

Locked out

CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders

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Executive summary

Background – the Home Office problem

1. Our prisons are full. In response the Government is planning to build more. But investing in increasing prison capacity is expensive, and prisoners are costly to maintain in jail. It costs £35,000 to keep someone in prison for a year. And it does not necessarily cut rates of re-offending – over two-thirds of those who have been in prison re-offend.
2. In looking at the potential causes of re-offending, the profile of prisoners provides an insight. The vast majority of prisoners are male – only five per cent of prisoners are female. There are higher proportions of prisoners from ethnic minority backgrounds than in the UK population. More than half do not have a single educational qualification; 65 per cent have numeracy levels below those of an average 11-year-old; and more than 80 per cent have poor writing skills.
3. In light of the increasing prison population, the Government has been keen to understand the links between social exclusion and crime. The 2002 Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report, *Reducing Re-offending*, highlighted the importance of this and in response, the Government set up the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to provide more ‘end-to-end’ services for offenders. Yet implementation has been slow, and three years later, offenders are still unable to access the help they need to deal with their problems and the cost and consequence of their imprisonment. A key theme which emerges from CAB work is the need to improve access to advice for prisoners.
4. The CAB service may be able to assist. Citizens Advice Bureaux are already providing advice in 43 prisons and working with the Probation Service to help prisoners and ex-offenders to deal with their problems. This gives us a unique insight into the types of problems that prisoners face and the solutions to them. However, any successful strategy to tackle re-offending must include a wide range of partners and address challenges, such as prison overcrowding and delays in processing benefit claims, which have arisen since the SEU report was published.
5. This report draws on nearly 500 case studies from 160 Citizens Advice Bureaux in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2005 and 2006. We also surveyed 12 CAB prison and Probation Service outreaches and interviewed 29 CAB clients in prison or on probation to get their views on the problems they were facing.

Main findings

6. Effective rehabilitation begins on arrival in prison. Prisoners’ induction and reception into prison custody need to focus adequately on the practical issues that new prisoners have to sort out, such as outstanding housing, employment, debt and benefit liabilities.

7. Once in prison, prisoners find it difficult to deal with their problems. Simple actions such as making a phone call or writing a letter are no longer easy and are subject to restrictions. Without support and advice within prison, it is often not possible to deal with outstanding debts, or housing issues. Prisoners often lose their outside accommodation, and build up debts.
8. Prisoners' networks of family and friends are hugely important in supporting them throughout their sentence, and in providing them with a stable environment on release. However, the Prison Service often requires prisoners to be transferred to another prison, sometimes at short notice. Continual relocation can break down these relationships, removing a prisoner's personal support network at a time when they need it most.
9. The Prison Service has to provide training and education to help rehabilitate and prepare prisoners for release. These services vary from drug rehabilitation courses, financial capability, to educational training leading to professional qualifications. However the availability and quality of these courses varies enormously. As a result, when prisoners are transferred to another prison, they may not be able to continue the same courses.
10. Comprehensive support for prisoners during their sentences can help enable offenders to successfully rejoin society. But CAB evidence shows support services can be patchy, often leaving prisoners without the skills to manage their situations, thereby reducing their chances of successful rehabilitation.
11. These problems are compounded where a prisoner has specific needs. Women with babies in prison may be unable to claim benefits for their children. Foreign nationals are kept in prison for long periods waiting for the Home Office to make a decision about deportation. Victims of miscarriages of justice often face unique difficulties in readjusting to ordinary life. They may have become institutionalised and in many cases their problems are compounded by mental trauma, as well as economic hardship.
12. At the point of release, a range of support and advice services should be available through the Probation Service and other advice agencies. These services help prisoners to organise accommodation and immediate financial support, either through employment or the benefit system. In reality, offenders are often released without having these basic needs met. They may find themselves homeless and hungry, and some may re-offend as a result of immediate poverty.
13. Prisoners who are released from remand are not eligible for practical support from the Probation Service, even though they can be held on remand for as long as 12 months.
14. Many prisoners are entitled to a discharge grant on release to help them meet living expenses for the first week until benefit claims are processed. However, the amount of discharge grant has remained fixed since 1997. CAB evidence suggests that this amount is insufficient to last for a week, let alone the 11 to 18 days in which benefit claims are supposed to be processed.

15. For ex-offenders to become financially stable on release, they need to be able to make advance claims for benefit, using documentation they are likely to have with them. It is also important that these claims are processed quickly.
16. Although NOMS has a target to find accommodation on release for 70,000 ex-offenders, CAB evidence suggests that many prisoners slip through the net, particularly in finding permanent accommodation. Some local authorities will not re-house ex-offenders because they consider they are not vulnerable and are intentionally homeless.
17. The repercussions of a custodial sentence can be long term. Finding employment can be difficult, due to the current legislation on disclosure of unspent convictions, and the reluctance on the part of many employers to take on ex-offenders. Some newly released prisoners cannot receive their wages or benefits because they do not have any documents to prove their identity in order to open a bank account, and so are locked out.
18. It is important to realise that these problems do not occur in isolation – prisoners and ex-offenders often have complex needs and may struggle to deal with them without appropriate advice and support. Advice therefore plays a key role in rehabilitating offenders. Independent, quality assured advice, delivered by voluntary sector providers, offers skills and advocacy which may not be available from statutory providers, such as Jobcentre Plus. Access to advice should therefore be at the heart of NOMS's strategy for reducing re-offending.

Key recommendations

19. **Reducing re-offending by investing in advice services for prisoners would cost a lot less than building more prisons. On average the costs of a CAB prison advice service serving the whole UK prison population could amount to as little as £319 per prisoner per year, compared to the costs of £35,000 per year keeping them in jail if they return.**
20. **The Home Office should make it mandatory for all prisons to provide sufficiently resourced independent and quality assured advice services.**
21. **The Prison Service should ensure that addressing a new prisoner's housing situation is a core element of induction to prison, to enable them to keep their home wherever possible. Induction procedures should be monitored and include follow-on sessions.**
22. **The Prison Service should ensure that the procedure for transferring prisoners takes into account the importance of prisoners' access to family support networks.**
23. **The Prison Service should ensure that on release, ex-offenders have sufficient proof of identity to enable them to claim benefits.**

- 24. The discharge grant should be sufficient to meet ex-offenders' basic needs for two weeks.**
- 25. The Government needs to develop a code of practice for employers to ensure best practice in the employment of ex-offenders.**
- 26. We also make a number of recommendations to the Prison Service, banks and other creditors, employers, local authorities and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to address other problems experienced by prisoners and ex-offenders.**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 On 9 October 2006, the Home Secretary, John Reid MP, announced to the House of Commons that the prison population had almost reached capacity at 79,819.¹ Home Office projections show that the prison population is likely to increase over the next five years.² Since 1993 the prison population has almost doubled in contrast to a significant drop in the number of recorded crimes, which has almost halved since 1995.³ The Home Secretary highlighted two main reasons for the increase in the number of prisoners; the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and subsequent tougher sentencing and the Government's decision to continue to detain foreign nationals at the end of their sentences until deportation has been arranged.
- 1.2 Public protection from crime and its consequences is at the heart of the Government's criminal justice legislative and policy agenda. The Home Office's Criminal Justice Review includes proposals to rebalance the criminal justice system by placing the victim at its heart.⁴ Whilst the emphasis on achieving justice for victims is very welcome, there needs to be equal emphasis on tackling the causes of re-offending.
- 1.3 Failure to tackle re-offending is to society's cost and detriment. It would not only make society safer, but it could also save the Government money in the long term. This is particularly important in light of high rates of re-offending in England and Wales – over two-thirds of offenders who are incarcerated re-offend.⁵ This is in contrast to our European neighbours, like Denmark who not only imprison significantly less people but whose rates of re-offending are some of the lowest in the world.
- 1.4 The imprisonment of offenders has both social and economic consequences. The 2002 report on ex-offenders and social exclusion by the SEU estimated that it costs at least £35,000 to a year to maintain one prisoner in custody.⁶ These costs are compounded by the high levels of re-offending:
- the cost to the criminal justice system of dealing with the consequences of crime by ex-prisoners comes to at least £11 billion per year⁷
 - a re-offending ex-prisoner is likely to be responsible for crime costing the criminal justice system an average of £65,000⁸
 - it will cost £1.5 billion to build new prisons to provide 8,000 additional prison places by 2012, and the estimated annual running costs for these new prisons will cost an additional £0.35 billion.⁹

¹ *Hansard*, 9 October 2006, Columns 32-46

² *Prison population projections, 2006-2013*, Home Office, July 2006

³ *The British Crime Survey 2005/2006*, Home Office

⁴ *Rebalancing the criminal justice system in favour of the law abiding majority – cutting crime, reducing re-offending and protecting the public*, Home Office, July 2006

⁵ *Hansard*, see above

⁶ *Reducing re-offending*, Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 2002

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Hansard*, 18 October 2006, Column 1290W

- 1.5 In looking at the causes of re-offending it is important to understand the prison population and how it differs from the population as a whole. The vast majority of prisoners are male – only five per cent of prisoners are female. There are higher proportions of prisoners from ethnic minority backgrounds – 15 per cent of prisoners are Black or Black British and six per cent are Asian or Asian British. This is in comparison to two per cent and four per cent of the total population in England and Wales respectively.¹⁰ More than half do not have a single qualification; 65 per cent have numeracy levels below those of an average 11-year-old; and more than 80 per cent per cent have worse writing skills than the population as a whole.¹¹
- 1.6 The 2002 SEU report, *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* included a number of recommendations as to how to overcome the obstacles faced by recently released prisoners, including housing needs, financial support, education and training and employment. In response the Home Office tasked Lord Carter with reviewing correctional services. Lord Carter found that there was a need for all parts of the criminal justice system to work better together, and therefore recommended both a new approach to manage offenders and to sentencing.¹²
- 1.7 In response, a key institutional development has been to bring together prison and Probation Services under the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). In February 2006, the Home Office published a five-year strategy document, which aims to provide mechanisms to protect the public and reduce re-offending.¹³ Central to the strategy is NOMS, which is tasked with managing offenders both in the community and in prison, with the aim of reducing re-offending by 10 per cent. Partnership working across government and the voluntary sector is mooted as one element of this strategy. However the details are lacking and some of the assumptions made about existing provision need to be challenged. And full implementation of NOMS has been slow.
- 1.8 Citizens Advice welcomes the move by NOMS to adopt the SEU's 'Pathways' as the basis for their strategies, incorporating stakeholder working groups regionally and nationally. However, it is disappointing to note that few of the SEU recommendations have been fully implemented, and that access to offender services has not improved substantially. And since the SEU report was published, new problems have emerged for prisoners and ex-offenders, most notably, the method of claiming benefits and long delays in processing claims.
- 1.9 Citizens Advice is well placed to contribute to this debate. For a number of years Citizens Advice Bureaux have been working in prisons, with offenders on probation, with their families and with ex-prisoners in the community in tackling their advice needs. Currently there are about 43 outreach services in

¹⁰ *UK Census, 2001 and Offender Management Caseload statistics*, Home Office, 2006

¹¹ *Ibid*, page 5

¹² *Managing offenders, reducing crime*, Lord Carter of Coles, December 2003

¹³ *A five year strategy for protecting the public and reducing re-offending*, Home Office, February 2006

prison and 29 working with Probation Services. The experience of these bureaux has been that the intervention of effective, impartial and confidential information and advice can play a major role in supporting offenders to resettle back into their communities. And the experience of all bureaux is that working with ex-offenders and their families has positive outcomes in helping them manage their lives.

About this report

- 1.10 This report is based on 483 case studies sent to Citizens Advice by 162 Citizens Advice Bureaux in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between January 2005 and August 2006. We also surveyed 12 CAB Prison and Probation Service outreaches. For the first time we also interviewed 29 CAB clients in prison or on probation. The 29 people we interviewed included:
- two men on probation
 - six women, one of whom was pregnant
 - seventeen sentenced offenders of whom three had life tariffs,¹⁴ and eight were first time offenders
 - one prisoner serving a life sentence
 - nine people on remand, of whom one was a foreign national
 - eleven prisoners from ethnic minority backgrounds
 - twelve prisoners had dependent children and three had non-dependent children
 - prisoners from three prisons which had a CAB advice service and two prisons which currently do not have a CAB advice service but are in the process of setting one up.¹⁵
- 1.11 We would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff, prisoners and clients of the following prisons for all their assistance with these interviews: HMP Durham, HMP Bronzefield, HMP Liverpool, HMP Sudbury and HMP Wormwood Scrubs, along with Citizens Advice Offender Support Services.
- 1.12 The aim of the interviews was to get the prisoner's perspective on the problems they were facing in accessing and using services during their sentence. We were also keen to understand how they felt they would cope on release. It is important to note that the content of the interviews varied according to whether prisoners were able to access CAB advice in their prison, as part of the interview process was assessing the role of advice.¹⁶
- 1.13 The evidence gathered in the interviews reinforces the SEU report's main finding: to address the links between crime and social exclusion. Our evidence also demonstrates that problems are clustered at different points of a prisoner's journey through the criminal justice system. We believe that the

¹⁴ A sentence with a life tariff differs from a life sentence in the following ways: the sentence is discretionary rather than mandatory and once released, the offender can be recalled to prison if they commit another offence.

¹⁵ These figures reflect the wide profile of CAB clients in prison and probation settings.

