

Throughout our response we have argued that there should be greater personalisation in sentencing so that the best mix of sanctions, support, technology and interventions can be deployed to protect the public, reform and rehabilitate. These could be deployed earlier, before offending escalates, with prison retained as sanction for breach.

Driving Better Outcomes Through Tailored Sentencing Reform

A one-size-fits-all approach often fails to address the complexities of individual cases or deliver the best outcomes for society. We propose several targeted reforms to make sentencing smarter, fairer, and more effective:

1. **Young Adult Community Sanction and Supervision Order:** The 18-25 age group represents a critical window for intervention. In other European countries, young adults are managed through juvenile courts – up to the age of 21 in Germany and 23 in the Netherlands[16]. In Northern Ireland, Hydebank Wood

[15]Ministry of Justice. (2023). *An impact evaluation of the prison-based Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) on reoffending*.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1173986/TSP_Reoffending_Report.pdf

[16]Wolthuis, A. & Berger, M. (2019). *Young adult offenders' rights and restorative justice*. Confederation of European Probation. https://www.cep-probation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/VOL-4.2-Young-adult-offenders%E2%80%99-rights-and-restorative-justice-.pdf

Secure College accommodates young men aged 18 to 24 is a successful model[17] incorporating training and work on day release, an approach which could be adapted elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In England and Wales no separate provisions for young adults exist and while for some, custody may be necessary to protect the public, many others may benefit from combining community sanctions, behaviour change programmes, and support for employment, education, and training. This could offer a more effective path to rehabilitation and crime prevention.

2. **Home Custody Orders for Older Offenders:** With 85% of prisoners over 60 suffering from major illnesses and nearly 2,000 inmates over 70[18], the public could be protected equally well by home custody orders, enforced with advanced electronic monitoring. This approach allows for tailored sanctions and rehabilitative work while reducing the strain on the prison system.

3. **Focus on Women and Diversion from Custody:** Removing mothers—often single parents—from their children has devastating ripple effects, pushing more children into care and increasing intergenerational offending. Community-based sanctions for some women that is designed to reduce family dislocation would be more effective at reducing reoffending and support children of women offenders and wider society.

4. **Mandatory Behaviour Change for Offenders:** Victims of domestic abuse often want the harmful behaviour to stop rather than incarceration of offenders, particularly where it is committed by their own young adult children or a spouse who is the parent of their children. Introducing behaviour change programmes as a standard sentencing measure ensures that harmful thinking is addressed, breaking the cycle of violence and fostering long-term safety.

---

[17] *Top marks Hydebank is a model of excellence - Long*. (2024, November 20). Department of Justice. https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/top-marks-hydebank-model-excellence-long

[18] House of Commons Justice Committee. (2020). *Ageing prison population*. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmjust/304/30402.htm