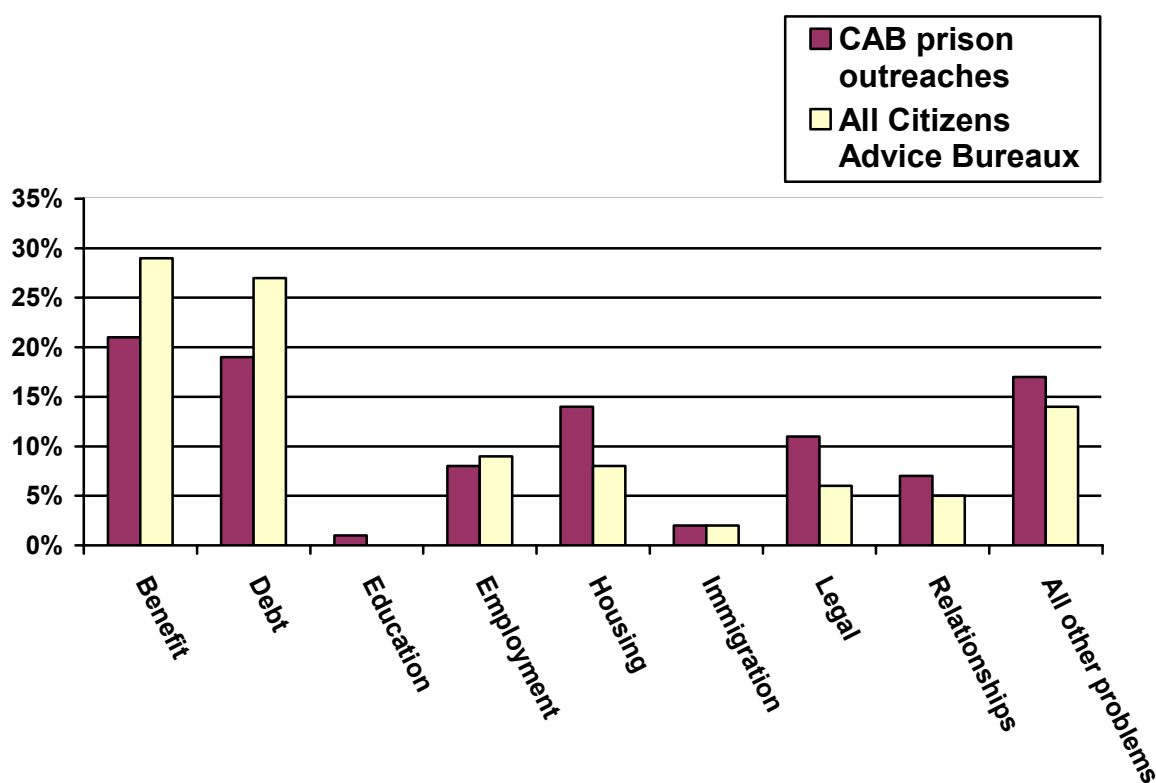
¹⁶ See Appendices 2 and 3 for discussion guides.

unique nature of our evidence makes a strong case for all prisoners to have access to independent advice on arrival in custody, during their sentence and before and after release.

1.14 As can be seen from the table below, our evidence does not cover all aspects of prisoners' lives, but focuses on the key practical issues of debt, personal finance, housing, relationship problems, employment and legal issues. So whilst we are aware of the chronic mental health and addictions crises in prisons, and some of the appalling conditions and racism that some prisoners have to endure, we cannot contribute new insights on these issues.

1.15 This table shows that prisoners experience the same problems as other CAB clients. However, bureaux in prison settings deal with disproportionately high number of enquiries about legal, housing and relationship problems.

Table 1.1 Proportion of different problems dealt with by CAB prison outreaches compared with the CAB service as a whole in 2005/6



Source: 5.5 million problems dealt with by 462 Citizens Advice Bureaux in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2005/06, and 6,005 problems dealt with by 22 CAB prison outreaches in 2005/06

1.16 This report looks at some of the issues experienced by offenders in the criminal justice system, which can contribute to re-offending, and aims to offer practical solutions, where possible. It highlights how offenders face numerous problems whilst in custody or leaving custody, and that returning to life in the community poses inevitable and immediate challenges and re-adjustments – where to live, how to budget, re-engaging in job and labour markets,

rebuilding relationships and dealing with the stigma of a custodial sentence. Failure to tackle these issues presents a real challenge to effective criminal justice for both offenders and victims of crime.

- 1.17 We believe that the current context of escalating prison numbers and the resulting pressure on NOMS in rolling out end-to-end offender management provides a critical imperative for taking the findings and recommendations of this report seriously. As the Chief Inspector noted in her 2006 report "Throughout the system, the pressure of prisoner numbers constrains decisions about how to allocate resources, prevents prisoners being held in their home regions, and has contributed to a significant backlog in sentence planning assessments."¹⁷ Disturbingly, the Chief Inspector found that all prisons were operating at the limits of their capacity, that accommodation was not fit for use and that rehabilitation services were suffering as a consequence.
- 1.18 In keeping with the NOMS approach to 'end-to-end' offender management, we have structured the report around the different stages of the offender's journey through the criminal justice system. Chapter 2 looks at induction and reception into custody as well as problems prisoners might have maintaining personal relationships, access to training and education and the problems that arise when prisoners are transferred. Chapter 3 examines the issues that a prisoner may leave outside which unless addressed, may cause problems on release. Chapter 4 looks at the problems faced by different groups of prisoners, including women, foreign nationals and prisoners who have been wrongly convicted. Chapter 5 addresses the concerns facing a prisoner at the point of release.
- 1.19 By addressing all of the above, this report demonstrates where improvements need to be made in order to reduce re-offending by those who have been in prison and improve effective rehabilitation, thereby protecting the public and reducing the burden on the public purse. What our evidence consistently shows is the importance of and need for advice as part of the offender management process. Chapter 6 sets out some overarching recommendations on access to advice.

¹⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales - Annual Report 2005-2006

2 Coping with life in prison

2.1 For people entering custody for the first time, it can be an overwhelming shock. Induction and reception processes are meant to ease the transition into prison life. However CAB evidence will show that procedures as they currently stand are not as effective as they could be at this crucial stage. Furthermore, the experiences of a prisoner during their sentence can have a considerable impact on their rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community. The SEU report found that there were strong links between the maintenance of strong family and friends support during custody with a reduction of re-offending on release. There is a role to play by both the Prison Service and the advice sector in ensuring that these needs are met.

2.2 In this chapter we will examine the following issues:

- reception and induction into prison custody
- maintaining contact with family and friends
- education and training opportunities
- transfers to other prisons.

Reception and induction into prison custody

2.3 All prisons have reception and induction procedures, the practice of which is guided by the Prison Service Order (PSO) on induction.¹⁸ The PSO includes a mixture of mandatory requirements, supplemented by guidance, and stresses the importance of needs-based induction, including those who need urgent help with legal matters, benefits and accommodation. These procedures are intended to help new prisoners, whether sentenced or on remand, adapt to prison life and put their outside affairs in order.

2.4 An effective induction process is critical in ensuring that a prisoner's responsibilities, including accommodation and repayment of loans or credit cards, are addressed at the outset. Unless these issues are acknowledged and tackled, problems may accumulate unchecked throughout the course of their sentence, potentially harming their chances of successful rehabilitation on release.

2.5 For example, new prisoners need to know that entitlement to most benefits stops whilst they are in prison. Failure to notify the relevant benefit office can cause significant problems and often leads to overpayments and arrears that must be repaid upon release. The Employment and Benefits Surgery

¹⁸ *PSO 1550*. This Prison Service Order provides the Service with instructions on the delivery and management of induction processes for prisoners. The aim of the PSO is that all prisoners new to custody or to an establishment are provided with an appropriate induction process. The aims are to assist and support the prisoner's integration into the establishment; to continue the assessment process; and to enable the prisoner to remain safe, make the best use of their time in custody, and prepare for a law-abiding life after release. The PSO sets out the minimum components required in an induction process. Establishments should be able to comply with the PSO within existing resources. Prisoner induction may be implemented flexibly to take account of the different types of prison and the different needs of prisoners.

Scheme, a joint initiative by the Prison Service and Jobcentre Plus, seeks to provide support on induction to ensure benefit claims are shut down to prevent overpayments.

An East London CAB reported a client who was released from prison after three months. He found that he had £1,200 in his account, which was due to payments for incapacity benefit and DLA continuing during his period of imprisonment. It was not clear whether this was a result of the system failing or the client not correctly informing Jobcentre Plus as to his change in circumstances. He was unaware that he was not entitled to benefits whilst in prison.

2.6 Induction is also a good opportunity for prison staff to identify particular needs that a prisoner may have, including physical and mental health problems and/or drug and alcohol dependency. However, one of the major concerns raised by the SEU report¹⁹ is that there is little uniformity between different prisons as to how this guidance is implemented. In light of our evidence Citizens Advice shares this concern.

2.7 The reality of induction is that its provision and quality may vary due to a number of factors. These can include: the number of new prisoners, at what time of day they arrive, and which staff are on duty.

“When I arrived in the prison you do have an induction interview but my lawyers were here at the same time. I was told that I should know the ropes by now anyway.”

Male inmate

2.8 However, our evidence suggests that there are examples of good induction practice, much of which has improved over time.

“The first time I come [sic] in it was '98, it was different, they just put you in your cell, now it's different”.

Male inmate

“I first found out about the bureau as part of the induction process it was a time for all the questions that needed to be answered.”

Male inmate

“We have a two day induction and they give you booklets, you get to meet all the reps.”

Female inmate

2.9 Citizens Advice recommends that the PSO should be revised to ensure that all new prisoners are informed of their responsibilities to terminate any benefit entitlement, and the Prison Service should work to enable this. Citizens Advice recommends that the Prisons Inspectorate should monitor prison induction procedures to ensure that they are complying

¹⁹ Ibid, page 5

with the PSO, and effectively meeting the needs of all new prisoners. They should also seek out examples of good practice and promote and disseminate them across the Prison Service.

- 2.10 The combination of introduction into prison life together with information on personal responsibilities - all presented often in one 'induction pack' can be overwhelming unless supplemented by follow up work. **Citizens Advice recommends that a follow up session is provided at a later date in order to recap on the important messages delivered at induction, and answer any questions that a prisoner may still have.**

Support from family and friends

- 2.11 Fifty nine per cent of male prisoners and two-thirds of women prisoners have dependent children under 18, and 55 per cent of men and a third of women prisoners lived with a partner before imprisonment.²⁰ Both prisoners and their families experience problems maintaining contact during a prisoner's sentence. Almost half of prisoners lose touch with their families after entering prison.²¹ Although prisoners are entitled to two visits per month, another report has indicated that only 50 per cent of prisoners use this entitlement.²²
- 2.12 All the prisoners we interviewed felt that having regular contact with their families, particularly their children, enabled them to maintain a presence in their lives. Enquiry statistics from CAB prison projects suggest that there is a higher proportion of enquiries from prisoners regarding children compared to the CAB service as a whole – in 2005/6 28 per cent of all CAB prison outreach enquiries about personal relationships concerned children, compared to 18 per cent for the CAB service as a whole. If the prisoner is unable to continue to support their children emotionally, this will leave them feeling disempowered and may foster resentment amongst their families:

“Me [sic] kids are my main concern, he's [son] struggling at school, he really, really needs help. I try and get them up on a visit as much as I can, every two weeks.”

Male inmate

“I've got to go down to [HMP] Preston, it's going to be difficult for the kids.”

Male inmate

- 2.13 An essential part of regular contact is through visits from family and friends. For some, the cost of a visit is prohibitive, but what the quotes also show is that the distance travelled by the offender's family and friends can often be considerable. There is some provision for close relatives and partners on a low income through the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS). The APVS

²⁰ *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile*, Prison Reform Trust, November 2006

²¹ *The forgotten majority*, NACRO, 2000

²² *Through the Prison Gate: a joint thematic review by HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation*, Home Office, 2001

provides help with travel costs and can even provide help with childcare costs and overnight stays where necessary. However, only those families in receipt of means-tested benefits are entitled to any help and others on a low income can miss out:

A CAB in Northamptonshire saw a 19-year-old client with learning difficulties who was serving a custodial sentence. After sentencing the client was imprisoned near to his hometown where his mother and his brother could visit. He was coming to the end of his sentence, when, without warning, he was transferred to another prison in the Midlands. His mother did not qualify for assisted visit help and could not visit him due to the length of the journey and other children to care for.

- 2.14 Some prisoners raised concerns that the visits were not long enough and did not give either the fathers or mothers enough time with their children or other family members.

“My kids all live locally, I’ve a son who is 11 and a daughter who is five, I mainly see them at the weekend and I get seven visits a month. We are pushing for all day visits at the moment as well because at the moment out of an hour long visit, you’ll only get 40 minutes if you’re lucky.”

Male inmate

- 2.15 Whilst maintaining a bond with children and family members seems to be of considerable importance for most prisoners, for some it was not something that they wanted. Some prisoners spoke of not wanting their children or their families to see them in prison as they did not consider it to be appropriate.

“My children live some distance away, and prison is such a different set of rules, I don’t want them to see me here.”

Male inmate

“I didn’t want my children to know where I was.”

Female inmate

- 2.16 For those prisoners who do not want to or cannot²³ maintain a relationship with their family and friends through face-to-face visits, the Prison Service needs to think of other methods of contact. HMP Wandsworth, amongst others, has developed a system where fathers read stories onto tape cassette, which are then sent to their children. This enables fathers to maintain a presence in their childrens’ lives.

- 2.17 Families and friends can also often provide a level of practical support, whether by supplementing the income of prisoners or managing their affairs for them on the outside. This assistance may give prisoners peace of mind and an incentive not to re-offend.

²³ For some offenders the nature of their offences might make maintaining relationships with children or other family members inappropriate.

“If I had no family or help from the outside, life would be difficult.”

Male inmate

- 2.18 CAB advisers who work in prisons reiterate the importance of family support for prisoners, not only whilst they are serving their sentence, but also for when they are released:

“If pre-release [they] know they have somewhere to stay, and are supported, [they] are much less stressed than those with no back-up.”

CAB adviser in prison outreach

“[Family and friends] provide backbone to offenders’ stability, unconditional support. Knowledge of impending visits/letters etc keeps offenders going. Upon release [they] often provide a stable home base, job opportunities, and other general support.”

CAB adviser in prison outreach

- 2.19 Citizens Advice has recognised the importance of working with both offenders and their families. We have collaborated with the Prison and Probation Services and the Legal Services Commission to set up a project in four prisons in the North East to advise both prisoners and their families. This project, Reducing Offending Through Advice (ROTA), has been funded by HM Treasury for three years and has been operational since 2004. Advice is part of a co-ordinated holistic package of measures designed to ensure that family links are sustained, resettle prisoners and prevent re-offending. This service is offered to all offenders during the induction process. This is an example of the type of support ROTA is able to provide prisoners and their families:

A client was struggling to find post-release accommodation as a result of his offence. The ROTA worker assisted him in making a housing application to his local authority and also arranged stable short-term accommodation for his release. Furthermore she also negotiated with his previous housing provider to accept small weekly repayments from his prison wages to reduce rent arrears. The client also wanted to re-establish contact with his two children. The adviser arranged for him to consult a family solicitor via video link enabling him to access specialist advice without the solicitor having to visit prison. The client was subsequently transferred to another ROTA prison and the adviser was able to refer him to her colleague for continued advice and support during his sentence.

Training and education during imprisonment

- 2.20 Nearly all prisons provide some education, training and employment opportunities within the prison. Many prisoners take courses which teach them skills or give them qualifications, which can help to improve their chances of employment on release. These can include CV workshop sessions and NVQs or A-levels. This is important, given that nearly two thirds of all prisoners are functioning well below acceptable literacy levels, compared to 23 per cent of the UK population.²⁴

“I am trying to get the qualifications that I didn’t get at school.”

Male inmate

One interviewee, who was serving a 25 month sentence, had done several courses whilst serving his sentence, including a pre-release course which involved working on his CV and disclosing information about criminal convictions.

- 2.21 Training courses provided in prisons such as UKDS HMP Bronzefield can be very comprehensive.

A pregnant interviewee was studying for a City and Guilds in Housing. “It [housing officer] could be a good part time job for me when the baby is in nursery. I am trying to think long term, you can only have a go, you’ve got to try and better yourself.”

Another interviewee, who had left school without any qualifications, had studied for numerous courses whilst in prison. He had qualifications in literacy and maths, and his NVQ 1, 2 and 3 in catering. He had also got NVQ in textile manufacturing.

- 2.22 Prisons also provide courses in personal development. Attendance at these courses can be a compulsory element of a prisoner’s sentence plan. Such courses can include victim awareness, drug awareness, and anger management.

- 2.23 Sycamore Tree is a course run at HMP Liverpool on victim awareness, which some prisoners participate in.

“[Sycamore tree] was very educational, it opens your mind to what you are and what you’ve done.”

“I got something out of it but it was bad, in that it was painful to do. On my wing there are 100 lifers who have most likely hurt or killed their wives and girlfriends. It makes them realise the impact this has on their kids and their families.”

Male inmates

²⁴ *Reducing Re-offending*, SEU, 2002

- 2.24 However, the availability and diversity of personal development and educational courses varies considerably between prisons. There is often competition for places and sometimes the content of the courses depends not on what the prisoners require or what matches local employment opportunities, but instead on the expertise of available staff, and the category of the prison.

“I don’t think the courses are long enough, just a week but they are really good courses, you have to sign up.”

Male inmate

“In my last prison I was doing book-keeping and Sage accounts [programme] and stuff which was brilliant but you can’t do that here.”

Male inmate

“There’s not a great deal of education. There’s an English course and Maths, but I would like to do a language again...I would only take education if it helped with employment.”

Male inmate

- 2.25 There are currently a number of programmes within prisons that work to improve the employability of prisoners on release. One such programme is PSPlus 2. The project is jointly funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and NOMS and is the largest ESF funded project of its type in Europe. The aim of PS Plus 2 is to increase the employability of offenders prior to their release through individually managing and motivating them in a range of areas. Once registered, prisoners can receive support in areas such as motivational training, employment brokerage, and careers advice as well as other areas, including housing. In total 48,000 offenders in 39 prison establishments across England took part between September 2004 and December 2006. This is a substantial proportion of the prison population. **Citizens Advice welcomes this initiative and recommends that the funding for this project continues, as part of a major initiative to improve access to education and training during imprisonment.**

The transfer of prisoners

- 2.26 The transfer of prisoners can increase the dislocation between offenders and their communities. Prisoners are moved for two main reasons:
- their sentence plan, including any training and personal development needs
 - overcrowding.
- 2.27 During their sentences, prisoners may spend time in a number of different prisons. During the period August 2005 to July 2006, at least 69,636 prisoners were transferred between prisons.²⁵ Although prisoners can be transferred for

²⁵ Hansard, 23 Oct 2006: Column 1676W

the best of reasons, it can be difficult for them to maintain close links with family and friends and continue to benefit from existing vocational and personal training courses.

- 2.28 The 'churn' that occurs as a result can be highly disruptive for several reasons. Firstly, any educational or personal development courses prisoners were doing will be disrupted and access to advice or support services may be terminated. In the new prison there may not be equivalent services or training courses.
- 2.29 Secondly, prisoners who have established visits with families and friends might find that access to visits in their new prison is limited or geographically hard to reach. This may contribute to the estimated two fifths of prisoners who lose contact with their families whilst serving a custodial sentence.²⁶
- 2.30 When a decision is made about where to move a prisoner, it seems that proximity and ease of access for family and friends is not always taken into account. Whilst the majority of inmates that we spoke to understood the reasons for their transfer, they all expressed concern and distress about the impact that moving would have on them and their families.

"I won't stay here because I need to do some courses like anger management and alcoholism and they don't do them here. I will probably go to another prison but I don't know when."

Male inmate

- 2.31 On average, the prisoners we interviewed had been moved four times. We have concerns about the amount of notice and information given to prisoners about transfer procedures. Our research illustrated that prisoners are rarely given any notice of a pending move. This may in part be due to lack of information passed down to prison officers, but this lack of knowledge can be detrimental to the prisoners and their families.

"I am worried that I won't have time to make a phone call to let my mum know where I am going."

Male inmate

"My pad mate got no notice and he had been here for four years and done a lot for the jail. The visits for me are going to be hard down there [new jail], there are probably going to be about two a month."

Male inmate

- 2.32 There appears to be no PSO, which sets out procedure for transferring prisoners. **Citizens Advice recommends that the Prison Service draw up a PSO on this issue. The PSO should take into account prisoners' access to family support networks, if appropriate, when deciding which prison to transfer them to. Furthermore, a prisoner should be given at**

²⁶ *Reducing Re-offending*, SEU, 2002

least 24 hours notice of any transfer so that they have the opportunity to inform friends and family of their impending move.

Conclusion

- 2.33 The aim of this chapter has been to illustrate the types of issues prisoners face going into prison. Induction processes can be helpful to settle prisoners into prison life and to deal with any remaining problems on the outside, but need to be supported by ongoing access to advice and information. Our evidence has demonstrated the importance of maintaining relationships with family and friends and meeting educational and training needs, and it has also shown the factors that can disrupt the success of both of these such as inappropriate transfers. In the next chapter we look at the problems experienced by prisoners trying to deal with problems outside prison.

3 Coping with problems in prison

3.1 When individuals start custodial sentences, their lives on the outside do not grind to a halt; bills still need to be paid, mortgage repayments and rent need to be met; and family and friends continue with their lives. Meeting these responsibilities can place considerable pressure on prisoners and their families. Unless these issues are tackled with the help of advice, information and continuing support, the situation in which an offender finds themselves on release can be one of homelessness, relationship breakdown and unmanageable debt. In turn this can affect their chances of effectively rejoining society and avoiding re-offending and can increase the chances of them re-offending. This chapter examines the following key issues affecting prisoners lives:

- loss of accommodation
- dealing with debt
- financial capability.

Loss of accommodation

3.2 Up to a third of prisoners lose their housing during custody.²⁷ The principal reason for prisoners losing their homes is that they are unable to keep up the rent or mortgage repayments. Swift action on induction could prevent prisoners on remand or those serving short sentences from losing their home, and for prisoners serving longer sentences, it would minimise rent arrears, other debts, loss of possessions, and future exclusion from housing registers.

3.3 On induction the Prison Service is required to assess the housing needs of 90 per cent of new prisoners.²⁸ However it is unclear what the Prison Service is required to do to meet this target. **Citizens Advice considers that it is vital that this assessment includes giving advice as to whether a prisoner's housing should be secured or terminated upon entry.** The advice needs to be relevant to each prisoner's circumstances. Without such advice, a prisoner is left to address their housing issues by themselves. However, as the following cases demonstrate, many are unable to do so:

A CAB in Central London reported a client who was an alcoholic and unable to manage his own affairs. He had served a sentence of six weeks and was unaware of the effect of his sentence on his housing benefit and was given no support or advice by the local authority housing department. He had now been issued with a notice seeking possession for rent arrears which had accrued because the housing department had stopped his housing benefit from the date he went into prison. At the time of seeking advice, he was confused and worried, and faced with homelessness.

²⁷ *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison*, Niven S and Stewart D, Home Office findings 248, London, Home Office, 2005

²⁸ *The National Reducing Re-offending Delivery plan – quarterly progress report – April-June 2006*, NOMS, states that currently the Prison Service is assessing 78.5 per cent of offenders for their housing needs within the first four days of custody.

“My home is empty and I couldn’t concentrate enough to write letters to sort out my council tax and water bills”.

Female inmate

- 3.4 Although as a general rule, prisoners are not entitled to state benefits, there is some help available to help preserve the prisoner’s home. In each instance, the onus is on the individual to ensure that that the relevant benefit office is notified. The rules are summarised in the table below.

Table 3.1 Entitlement to housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest (ISMI) for prisoners

	Remand prisoners	Sentenced prisoners
Housing benefit rules for tenants	A prisoner on remand, including someone on remand in a bail hostel, is entitled to housing benefit for up to 52 weeks, provided his or her absence from home is unlikely to last more than 52 weeks. ²⁹ He or she must not rent out the property whilst in prison and must intend to return home on their release.	A sentenced prisoner, including someone on temporary release, is entitled to housing benefit for up to 13 weeks, which includes any time spent on remand. They must intend to return home, must not rent out the property, and must not be expected to be in prison for more than 13 weeks.
ISMI rules for homeowners with mortgages	ISMI payments are available to remand prisoners for up to 52 weeks, subject to the normal rules for ISMI payments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is not usually available during the first nine months of an income support claim • it only covers interest payments at a standard rate • it only covers interest on the first £100,000 of loans for house purchase and certain home improvements or repairs. 	No entitlement

²⁹ Local authorities will, in practice, assume that a remand prisoner will be on remand for less than 52 weeks. If they do not do so, the prisoner can obtain confirmation from a probation officer.

- 3.5 If a prisoner's sentence is longer than 13 weeks, his benefit will stop immediately, regardless of any notice period required on the property.

A Surrey CAB client had started her sentence on 28 February and was due for release on 30 May, a total of 14 weeks. This was one week longer than the entitlement for housing benefit for sentenced prisoners. She was therefore not entitled to have her rent paid whilst in prison, thus jeopardising her tenancy.

A CAB in Northamptonshire saw a client who had lost his council home because his housing benefit had stopped due to the length of his sentence. The landlord had also cleared the property of his personal effects and destroyed them.

- 3.6 When terminating a tenancy, many landlords require a period of four weeks notice, during which rent must be paid. However, because housing benefit stops automatically for prisoners with sentences longer than 13 weeks, many prisoners are unable to pay. Without housing benefit to pay for any notice period, rent arrears are almost inevitable:

A Surrey CAB client lived in rented accommodation, and was in receipt of housing benefit. Whilst on remand he had received housing benefit, but when he was sentenced for nine months his entitlement would cease. As a result he would be unable to pay the rent, and would lose his property. He was unable to give a month's notice as his benefit stopped immediately, and so he would also lose his deposit. He would have to rely on friends to clear his property of his personal items and store them until he was released, at which point he would be homeless.

- 3.7 As the table above shows, there is a difference between the support available to sentenced prisoners who are tenants and those who are homeowners. Prisoners with custodial sentences are not entitled to any ISMI payments.

A CAB in South London reported that a client who was receiving ISMI prior to his sentence found that upon conviction his payments ceased immediately. Without this financial support he was unable to continue to make his mortgage payments and it was likely that he would lose his home.

- 3.8 It seems illogical that these two benefits for housing costs for custodial prisoners are not aligned, especially when the 52-week rule for remand prisoners is applicable to both housing benefit and ISMI. It also seems disproportionate that if a prisoner owns their own home, a sentence of just three months could result in them losing it. If a prisoner does lose their home this also becomes a punishment. This problem is compounded because homeless offenders are more likely to re-offend. **Citizens Advice recommends that the rules regarding ISMI payments be aligned with housing benefit for sentenced prisoners; for example, that ISMI should also be payable for up to 13 weeks for those with custodial sentences.**

Dealing with debt

- 3.9 The SEU report states that ‘over a fifth [of prisoners] face increased financial problems, and for a third of prisoners existing debt problems worsen whilst in prison.’³⁰ These can manifest themselves in several ways; an inability to pay loans or credit card repayments; fines such as magistrates’ courts fines, and an inability to manage bank accounts. All these can mean that on release ex-offenders are faced with unmanageable or spiralling debt. The main debt problems prisoners experience are with mainstream credit debts or unpaid household bills. In 2005-06, CAB advisers working in prisons reported seeing 1,100 debt-related enquiries, nearly half of which were arrears on credit cards or unsecured loans.³¹ The reality of coping with unmanageable debt is that it not only causes significant stress and anxiety to both a prisoner and their family but can also prevent the prisoner from making a fresh start on release. In a survey of prison outreach services run by Citizens Advice Bureaux, all respondents said that debt is one of the top five issues that can cause re-offending or poor reintegration into society.³²
- 3.10 NOMS’s 2005 National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan aims to help prisoners with their debt problems by provision of quality – assured debt advice. Although this is welcome, it is not sufficient just to provide debt advice, as there are several barriers that may prevent a prisoner from being able to manage any debts that accrue. Because there are limits on the number of phone calls a prisoner can make, it is difficult to negotiate with creditors. Likewise, writing letters to creditors can also pose problems, even just in finding out who is the most appropriate person or department to liaise with. In the time it takes to liaise with creditors, interest and late payment charges will often accrue, causing the existing debt to worsen and placing a greater financial burden on the individual and their family. For example:

“I gave one [bank] a ring but he just wanted to know that I was in prison.”
The interviewee indicated that the bank did not wish to discuss his situation and as a result the outstanding debt was not dealt with.

Male inmate

“I have about £6,000 of debt on the outside, I was trying to pay it off before I came in but I don’t know what’s happening with it now.”

Male inmate

- 3.11 If a person can no longer meet their contractual repayments, most creditors will require an offer of repayment, even if only a token amount, backed up with a statement of income and expenditure. For prisoners this can present a particular hurdle, as they may have very little or no income with which to make repayments:

³⁰ Ibid, page 17

³¹ Citizens Advice CASE statistics, 2005-06

³² Survey of Citizens Advice Bureau outreach projects 2006

A CAB in County Durham reported that they were helping a prisoner with six months left to serve on his sentence to negotiate with his bank about an overdraft. He had arranged the overdraft prior to imprisonment when he had been in work and was able to make repayments. When the CAB wrote to the bank asking for interest to be suspended on his account until he was released, the bank refused to do this without first seeing detailed information regarding proposed repayments, income and expenditure.

- 3.12 The accrual of interest charges on outstanding debts can also compound the problem. There are currently no guidelines governing the suspension of interest charges by lenders in respect of debtors who are in prison. Practices vary enormously between lenders, and even within the bank, often depending on the member of staff dealing with the case.

A CAB in Surrey saw a client who had served a 15 month custodial sentence. The client had debts, which had increased whilst he was in prison. His debts had become unmanageable and he felt he had no option but to petition for bankruptcy.

“I’ve got my own house but with me being the main money earner, my girlfriend is struggling with the mortgage. I’ve also got a couple of bank loans and I owe £28,000 and it’s building interest.”

Male inmate

A CAB in South London reported a client serving a nine-month sentence who sought advice about two credit card debts. The CAB wrote asking both creditors to suspend interest charges without an offer of repayment, as the client had no income with which to repay his debts whilst he was in prison. When neither creditor replied, the CAB contacted them both to discover that although the letter explaining the client’s situation had been received, neither creditor was willing to freeze interest and other charges.

- 3.13 Many lenders seem unwilling or unable to comprehend the situation that many prisoners find themselves in. Furthermore, their debt collection practices do not take into account the length of sentences that offenders serve, which will prevent them from being able to pay off debts. Previous work by Citizens Advice illustrates that this is symptomatic of a general approach that many lenders have towards people whose debt problems are likely to be long term.³³ As a result prisoners in debt may receive completely inappropriate correspondence and treatment by creditors and debt collectors, as the following case shows:

A CAB in County Durham reported that a man serving a three-year sentence had a £1,500 debt to a bank which was being collected by an external debt collector. The CAB wrote to the bank and the debt collection firm to advise them of the duration of the client’s sentence and his inability to make repayments. The debt collector’s solicitors wrote to

³³ *In too deep – CAB clients’ experience of dealing with debt*, 2003

the client whilst in prison threatening legal action unless payment was made in seven days. However the client only earned 50 pence per day in prison, which he used to buy sundries such as toiletries. When the CAB rang the solicitors to query why this letter had been sent, the firm stated that it was a standard computer-generated letter, and, “they do get payments from prisoners via family members”. When the CAB pointed out that the client’s family were not liable for the debt, the solicitors were adamant that the family should pay.

“We experience difficulty in getting debt collection agencies to acknowledge the realities of prison: long term prisoners end up with large files due to creditors insisting on six monthly reviews despite a lengthy sentence and it is clear that their circumstances will not change.”

Norwich and District CAB

- 3.14 A number of lenders have set up specialist debt collection units dealing with individuals who have been identified as vulnerable, or who have advice agencies dealing with their affairs. **Citizens Advice recommends that all creditors consider setting up specialist teams to deal with vulnerable debtors and advice agency cases. They should also train all collection staff in the specific debt problems faced by prisoners; ensuring that debtors who are in prison are treated appropriately and realistically. NOMS is best placed to work with creditors, through their trade associations, such as the British Bankers Association and the Finance and Leasing Association, to achieve this. It is vital that this work forms part of NOMS’s pathways on accommodation, finance and benefits.**
- 3.15 For many prisoners, the inability to manage and repay their debts and undertake realistic negotiations with creditors during their sentence may leave them with very little option other than to petition for bankruptcy. Access to insolvency remedies, which could help prisoners make a fresh start, is difficult due to the process of petitioning. Petitioners have to attend court for the bankruptcy order to be made and for the statement of affairs to be sworn. They also have to attend a meeting or phone the Official Receiver for an interview. For many prisoners this is an impossibility.
- 3.16 However, the Citizens Advice Reducing Offending Through Advice (ROTA) project in Northeast England has made arrangements with Teeside Combined Courts. This project, which is a Treasury-funded project with the Prison and Probation Services and the Legal Services Commission, has arranged for a Combined Courts representative (a commissioner for oaths) to attend the prison with the official receiver prior to the petition, and the petition hearing is dealt with by video link. Since this arrangement has been set up, a number of prisoners have been able to make themselves bankrupt.
- 3.17 **Citizens Advice recommends that the Insolvency Service and the Court Service liaise with the Prison Service to initiate a similar service for all prisoners who wish to petition for bankruptcy.**

Financial capability skills

- 3.18 A report evaluating the financial capability project delivered by North Liverpool CAB to inmates of HMP Liverpool³⁴ found that interventions to improve the financial capability and stability of prisoners had to include not just debt advice but also generic financial advice and training in financial capability skills. Furthermore, the process of dealing with financial problems can often give offenders peace of mind and may be the first step towards a future of financial management.

“[It’s] very challenging but rewarding to see success, even sorting out a small debt so the creditor agrees to freeze interest during the sentence, can make a huge difference to prisoners well-being and outlook on life.”

Teesdale CAB

“I have about £1,000 debt and that was my main reason for doing the CAB’s money matters course. It was brilliant.”

Male inmate

- 3.19 The Financial Skills for Life project, delivered by Citizens Advice Bureaux and currently funded by Prudential plc, has enabled the development of a range of financial capability training initiatives.
- 3.20 Until Fenland CAB’s time-limited funding for its Financial Literacy Project in five prisons across the South East ceased in the summer 2006, it helped prisoners gain the skills to manage their financial affairs.³⁵ The CAB sought to help reduce re-offending rates by working in partnership with the education department of four local prisons to deliver practical sessions as part of a pre-release training programme on how to claim relevant benefits, budget, open a bank account and manage the cost of living independently. They employed a Financial Literacy Officer whose duties included liaison with Probation Services to ensure continuity of support to prisoners on their release.
- 3.21 In 2003, a pilot outreach project began at Onley Prison delivered by Rugby CAB. The project includes a pre-release course with a money management element, covering issues such as budgeting skills, income maximisation, priority and non-priority debt, opening bank accounts, credit unions and bailiffs. It aims to provide the participating prisoners with essential skills, information and assistance to enable them to successfully integrate back into the community on release.
- 3.22 **Citizens Advice believes that the Prison Service should recognise the value that such courses bring to both the prison and the prisoners and therefore to society as a whole. We recommend that the Prison Service**

³⁴ *Financial Skills Training at HM Prison Liverpool*, Paul Jones, Liverpool John Moores University, December 2006

³⁵ The financial literacy project operated in HMP Littlehey, HMP Highpoint, HMP Whitemoor, HMP Wayland and HMP Edmunds Hill.

works with Citizens Advice and other advice agencies to develop and deliver similar such projects across the Prison Service.

Conclusions

- 3.23 This chapter has identified the key issues facing prisoners when they first start a custodial sentence. Prisoners with outstanding debts face enormous challenges in negotiating with their creditors, whose systems are not set up to deal with no payment at all. Prisoners face further challenges trying to maintain their accommodation, including help with ISMI and housing benefit. Dealing with these problems as or before they arise, however, may work to enhance an offender's prospects for successful rehabilitation. The next chapter will illustrate the issues affecting different groups of prisoners.

4 Prisoners with different needs

4.1 As we outlined in the first chapter, prisoners are not a homogenous group, and their needs are often complex. It has been widely reported and recognised that diversity and equality issues both in Prison Services and in the treatment and experiences of offenders on leaving prison are problematic, insufficiently prioritised and inadequately understood. Stated commitments to equal treatment in prisons can be misinterpreted as treating everyone the same rather than respecting and responding to difference. As the Chief Inspector of Prisons has noted "we still have a prison system which is primarily geared towards young white adult men; it moves only slowly, and inconsistently, to recognise the needs of minorities."³⁶

4.2 The Citizens Advice service is acutely aware of these issues and is making a concerted effort to tackle institutional and individual discrimination at all levels. Evidence from CAB prison advice services highlights how three groups of prisoners are suffering serious detriment and exclusion:

- women and particularly pregnant mothers
- foreign nationals
- victims of miscarriages of justice.

Women in prison

4.3 Women are very much in the minority within the prison system: there are 4,409 women in prison, accounting for just six out of every 100 prisoners. Despite the relatively small proportion, the number of women in prison has more than tripled over the last ten years. In 1993 there were approximately 1,100 women in prison compared with 3,500 in 2003.³⁷

4.4 As Baroness Stern stated in a House of Lords debate on women in the Criminal Justice system: "Every report written about women in prison says that they are the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and psychologically damaged members of a population that is already grossly disadvantaged."³⁸

"If you weren't mentally ill when you went in, you certainly are after a very short space of time".

Penny Mellor, former prisoner quoted in *British Medical Journal*³⁹

4.5 In recognition of the challenges facing women in prison, the Home Secretary, in 2005, announced £9.15 million to develop 'radical new approaches to help reduce women's offending'. The initiative will involve setting up community supervision and support centres, where women can access help and support

³⁶ *Women in Prison*, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2005

³⁷ *80,000 not out: what is driving the prison population and what could bring it down?* Professor Carol Hedderman, presentation to an Institute for Public Policy Research seminar, 17 March 2006

³⁸ *Hansard*, House of Lords debate – Criminal Justice Women, 29 June 2006

³⁹ *Ibid*

for a wide range of issues, such as drug abuse, mental health problems, housing, childcare and domestic violence.⁴⁰

- 4.6 At the point of release women continue to experience disadvantage, reducing their chance of effective rehabilitation; 65 per cent of women released from prison in 2002 were re-convicted within two years of release.⁴¹ Home Office research has found that 41 per cent of women in prison did not have accommodation arranged on release and only one-third of women prisoners who wanted help and advice about benefits and debt received it.
- 4.7 Research has also shown that for women leaving prison, their first priority is accommodation.⁴² About one-third of women prisoners lose their homes, and often their possessions, while in prison. Furthermore, the loss of children has a devastating impact on women prisoners' resettlement into the community, with many women facing the prospect of not being able to get their children back until they have a home. Conversely, their chances of being re-housed are compromised unless they have their children with them.⁴³

Pregnant women and women with young children

- 4.8 Family breakdown through involvement in the criminal justice system is a key contributory factor in the cycle of offending and re-offending, as prisoners are far more likely than the general population to have grown up in care, poverty or an otherwise disadvantaged family. In this context, the importance of treating mothers and pregnant women in custody appropriately is being increasingly recognised:

“There is every reason to invest in the very best services [for pregnant women, new mothers, babies and toddlers in prison]. Quite apart from our concern for the welfare of those children and adults, excellent interventions at this time can help to break the cycle of criminality, anti-social behaviour and social dependency from one generation to another...to break [this] cycle...provision for pregnant women, new mothers and infants in prisons should be the best that we can afford.⁴⁴

- 4.9 Home Office research shows that 66 per cent of women in prison have dependent children under 18.⁴⁵ The HM Inspectorate of Prisons stated, “At the end of 2005, the number of imprisoned mothers with babies was 65, a figure that had remained constant throughout the previous two years.” However, there are no official figures released on the number of pregnant women, or the number of mothers and babies passing through prisons each year. Research

⁴⁰ *Women in prison*, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2005

⁴¹ *Hansard*, House of Lords debate – Criminal Justice Women, 29 June 2006

⁴² Singleton et al *Psychiatric morbidity among prisoners in England and Wales*, London Stationery Office, 1998

⁴³ *Reducing Re-offending*, SEU, 2002

⁴⁴ *Hansard*, The Earl of Listowel, House of Lords debate – Criminal Justice Women, 29 June 2006

⁴⁵ Home Office Research Study 208

figures also estimate that over 600 women receive antenatal care in prison each year, with over 100 actually giving birth during their sentences.⁴⁶

- 4.10 There is currently no Prison Service Order guiding how pregnant prisoners should be treated, for instance, how to appropriately restrain a pregnant woman. Subsequently, the antenatal treatment of women varies enormously across prison establishments, with many women being treated inappropriately:

A CAB in Tyne & Wear reported that a client was pregnancy tested on arrival at prison. When she found she was pregnant, she opted for an abortion and waited a number of weeks for a hospital appointment. On the day of the procedure, she was accompanied by three prison officers and was handcuffed throughout. The client was given pessaries and told to expect blood clots. The client actually passed a well formed dead baby. A nurse came to dispose of the foetus, but the client was not offered any counselling or choices of disposal of the foetus. The client was back in prison within hours and felt that the hospital could not get rid of her quick enough. The client told the CAB adviser that she was suffering from flashback and could hear a baby crying. The CAB helped her make a complaint about her treatment by the hospital.

- 4.11 There are currently over 80 places in prison Mother & Baby Units across England, which are spread between seven establishments. There is no automatic eligibility for a place within a mother and baby unit. If there are no places, prisoners must arrange for the baby to be looked after by relatives or it will be taken into care.
- 4.12 In February 2000, the Prison Service implemented a new Prison Service Order covering both the management of mother and baby units and the application process for entry into them. However, the provision of services and support for this group is often under funded and insufficient and varies from prison to prison. Although all mother and baby units are required to meet the baby's essential needs, the provision of items such as clothing and pushchairs is at the discretion of the individual units.
- 4.13 Citizens Advice recommends that the provision of services and support to both pregnant women and women and their babies in mother and baby units should be consistent across the Prison Service. There should be a Prison Service Order on the treatment of pregnant women in prison.**

Child tax credit and Sure Start Maternity Grants

- 4.14 Women who give birth in prison and are able to keep their baby with them need to purchase essential baby clothes and equipment. The Sure Start Maternity Grant may be their only means of getting this. However, our evidence shows that pregnant women in prison are being told they are not entitled to this help,

⁴⁶ *Getting it right? Services for pregnant women, new mothers, and babies in prison*, Maternity Alliance, 2005

even though they are able to keep their baby with them in the prison Mother & Baby Unit.

- 4.15 One of the prisoners we interviewed was about to enter the prison's Mother and Baby Unit to give birth. She had been told that she was not entitled to a Sure Start Maternity Grant. When asked who would supply her with equipment she said, "My daughter is bringing it up – I'm borrowing hers. I don't know how I'm going to afford nappies."
- 4.16 The general principle is that people in custody are not entitled to any benefits, with a few specific exceptions, notably child benefit.⁴⁷ However, within the tax credit regulations, there are no specific exclusions for those detained in custody. Furthermore, eligibility for a Sure Start Maternity Grant depends on the claimant's receipt of a qualifying benefit, including child tax credit. Again there are no specific exclusions for those in custody.
- 4.17 This mistaken assumption appears to be supported by government. The organisation Women In Prison recently received the following clarification from the DWP:

"In the UK, the general rule is that prisoners do not receive any social security benefits at all...In the first place the Government considers that payment of social security benefits to prisoners is unnecessary. They are already being maintained at considerable public expense and to pay entitlement would amount to double provision. Secondly, the idea of prisoners receiving payments from public funds at a time when they are generally considered to be repaying a debt to society is widely felt to be morally repugnant. Forfeiting benefit, even though they may have contributed to it, is commonly regarded as being a legitimate aspect of the punishment."⁴⁸

- 4.18 Although the financial support provided by both Child Tax Credits and the Sure Start maternity grant is paid to the mother, it is intended to meet the needs of the child. In the words of Malcolm Wicks, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary, DWP, "The Sure Start Maternity Grant complements the Sure Start programme, which is helping many thousands of children from the most deprived areas to get the best start in life."⁴⁹ By denying mothers in prison access to child tax credit and sure start maternity grant, the Government is effectively punishing the child along with its mother.
- 4.19 **Citizens Advice recommend that prison staff, especially those working in Mother and Baby Units, are reminded of a mother's entitlement to both Child Tax Credits and a Sure Start Maternity grant. They should have a clear duty to both inform mothers of their eligibility, and assist them, if necessary, in receiving and completing the relevant application form. The voluntary sector has a role to play in working with the Prison Service to**

⁴⁷ S113(1)(b) Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992

⁴⁸ Letter from Ministerial Correspondence Unit, DWP to Women in Prison, dated 2 June 2006

⁴⁹ Written Answers, Monday 12 November 2001

ensure awareness and take up of child tax credits to ensure the best possible start in life for children already in difficult circumstances.

- 4.20 **We also recommend that the DWP and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) ensure that both benefits and tax credits front-line and claims processing staff are aware that mothers in prison Mother & Baby Units are entitled to Child Tax Credits and, subsequently, a Sure Start Maternity Grant.**

Foreign nationals facing deportation

- 4.21 In little over a decade, the number of foreign nationals in prisons in England and Wales has trebled. In April 2006 there were 10,000: accounting for 13 per cent of the prison population as a whole, and one in five of the women in prison. As the Chief Inspector of Prisons points out, foreign nationals, though a diverse group, have a recognisable cluster of specific needs – language, family links and immigration law advice.⁵⁰
- 4.22 Particular problems have arisen in the last couple of years because of the Government's policy of deporting foreign nationals at the end of their custodial sentence. This has been exacerbated by the policy of detaining failed asylum seekers, and compounded by poor communication between the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) and the Prison Service. The impact of these problems can be seen in our evidence, which illustrates that foreign nationals taken into custody experience considerable confusion about their status, are being detained for periods of up to a year, and are often unable to access appropriate advice:

A CAB in Yorkshire reported that an Algerian man had been taken into custody in 2005, and was due to be released and deported to Algeria by the end of the following year. Anxious for his own safety, he had appealed against his deportation, but was still detained, awaiting a decision 12 months after his sentence finished.

A CAB in Cambridgeshire reported that a Samoan woman sought advice from their prison outreach about her immigration status. She had come to the UK as a child, on a Samoan passport, which had since expired. She had been in the UK for 18 years, had obtained indefinite leave to remain and had applied for British citizenship. The client was given a two-week sentence for shoplifting. Immediately before release she was told she was to be detained pending resolution of her immigration status, and was detained for a further three weeks after the end of her sentence. In custody she was only allowed £1 phone credit which was insufficient for contacting her solicitor and family.

The same CAB reported that a man who had refugee status had been imprisoned and was scheduled to be deported on his release some time ago. However the deportation did not happen and he subsequently built a

⁵⁰ *Foreign national prisoners – a thematic review*, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, November 2006

new life working full time to support his young family. However in July 2006, he was arrested again and was again awaiting deportation.

A CAB in Surrey saw a client whose husband had been sentenced to two months' imprisonment at the beginning of 2006. However, when the sentence had been served, her husband was not released and was transferred to another prison where he was to be detained facing deportation, even though he had been a British citizen for over 20 years.

4.23 Leeds CAB has recently done an extensive report on the plight of foreign nationals held in prisons especially in HMP Leeds. It found that prison staff were 'unprepared and at a loss' as to how to deal with the increasing problem of foreign nationals held for deportation following completion of prison sentences. The report looked at three key issues:

- the delay between completing sentences and Home Office action in deporting or dealing with appeals
- the work of other UK prisons and the help they provided for foreign nationals to provide a comparative with local work
- the need for a minimum standard of advice and support that this client group should expect.

4.24 Since publication of this report, HMP Leeds has provided a small dedicated staff to deal with this issue, allowing the CAB to signpost these cases back within the service. Racism is also being addressed with the employment of a diversity officer. However cases are still being brought to the attention of Leeds CAB of clients who remain in prison well beyond sentence expiry dates because of an inability to prove their nationality, and of prisoners writing to all listed legal service providers of specialist immigration advice but being unable to find any firm with the capacity to take on their cases. Citizens Advice agrees with the Chief Inspector of Prisons' conclusions that a national strategy for managing foreign national prisoners is required.⁵¹

4.25 Given the increase in the number of foreign nationals in prison, it is likely that the experience of the CAB in Leeds will be replicated in prisons across the country. **Citizens Advice recommends that all custodial institutions must have designated immigration officers responsible for liaison with the IND and foreign national prisoners who are detained after their sentence has been completed. The duty on the Prison Service to inform detained foreign nationals on their immigration status and arrange appropriate legal advice must be clear in PSO regulations and better enforced.**

⁵¹ Ibid, page 31

Miscarriages of justice

4.26 Whilst they are a small number of prisoners, victims of miscarriages of justice often face unique difficulties in readjusting to ordinary life. They may have become institutionalised and in many cases their problems are compounded by mental trauma. At the same time they have practical needs, for example benefit or employment income on which to live, accommodation, reconnection with their family and friends, and reintroduction to the National Insurance (NI) and tax system. They also get no support from the Probation Service because they are not offenders. However, because they have been in prison, often for very long periods of time, they will still feel the full effect of this.

4.27 The Royal Courts of Justice CAB is funded by the Home Office to provide an advice service to victims of miscarriages of justice, whether they are in custody awaiting an appeal against their conviction, or on release following a successful appeal and in need of support. This work has identified three issues which are commonly experienced by victims of miscarriage of justice:

- no access to immediate funds on release
- the length of time it takes to assess compensation claims
- backdating of National Insurance contributions.

4.28 When victims of miscarriage of justice have their convictions quashed, they are immediately released. However, they are often released without the means to support their immediate, let alone long-term needs. Unlike other prisoners, they do not get a discharge grant, because they are entitled to compensation instead. But as our evidence shows, the process for gaining compensation can take months and there are no facilities for them to obtain interim payments to support themselves in the meantime:

A CAB in Northamptonshire reported that a woman sought advice when she was released after her conviction had been quashed on appeal. The client, who was refused medical treatment for depression whilst in prison, was released with no money. As a result she had to walk right across London, despite considerable mental and physical ill-health.

One Miscarriage of Justice Project client spent 17 years wrongfully imprisoned before his conviction was finally quashed. He experienced lengthy delays before receiving his final payment. Having eventually received his final payment, he was shocked to be told by the assessor that he was fit for part time work and his compensation was reduced for future loss of earnings accordingly. The implication was that he was expected to work, despite suffering from a recognised trauma which affects sleep and memory.

4.29 In a Written Statement, the previous Home Secretary noted, 'Claims for compensation...may drag on for several years.'⁵² The assessment process is inadequate in its current form, as there is only one part time assessor. The

⁵² *Hansard*, Written Ministerial Statement, 19 April 2006, Column 15WS

Home Office has now introduced strict time limits of six months for eligibility and final assessments within 12 months. However, no mention is made of what an individual is meant to do during the intervening period to support themselves. **Citizens Advice recommends that an advance of compensation is made within seven days to enable miscarriage of justice victims to meet their immediate needs.**

- 4.30 The short timescales also mean it is difficult for the assessor to adequately take into account the trauma experienced by the victim of the miscarriage of justice. Part of the compensation covers the trauma suffered and its longer term effects. Given that the effects of post traumatic stress disorder can take up to six months to show, and delays in the assessment and reporting process, these timescales are artificial and could lead to inadequate compensation for miscarriages of justice victims. **Citizens Advice recommends that the solution is not to impose a uniform time frame for assessment, but to speed up the process once all information is available to the assessor, and to speed up the payment of interim compensation.**
- 4.31 The Home Secretary has also proposed limiting the amount of compensation payable to £500,000 maximum, and in respect of loss of earnings to one and a half times gross average industrial earnings. Possible reforms have been mooted to allow deduction on the basis of previous convictions or conduct. Citizens Advice considers that the state should pay full and proper compensation to those who have suffered a miscarriage of justice and should not seek to limit its liability. **Citizens Advice recommends that the Government retain the discretionary power to provide compensation on a case-by-case basis, subject to an independent assessor's recommendations.**
- 4.32 Miscarriage of justice victims are not treated with discretion with regard to National Insurance contributions during their period of false imprisonment and are therefore unfairly penalised upon release, as they are unable to claim certain welfare benefits. People who are imprisoned or detained in legal custody after being convicted of an offence and whose conviction was subsequently quashed can apply in writing for the credits to be awarded retrospectively.⁵³ **Citizens Advice recommends that HMRC should ensure that NI credits are automatically awarded to miscarriages of justice victims for their period of their wrongful imprisonment.**

Conclusion

- 4.33 This chapter has raised just a few of the equality challenges faced by the evolution of NOMS and the Prison Service. These concerns and our experience of working with different offender client groups point to the role the Government has to play to acknowledge their needs, identify tailored policy solutions to prevent these kinds of negative experiences continuing, and implement effective equality strategies across the prison system which focus on respecting the fundamental rights of different groups.

⁵³ Reg 9D, Social Security (Credits) Regulations 1975

5 Coming out – discharge and rehabilitation

- 5.1 Irrespective of the length of the sentence that has been served, re-joining the community can be a potentially difficult and unsettling experience.

“I’ve got more problems now than I had before [getting sent to prison].”

Male inmate

“A lot of prisoners would struggle getting out. I will be a wreck. I don’t know if I’ll be able to adapt to people.”

Male inmate

- 5.2 Ex-offenders re-joining the community may have a whole host of problems including housing, employment and access to financial support. These problems can be compounded by any conditions of release that the offenders may be subject to. They may include restrictions on where they can live, whom they can associate with, where they can go and what work they are eligible for. All of these will impact on their experience of resettling back into the community and their chances of effective rehabilitation.

- 5.3 In this chapter we will examine CAB evidence on the challenges faced by people who have just been released from prison:

- the level of support available for prisoners on release
- access to benefits
- finding accommodation
- access to employment
- access to banking.

Support on release

- 5.4 Comprehensive support in the build up to release and post-release is crucial to enable offenders to rejoin and remain as effective law abiding citizens. For those serving custodial sentences of more than 12 months, probation officers based in prisons provide support from incarceration to release. In 2005/06, the Government spent £799,387,000 on Probation Services.

- 5.5 The prisoners whom we interviewed spoke positively of their experience with the Probation Service. Their experiences reflect the relative ease of access that they have to the Probation Service whilst in prison.

“I’ve seen probation anytime I want and they’re really good, they’re all really good.”

Male inmate

- 5.6 In January 2006, 20 per cent of the 76,400 members of the prison population were on remand.⁵⁴ Given the uncertainties and disruption that remand prisoners face, it is one of the most disturbing trends in criminal justice practice that the size of this group is growing the fastest. However, the support mechanisms in place for this group are virtually nonexistent. There is no requirement to prepare or begin thinking about a sentence plan for a remand prisoner. In turn they receive little help to prepare for release. Bureaux evidence confirms this. For example, remand prisoners receive no financial help at the point of release.

A Berkshire CAB reported that their client had been released from remand, after a not guilty verdict. During his time on remand, he had lost everything. He had no accommodation arranged for that night, and the local authority was unable to help him.

A CAB in Staffordshire reported that their client, a former soldier, had been accused of 'arson with intent' and had spent eight months in prison on remand. He was tried and found not guilty by the jury on all 12 charges. On release he only had the clothes he was wearing, he had lost many items of personal and sentimental interest as well as documents such as birth certificate and passport. As an ex-prisoner he was not helped by services organisations – because he 'had brought the forces into disrepute'. He also applied to Victim Support for help – he felt he was a victim of the crime, but he did not qualify for help. The client told the bureau that he would have qualified for more if he had actually completed a sentence as a guilty person.

A CAB in Surrey reported that discharge grants are available to sentenced prisoners leaving prison. If a prisoner is released from court with a not guilty verdict, they are not eligible for a discharge grant because they have not satisfied the condition of being a sentenced prisoner. The CAB commented that while it may be a relief to be found not guilty, it did not mean that the person has no financial needs.

- 5.7 **Citizens Advice recommends that NOMS should ensure that remand prisoners who are found not guilty and released receive the same level of support as prisoners released from longer custodial sentences.**

Meeting immediate needs on release

- 5.8 At the point of release, a prisoner may be entitled to a travel warrant, a discharge grant, or a subsistence payment. The majority of prisoners will receive a discharge grant, which is supposed to meet living expenses for the first week until regular benefits are processed and awarded.⁵⁵ Prisoners should be given a form to sign for the grant two weeks prior to release.

⁵⁴ *80,000 not out: what is driving the prison population and what could bring it down?* Professor Carol Hedderman, Presentation to an Institute for Public Policy Research seminar, 17 March 2006

⁵⁵ Discharge grants are available to ex-prisoners provided they are aged 18 or over, and they are eligible to claim income support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Prisoners who were imprisoned for less than 15 days or released from remand are not eligible for a discharge grant.

- 5.9 The amount of discharge grant has remained fixed since 1997 and is worth £46.75. This amount is insufficient to last for a week, let alone the 11 to 18 days which are the target benefit claim processing times. This compares with the current personal allowance for income support which is £57.45 for a single person aged 25 and over, and if the grant had kept pace with inflation it would now be around £57. CAB evidence suggests that ex-offenders are often unable to meet their basic needs, placing an added strain at a time when they may be struggling to readjust to life in the community.

A CAB in Staffordshire reported a client who was discharged with the full £46.75 discharge grant and applied for income support immediately on release. Eighteen days later he had still not received any benefit, his discharge grant had run out and he had no money to buy food.

A CAB in Somerset reported a client who had received the full discharge grant and immediately applied for benefit on release. Two and half weeks later he still had not received his benefit. He had no money left for food, clothing or accommodation. The client told the CAB that he had stolen a cooked chicken the previous day so that he could eat.

- 5.10 **Citizens Advice recommends that the level of discharge grant be raised to at least £114.90, the equivalent of 14 days of income support or job seekers allowance for those aged 25 or over, to allow for the time it takes for benefits to be processed.** Uprating the prison discharge grant in this way would cost an additional £6 million per year.⁵⁶

Applying for benefits

- 5.11 Financial stability in the period immediately following release is essential if an ex-prisoner is to resettle effectively into the community and avoid reverting to crime. Only a few will have employment arranged for their release and as a result many look to the benefit system for immediate financial support, by claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), if they are available for work, or income support or incapacity benefit if they are not. Very high proportions of prisoners and ex-offenders are in receipt of benefits. At the time of the SEU report, 72 per cent of prisoners were in receipt of benefits before entering prison, and on release, 81 per cent of ex-prisoners claimed benefits.⁵⁷ For ex-offenders to obtain financial stability on release, application processes need to be appropriate and benefit claims need to be processed quickly.
- 5.12 CAB evidence continues to show that there can be long delays in processing benefit claims. In a survey of 170 Citizens Advice Bureaux carried out in September 2006, 80 per cent of advisers said that clients faced serious delays in receiving benefit payments. The relatively new process of having to initiate claims for JSA, income support or incapacity benefit by telephoning Jobcentre Plus has also caused problems for people who have difficulties in

⁵⁶ Based on 90,000 prisoners discharged per year – figures from the SEU report, *Reducing Re-offending*

⁵⁷ Ibid

using the phone. Two thirds of bureaux in our survey reported serious difficulties contacting Jobcentre Plus by phone. Prisoners, who may be destitute on release and may not have access to a telephone, are particularly likely to experience problems. Because of the emphasis on the telephone as the preferred means of contacting Jobcentres, it has become more difficult to make a benefit claim in person, and many bureaux have reported clients being refused alternative means of making claims.

A Northamptonshire CAB reported a prisoner, shortly due for release, who asked for help completing a form for incapacity benefit. His local Jobcentre Plus would not accept a paper claim form and insisted that he applied over the telephone. The client had little access to a telephone in prison and there was little to no privacy available.

A Buckinghamshire CAB reported that a lone parent suffering from depression, had received income support, housing benefit, and council tax benefit prior to her custodial sentence. On release she made a new claim for income support over the telephone that, eight weeks later, had still not been processed. She had no money to feed herself or her family.

A CAB in Berkshire reported that a recently released prisoner was told by Jobcentre Plus that it would take up to six weeks to process his claim for JSA. Although he had been given a discharge grant of £46 on release, the money had only lasted 10 days. When the client applied for a crisis loan, Jobcentre Plus refused his application on the basis that they did not think he could repay it.

- 5.13 There has been some recognition of the problems prisoners face in claiming benefits on their release. The Employment and Benefits Surgeries run by Jobcentre Plus provide one-to-one support to ensure that any appropriate benefit claims are submitted prior to release. This scheme is a joint initiative negotiated by the prison and the local Jobcentre Plus office, and so there may not be an equal level of provision in all prisons. Jobcentre Plus reorganisation has also reduced the number of local Jobcentre Plus offices, so some arrangements may also have disappeared.
- 5.14 Fresh Start is another joint initiative run by the Prison Service and Jobcentre Plus, introduced by the DWP in 2001. It guarantees pre-arranged new jobseeker interviews for all newly released prisoners, either on the day of release or the first practicable day thereafter. Whilst this is a welcome initiative, it currently only deals with applications for JSA. This causes problems for people who are not eligible for JSA:

A CAB working in a women's prison reported that local Jobcentre Plus were scheduled to begin Fresh Start interviews shortly. However the CAB had to explain to the prison staff that the Fresh Start initiative would only benefit a small number of the prisoners because the majority cannot work due to ill health or child care responsibilities, and therefore would not be entitled to claim JSA. The CAB also pointed out that if these prisoners were given Fresh Start interviews, they would be

worse off on release, because they would have to make a fresh claim for income support, the appropriate benefit, and wait for it to be processed.

A homeless man who was suffering from depression and epilepsy sought advice from a CAB in Devon a month after his discharge from a three month sentence in prison. At the time of seeking advice he had no income. Before going to prison he was in receipt of incapacity benefit, which stopped when he went into prison. The Fresh Start initiative was not available to him because he needed to claim income support and incapacity benefit rather than JSA. However the CAB felt that the client would have benefited from some help and support to claim benefits, as he was unable to express himself or cope with day-to-day living.

- 5.15 According to Jobcentre Plus, in 2005-06, over 35,000 new claims interviews were booked through the Fresh Start scheme, 21,000 of which were attended, a success rate of around 60 per cent. **Citizens Advice welcomes both of these initiatives and recommends that it is widened to include claims for income support and incapacity benefit.**

- 5.16 Lack of identification can also be a significant problem when applying for benefits. Many clients have no formal identification on discharge, it having been lost during their time in prison. Often, the only identification they have is a letter from the Prison Service, or a letter from their solicitor. This can affect their access to benefits, as to claim benefits people must produce their NI number, as well as providing other proof of identity such as a passport, a birth certificate, or a driving licence.

A Buckinghamshire CAB client applied for a crisis loan on release. He was refused as he did not have any form of identification other than his NHS medical card and a letter from his solicitor, neither of which the Jobcentre Plus would accept.

A man asked a CAB in Somerset for help with applying for benefits. He was sleeping in his car in temperatures below freezing and had no income. He had tried to claim jobseekers allowance and a crisis loan but had been told by the jobcentre to provide two documents to prove his identity. The client only had one document: his prison discharge letter. The police refused to identify him although they had arrested him. Eventually a firm of solicitors whom he had used over a year earlier agreed to write a letter of identification.

- 5.17 **Citizens Advice recommends that the Prison Service should draw up an agreement with DWP on the provision of necessary documentation to prisoners before release to enable them to make a claim for benefit.**

The social fund

- 5.18 As a result of many of the delays highlighted above and the inadequacies of the discharge grant, many recently released prisoners may need to apply to the social fund for short term help with living costs via crisis loans. They may also need a grant to help them resettle in the community by means of a community care grant.
- 5.19 Citizens Advice has called for fundamental reform of the social fund, which does not provide adequate assistance in the form of either grants or loans in times of crisis or when a long period on low benefit income means that expenses resettling or furnishing a new home, for example, cannot be afforded.⁵⁸ Access to the social fund has also been affected by Jobcentre Plus reorganisation - in Citizens Advice's recent research, almost all bureaux who responded to our survey said their clients were experiencing difficulties claiming crisis loans. Telephone lines have very often been engaged, and ex-offenders who may already be destitute may find it impossible to make an application:

A CAB in West London reported that a lone parent recently released from prison had been waiting three weeks for her income support claim to be processed. She tried to apply for a crisis loan but was unable to get through on the telephone. In the meantime, she had no money to feed either her child or herself. The bureau adviser tried calling the crisis loan line on behalf of the client, but was also unable to get through.

- 5.20 Many prisoners will require a community care grant to buy new clothing or to furnish a new home on release. However they are often turned down because DWP guidance to social fund staff states that prison governors are responsible for ensuring that discharged prisoners should be suitably and adequately clothed.⁵⁹ Although the guidance goes on to inform social fund staff that clothing provided may not be available or may be inadequate for the prisoner's needs, Citizens Advice Bureaux find that recently released prisoners are often told that they are not entitled to a community care grant:

A CAB in Surrey reported that a client released from prison had been refused a community care grant for clothing because the social fund staff had assumed the prison would provide clothing to prisoners before release. When the CAB rang the prison, the adviser was told that the prison had no clothing kept for discharged prisoners.

- 5.21 Although negative decisions can be appealed, without appropriate support prisoners are unlikely to know about this process and are unlikely to challenge a decision.

A Hampshire CAB saw a client who was released from prison on a temporary licence. Whilst he had been in prison his ex-partner had

⁵⁸ *Unfair and Underfunded – CAB evidence on what's wrong with the social fund*, Citizens Advice, 2002

⁵⁹ Part 2 of the *Social Fund Guide*, DWP, September 2006

destroyed all of his clothing, and he had only what he was wearing. With the help of his probation officer he applied for a community care grant but was unsuccessful. DWP confirmed this and stated that a grant was not normally given for clothing. The client was so distressed that he took a drug overdose and was admitted to hospital for treatment.

- 5.22 Even if a claim for a community care grant is successful, limited local budgets for grants mean that claimants are often offered much less than they need to purchase basic necessities:

A Northamptonshire CAB reported a client who was shortly due for release but the prison resettlement team had not been able to find him any accommodation. He applied for a community care grant to purchase a sleeping bag, some clothes, a rucksack and other essentials. He was awarded just £65, which could not possibly cover all of the things that he needed.

- 5.23 Delays experienced when applying for income support, JSA or pension credit also affect a client's ability to apply for a community care grant. A claimant must have been assessed as eligible for one of these benefits before they can apply for a grant.

A CAB in Buckinghamshire reported that a man released from remand had the chance of hostel accommodation and possible employment in a nearby town but had no money to get there. He was anxious to make a new start. He tried to claim a community care grant but he was told that he was ineligible, as he had not yet claimed JSA. The adviser tried to telephone the crisis loan helpline but was unable to get through.

- 5.24 The difficulties prisoners face on release in accessing the limited help available from the social fund stem in part from qualifying conditions which require people to be in receipt of particular benefits before they can qualify, for example for a budgeting loan or a community care grant.

- 5.25 **We would like to see DWP working more closely with the Prison Service to develop ways in which these difficulties could be minimised, in particular by considering whether prisoners might be able to make claims for benefit shortly before their release date, in order to ensure that their resettlement and rehabilitation on release is not jeopardised by lack of access to any resources. This relationship should be built into the Pathways and NOMS action plans for reducing re-offending.**

Finding a home

- 5.26 The SEU report calculated that a stable home could make a difference of over 20 per cent in terms of reduction in reconviction.⁶⁰ A lack of accommodation can also severely hinder ex-prisoners' chances of finding employment. Almost

⁶⁰ Ibid, page 37

a quarter of employers would not consider employing a homeless person.⁶¹ Therefore, securing accommodation for prisoners on release should be a priority.

- 5.27 However, CAB evidence suggests that ex-offenders are often unable to meet their basic needs, placing an added strain at a time when they may be struggling to readjust to life in the community:

A Northamptonshire CAB reported the case of a young man without any family support network who had been in council care up until the age of 16. Since then, he experienced a cycle of homelessness and prison sentences. The client admitted to the CAB that he had often committed a crime in order to enter prison, especially in the winter. At the end of his current sentence he would once again be homeless.

- 5.28 This case illustrates how homelessness can spiral into re-offending:

A Somerset CAB client, a single man estranged from his young daughters, had tried to commit suicide prior to his sentence. He was arrested by the police due to an outstanding warrant and was imprisoned. On release he had no money and nowhere to stay. The client had to sleep in his car in temperatures below freezing and he was in a vulnerable state of mind. His homelessness application was refused, as he was not considered to be vulnerable. After having been turned away, the client admitted to stealing petrol to keep his car running, and then when the temperatures dropped even lower, he ripped a telephone off the wall in the police station so that he could have bed for the night. Following the intervention of the CAB, the local authority's homeless persons unit agreed to help him if he provided details of his medical condition.

- 5.29 It is therefore welcome that NOMS has ambitious targets for helping prisoners find both short and long-term accommodation on release. These include ensuring that 70,000 prisoners have accommodation on release from prison.⁶² The National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan also sets out a number of action points to ensure that prisoners have accommodation to go to on release from prison, including the provision of housing advice, and to identify housing needs.⁶³ The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have recently issued guidance for local authorities on good practice in homelessness prevention, including best practice on meeting the housing needs of ex-offenders.⁶⁴

- 5.30 Although statistics from the Home Office suggest that these targets are being met with 89 per cent of offenders leaving prison with accommodation to go to,

⁶¹ *Labour Market Outlook Survey report*, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), summer/autumn 2005

⁶² *NOMS performance report on offender management targets*, April – June 2006

⁶³ *The National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan – Quarterly Progress Report*, November 2005 - March 2006

⁶⁴ *Homelessness Prevention: A Guide to Good Practice*, DCLG, 2006

other evidence suggests that many prisoners slip through the net, particularly in accessing permanent accommodation. For example, London Offender Assessment System (OASys) data for 2005/06 identified that 36 per cent of offenders from an 11,400 sample had needs relating to accommodation. But only 35 per cent of these had their need registered and only 28 per cent had an intervention logged in their sentence plan.⁶⁵ CAB advisers working in prisons dealt with a higher proportion of enquiries relating to threatened or actual homelessness than Citizens Advice Bureaux as a whole – 34 per cent of all housing enquiries dealt with by CAB prison outreaches compared to 22 per cent of all housing enquiries dealt with by the CAB service as a whole.

Presenting as homeless to the local authority

- 5.31 CAB evidence shows that some prisoners experience acute problems when applying to local authorities as homeless or to go on the housing register.
- 5.32 People released from prison can apply to be 're-housed' as homeless to the local authority. There are a number of conditions a person has to satisfy in order to qualify for re-housing under homelessness legislation. One of these is that the applicant must be considered to be in priority need.⁶⁶ In England, a person is considered to be in priority need if they are pregnant, have dependent children, chronically sick or disabled, or considered to be vulnerable. Local authorities are able to use their own discretion when assessing whether a person is vulnerable.
- 5.33 In England, the Homelessness Act 2002 gives priority need status to a person who is vulnerable as a result of having been to prison or remanded in custody.⁶⁷ According to sections 10.24 – 10.27 of the *Code of Guidance* which is used by all local authorities in assessing homelessness applications, a period in custody may make an individual vulnerable, but not all those released homeless from prison will be considered to be vulnerable.
- 5.34 The 2002 Act was intended to improve homeless ex-prisoners' access to housing. However in practice the statistics show that the number of ex-prisoners considered as vulnerable has decreased since this legislation was implemented. In 2002, a total of 2,963 ex-prisoners were considered as vulnerable by local authorities, but in the first quarter of 2006, this had dropped to just 102.⁶⁸
- 5.35 There is a lack of consistency when it comes to making decisions about the vulnerability of ex-offenders. Some local authorities will not consider an applicant vulnerable due to institutionalisation if they have served a relatively short sentence, ignoring the fact that the applicant may have been in and out of prison several times in quick succession.

⁶⁵ *Reducing Re-offending in London – Phase 2 of the London Resettlement Strategy*, London Resettlement Board, September 2006

⁶⁶ *Homelessness Code of Guidance to Local Authorities*, DCLG

⁶⁷ In Wales, a person is in priority need if they are homeless on being released from custody.

⁶⁸ DCLG statistics, quoted by *Inside Housing*, Ocean Media Group, 28 July 2006

A CAB in Bedfordshire reported that a man who had been in and out of prison for the last 10 years, had recently been released from prison and was homeless. Although he was receiving treatment for drug addiction, the local authority had refused his homeless application on the grounds that he was not eligible and not in priority need.

A CAB in Kent reported that their client had been living with his mother and stepfather in a one bedroomed bungalow since his release from prison three months earlier. The client felt that this was a temporary arrangement, and that he needed to find a place of his own as he felt his mother's mental health had been affected by his staying at her house. However the local authority would not accept that he was vulnerable even though he had been diagnosed as having a personality disorder, and was a recovering drug addict.

5.36 Citizens Advice recommends that the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* clarifies that when assessing a prisoner's vulnerability, a local authority must take into account not only the length of sentence, but also the number and frequency of all prison sentences that a prisoner has served.

5.37 Another condition for qualifying for re-housing is that applicants must not be intentionally homeless; that is, that they have not done something deliberately or failed to do something which has resulted in their homelessness. People who have lost their previous accommodation as a result of rent arrears or having left a property voluntarily, may be classed as intentionally homeless.

5.38 However, as outlined earlier in this report, the housing benefit rules often result in prisoners having to choose between accumulating rent arrears or surrendering their tenancy when they go into custody. Whilst some local authorities take this into account, others will class them as intentionally homeless and refuse to help them:

A CAB in Sussex reported a client who was given a custodial sentence and was advised to give up her council tenancy, despite her boyfriend's offer to pay the rent. On release, she made a homelessness application but was refused on the grounds that she was intentionally homeless. She was unable to access affordable housing and felt extremely stressed, as she was anxious to make a "new start".

A CAB in Wiltshire reported that a lone parent was forced to surrender her tenancy of a council property when she entered prison, as her housing benefit stopped and she was unable to pay the rent. On release she applied to be re-housed but the District Council would not accept her as homeless on the grounds that she made herself homeless when she surrendered her tenancy herself. The client had made a further homeless application, supported by a letter from her probation office but with no success. She was very depressed and anxious, and at the time of seeking advice was sleeping in a car, whilst her son stayed with a friend.

- 5.39 Many prisoners are faced with a dilemma; if they surrender their tenancy then they risk being considered intentionally homeless, but if they do not, they may accumulate rent arrears which may lead to their exclusion from the housing register. Currently the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* only states in relation to ex-offenders and intentionality, 'In considering whether such an applicant is homeless intentionally, the housing authority will have to decide whether, taking into account all the circumstances, there was a likelihood that ceasing to occupy the accommodation could reasonably have been regarded at the time as a likely consequence of committing the offence.'⁶⁹ **Citizens Advice recommends that the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* makes it explicit that if a prisoner has been forced to surrender their tenancy when they first went into prison because they were unable to sustain it during their sentence, then they should not be considered to be intentionally homeless.**

The housing register

"I've spoken to a lot of the lads, and housing is such a nightmare, it takes so long...I've applied for a flat with the local council, but it is so slow."

Male inmate

- 5.40 Some prisoners may have temporary accommodation organised for them on release, for example, with friends and family. However, in the long term, they need to find accommodation of their own. For many, this means applying to go on the local authority's housing register.
- 5.41 Ex-offenders can experience particular problems when they put their names on the housing register. Some of them will have rent arrears on release. Even if the applicant is not considered to be intentionally homeless as a result of these arrears, a number of housing providers will refuse to place someone with rent arrears on their register as a result, regardless of the cause.

A CAB in Greater Manchester reported a client who had been living with his partner and her three children in his council flat before he was imprisoned. When he went into prison he asked his now ex-partner to hand back the keys to the council and explain why he was unable to do it in person. When he was released from prison he applied to the council for housing who said that due to his mental health problems he would be classed as priority for re-housing. After 13 weeks he had heard nothing so he went to the council where he discovered that his ex-partner had not handed in the keys as requested and he now had rent arrears of nearly £700. He was told that due to his debts he was no longer a priority case and they would not help him until he had paid off his arrears.

A CAB in Lancashire reported a client who had approached a housing association for accommodation on leaving prison, but was told that he

⁶⁹ Paragraph 11.14

had £200 of outstanding rent arrears that he would have to repay before they would place him on the housing register.

- 5.42 **Where ex-offenders agree to a plan to repay any rent arrears, for example via a direct deduction from benefit where appropriate, they should not be excluded from the housing register.** Indeed, guidance for housing associations states, 'rent arrears should not be an automatic barrier to access. Where applicants are deemed to be ineligible for housing because they owe rent from a previous tenancy, associations should actively encourage applicants to enter into agreements to pay their arrears. If such agreements are kept for a reasonable period, the application should be re-activated.'⁷⁰ A more flexible and understanding approach of rent arrears held by ex-offenders, taking into account the circumstances in which they were accumulated, would help to reduce the number of people excluded from housing registers upon release.

Employability upon release

- 5.43 Research shows that employment reduces the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half, but over two thirds of prisoners arrive in prison from unemployment and three quarters leave prison with no job to go to.⁷¹
- 5.44 Securing employment for ex-offenders can be extremely difficult. Employer prejudice and unwillingness to employ someone with a criminal record, combined with long periods of unemployment whilst in prison, uncertain housing situations, a lack of skills and low self-confidence all work against an applicant.
- 5.45 A CIPD survey found that over half of employers said that nothing would persuade them to recruit from the core jobless groups.⁷² Almost one in three employers went further to say that those with a criminal record were specifically excluded from their recruitment processes.
- 5.46 However, employer discrimination is not necessarily widespread. Eighty seven per cent of employers with experience of employing ex-offenders consider them to be as productive as other workers. This would suggest that people with criminal records are in many cases being unfairly excluded from the recruitment process despite their potential. For example, the National Grid Transco Foundation has won awards for its Training Scheme for Young Offenders. The company has trained about 250 offenders so far. The re-offending rate of participants in the programme is only seven per cent, resulting in a significant saving to taxpayers in the United Kingdom, compared with the national average of over 70 per cent.

⁷⁰ *Housing Corporation Regulatory Circular*, July 2004. This circular sets out the Housing Corporation expectations of housing associations when assessing the eligibility of applicants for a housing association home, and when working to prevent or respond to breaches of tenancy.

⁷¹ *Reducing Re-offending*, SEU, 2002

⁷² The CIPD defines 'core jobless' as people with a criminal record, a history of mental or physical illness, drug or alcohol dependence, or who are homeless.

- 5.47 According to the Prison Reform Trust, over half of male prisoners and over two thirds of female prisoners have no qualifications, compared to just 15 per cent for the rest of the UK population. Drug, alcohol and mental health problems can all play their part, as can a lack of basic skills: only half of prisoners have reading skills, one fifth writing skills, and less than one third the numeracy necessary for 96 per cent of all jobs.⁷³
- 5.48 On release, ex-prisoners are eligible for early entry into New Deal, a government sponsored employment programme. Early access to this scheme depends on Jobcentre Plus staff knowing that a claimant is an ex-prisoner or on prison-based probation officers making appointments for prisoners to attend Jobcentre Plus interviews on release. However only one in thirty prisoners say that they have a job or training interview planned for their release, and only one in fourteen have training or education in place.⁷⁴ Even if a prison leaver does manage to find training, the funding opportunities are very few, making access to these courses very difficult. Few prisoners will have the financial resources to pay for the course themselves.

A CAB in Leicestershire reported that a client who had been discharged from prison four weeks earlier, had been accepted on a training course nearby, but could not afford the course fees or the travel costs out of his JSA. He contacted the bureau to ask if there was any help he could get. The Jobcentre had refused to fund his training, and none of the charities or organisations contacted would help.

“I’m not bothered about getting a job, I’m more concerned about being given a chance.”

Male inmate

- 5.49 This is disappointing, as a recent research review has found that interventions focused on employment can make a significant difference to the employment rates of offenders.⁷⁵ Work in prisons, vocational training and community employment programmes can all have a positive impact on employment. Citizens Advice therefore welcomes recent initiatives to enhance access to skills training, for example the establishment of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) by the Learning and Skills Council. However offenders continue to face numerous barriers to accessing mainstream employment, and these barriers may persist long after sentences have been served and convictions spent.
- 5.50 A particular problem ex-offenders have when applying for jobs is that they may have to declare any unspent convictions. Legislation requiring the declaration of unspent convictions has not been updated for 30 years, and is based on the length of the original sentence rather than nature of the offence or the time served. The impact of sentencing policy changes in that time has been to increase the number of people who are not only jailed but face

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ *Reducing Re-offending*, SEU, 2002

⁷⁵ *Rapid Evidence Assessment of Interventions that Promote Employment for Offenders*, Hurry et al, Institute of Education report, 2005

discrimination and barriers to employment afterwards. Critically sentences over two and a half years will never become spent. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 states that after this 'rehabilitation' period, a person cannot be legally obliged to disclose a conviction when applying for a job, with some exceptions such as positions working with those under 18 years of age and many medical professions.

- 5.51 Unspent convictions must be disclosed upon request, and can lead to automatic and outright rejection for a position. Many ex-prisoners state that their criminal conviction has been a major barrier in their attempt to find employment on release.

A CAB in Cumbria saw a client who had spent four years in prison. He found it very difficult to find employment. He told the CAB that although he had applied for a large number of varied jobs, as soon as he disclosed his prison sentence employers did not want to employ him. The bureau was able to help the client to enter the New Deal scheme.

A CAB in Essex reported a client who found it extremely difficult to get work as a result of his criminal record. He had been sleeping on a friend's floor but had been asked to leave, and was about to become homeless. Without employment, he could not afford accommodation, and his lack of a stable address would make finding employment even harder than it already was.

- 5.52 Whilst we acknowledge that in certain circumstances and for certain offences it is vital that an ex-offender is required to disclose their conviction, in some instances, our evidence shows that the current legislation can be a barrier in enabling some ex-offenders to find work. In 2001 the Home Office first started the process of reviewing this legislation and acknowledged that changes to the law governing criminal disclosures were needed. The review proposed that custodial sentences of more than two and a half years be included in the Act, that rehabilitation periods should be replaced by much shorter disclosure periods, and that employers should be encouraged to sign up to a voluntary code of practice regarding disclosure requirements.⁷⁶ However, the recommendations of the review have yet to be fully implemented.

- 5.53 Whilst we understand that any new legislation will need to address the complex issues of risk and safeguarding vulnerable individuals raised in light of the Bichard inquiry,⁷⁷ we are disappointed that progress towards updating the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) has been so slow. At present, these provisions appear to add yet another layer of disadvantage and discrimination to an ex-offender's effective rehabilitation. **Citizens Advice recommends that the Home Office should bring forward legislation to reform the ROA without further delay.**

⁷⁶ *Breaking the Circle: A report of the review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act*, Home Office, 2002

⁷⁷ *The Bichard Inquiry Report*, Sir Michael Bichard, 2004

- 5.54 We would also urge that the Home Office keep the law applying to offender rehabilitation under continuous review with a view to reducing unfair labour market discrimination against ex-offenders, and should work with DWP and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in taking forward the ideas outlined in a recent interdepartmental green paper on reducing re-offending through skills and employment.⁷⁸ The review of the ROA recommended that a voluntary code for employers would be a good way forward, though little further work has been undertaken on this; however potentially a code of practice could draw out best practice on handling disclosure issues, assessing risk and providing helpful guidance to employers considering recruiting offenders. **Citizens Advice would endorse proposals for the development of a code of practice with respect to the employment of ex-offenders.**

Access to banking

- 5.55 Whilst the building blocks of successful rehabilitation largely rest on finding a sustainable home and employment, there are other factors which can hinder integration, such as problems accessing bank accounts.
- 5.56 Since benefits are now paid directly into bank accounts and almost all employers insist on paying wages into bank accounts, possession of a bank account is essential to counter financial exclusion and help released prisoners assimilate into the community. However, the increasingly stringent money laundering regulations has meant that the identification required to open a bank account places those who have served a custodial sentence at a disadvantage.⁷⁹ Bureaux see clients who, having cleared the first hurdle of getting a job or claiming benefits, find themselves unable to open a bank account into which they can receive their wages or benefits.

A Sussex CAB saw a young man who had just been released from prison. He wanted to open a basic bank account but did not have a passport or a driving licence. The client had photo ID that was issued at the prison but the banks would not accept this.

A CAB in Derbyshire reported that a man who had recently been released from prison found it difficult to open a bank account for benefit payment. Before going into prison he had rented a room. Whilst he was in prison his ex-landlord cleared out his room, and threw away some of his belongings, including documents which would have been useful to prove his identity and address to open a bank account.

- 5.57 Several initiatives have recently been developed, including a pilot by The Cooperative Bank to work with offenders to open bank accounts.⁸⁰ Guidance produced by the Joint Money Laundering Steering Group (JMLSG)⁸¹ now

⁷⁸ *Reducing re-offending through skills and employment*, DfES, December 2006

⁷⁹ *Banking benefits – CAB evidence on payment of benefits into bank accounts*, Citizens Advice, 2006

⁸⁰ *Prison no bar to an account say Cooperative Bank*, press release, 17 May 2006

⁸¹ The JMLSG is made up of the leading UK trade associations in the financial services industry. Its aim is to promulgate good practice in countering money laundering and to give practical assistance in interpreting the UK Money Laundering Regulations.

includes an expanded list of documents which banks can accept as proof of identity for people to open a basic bank account. In theory, this allows banks to be more flexible about ID for people who may not possess a passport or a driving licence. For those on probation, the JMLSG guidance states that where standard documentation is not available, 'a letter from the customer's probation officer, or a hostel manager, would normally be sufficient'. For prisoners, the guidance states that 'a letter from the governor of the prison' will be sufficient.⁸²

- 5.58 Citizens Advice welcomes the innovative work that some banks and prisons have undertaken in this area. Such examples of best practice should be widely disseminated amongst the Prison and Probation Services. **Citizens Advice recommends that banks must reflect the JMLSG's guidance in their daily practices to make it easier for those recently released from prison to open a bank account.**
- 5.59 **We also recommend that, as part of the pre-release process, prisons must ensure that all prisoners have a bank account at the point of release.** Responsibility for this should be assigned to probation officers or the resettlement team. This should include procuring a letter from the Prison Governor or probation officer which can be used as proof of identity.

Conclusion

- 5.60 This chapter has explored the issues that ex-offenders face on release and when trying to settle back into the community. The typical barriers that ex-offenders face are difficulties with accommodation, receiving benefits and entering the labour market. These issues need to be comprehensively addressed in the pre-release process and in sentence planning.
- 5.61 The concluding chapter will bring together the main themes of the report, highlighting the main factors which can trigger re-offending behaviour and offer solutions, based on a framework of advice interventions.

⁸² JMLSG sector guidance, January 2006, page 12, available at: http://www.jmlsg.org.uk/content/1/c4/68/87/Final_Part_II_030306.pdf

6 Conclusions – the need for advice

6.1 The key aims of this report have been to highlight where service gaps exist and policies are either failing or non-existent. Through the examination of these issues, we have demonstrated where improvements need to be made in order to reduce re-offending through effective rehabilitation and access to practical advice, thereby protecting the public and reducing the burden on the public purse. Our evidence clearly demonstrates that there are numerous barriers to effective rehabilitation, and that advice interventions, especially in custody, can make a difference.

6.2 Advice, with appropriate specialist support where necessary, helps offenders to take responsibility for their own issues. Individual information and/or advice sessions for prisoners is usually the most effective service to offer prisoners, as it is open to all prisoners, and at all stages of the prisoner's period in custody whilst induction, prisoner education and pre-release courses can be selective. Here are a few examples of how the CAB prison advice service clients felt about the help they received:

“The CAB is the best service here; it’s impartial and supports lots of people. I’m so glad the CAB exists.”

Female inmate

“I wouldn’t have been able to sort out my problems without the bureau. I feel more confident about release because now I know there is help outside.”

Male inmate

“The CAB was going to close about six months ago and the impact on the jail would have been enormous.”

Male inmate

“My adviser has done letters to both non-priority and priority creditors and offers have been made to priority creditors and moratoriums have been made to all non-priority. It’s not just been action though; I have had some really good advice about bailiffs and bankruptcy. We speak every couple of days; it’s been really efficient and just when I get a bit worried, the phone rings.”

Male ex-offender on probation

6.3 Yet this level of support is in perilously short supply. For example there are only 43 prisons with a CAB advice service out of a prison estate of 139 establishments in England and Wales. One of the key findings of the SEU report was that there is a real need for good quality advice in every prison.

6.4 Citizens Advice would go further and argue that this should be confidential, independent quality assured advice which covers the whole range of issues faced by prisoners relating to legal, financial, housing and personal issues. For example, Jobcentre Plus surgeries do not advise on housing, debt or

health related benefits, such as disability living allowance or attendance allowance and do not assist people under the age of 18 or over 60, or look at the whole situation of the offender and their family. In addition, as much of the benefits system is discretionary, (for example, community care grants and the social fund), there is a need for advocacy and negotiation on clients' behalf, such as reviews and appeals, which cannot be provided by DWP staff. Voluntary sector providers also bring skills and independence into advice provision, which may not be available from statutory agencies.

- 6.5 As the SEU's report concluded: 'Advice on benefits in prison is inconsistent; rarely provided by Jobcentre Plus'. Whilst in relation to housing advice the SEU report found that, 'Quantity and quality of housing advice provision differs greatly from prison to prison. Housing advice work can be highly technical and time consuming (legislation, guidance, procedure) - in reality, a limited number of people are able to perform this role within a prison.⁸³ And whilst it is a widely accepted principle of justice that prisoners are entitled to legal assistance, even this can be hard to access. Access to advice needs to be evenly distributed and consistently delivered throughout the criminal justice system.
- 6.6 Citizens Advice considers that the provision of advice to prisoners should be mandatory. Every prisoner should be entitled to get advice as a way of reducing the risk of re-offending. Deprivation of liberty should never exclude offenders from accessing independent advice. **Citizens Advice therefore calls for NOMS to produce a national strategy for the delivery of advice services in prisons.**

Advice in custody

- 6.7 Advice for prisoners fits the wider strategic objectives for NOMS of delivering 'end-to-end offender management' through the commissioning of services across custodial and community settings. A key element of this strategy is that it should be mandatory by way of Home Office PSOs for the Prison Service and NOMS to provide facilities for advice providers, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, to be able to operate services within prisons as well as within NOMS's post-release initiatives and probation support. Delivery inside institutions currently occurs at the discretion of prison governors, and our evidence suggests that whilst there are excellent examples of good practice, they are still patchy. Given that the key window for re-offending is in the immediate aftermath of release, it is essential that there is access to advice and support services within prison. **Citizens Advice recommends that the Home Office introduces a new PSO on advice services in prisons making it mandatory to provide advice services in prisons and providing guidance on the role and function of different types of provider.**

⁸³ *Reducing Re-offending*, SEU, 2002

- 6.8 The role and function of different types of advice provider needs to be clearly understood by the Prison Service, especially in relation to service impartiality and confidentiality. Confidentiality is a key principle of the CAB service's independent advice provision and is especially important in the context of assisting prisoners with their problems. The CAB service will not disclose any information learnt when dealing with a client without the express permission of that client. If clients feel they can talk freely without fear of what they say being revealed to other agencies within the criminal justice system without their consent, then they are more likely to explain their problems fully to the adviser. **Citizens Advice recommends that the relevant PSO should include protocols on confidentiality.**
- 6.9 For a PSO on advice services to be effective, it needs to go hand in hand with adequate and sustainable funding for advice services. Citizens Advice believes that each and every prison establishment should deliver through an independent quality assured advice service provider support and advice for offenders to meet their needs on a range of issues. We believe that this is critical and must be a key strand of strategy both of NOMS, the Prison Service and the Probation Service in providing end-to-end offender management. **Regional Offender Managers (ROMS) should have responsibility for taking this forward, working in partnership with local providers to deliver regional plans for offender services.**

Support for prisoners going in and pre-release

- 6.10 Our evidence demonstrates that effective support for offenders on entry into custody and prior to release is crucial in ensuring access to services and helping offenders resettle into the community. Following the SEU report which recommended numerous ways in which the custodial process could be improved through integration with appropriate support and services, the Home Office and NOMS have taken some of these forward. However our evidence shows that these initiatives need to be more robust if they are to have a significant impact on supporting offenders. For example, prisons are now required to establish accommodation for offenders on release. However, there is no guidance as to whether accommodation is long or short-term. Without this guidance, prisons could meet the target by only finding one night's accommodation for recently released prisoners.
- 6.11 Citizens Advice understands that on induction into the prison system, an offender should be evaluated for health and other welfare needs by means of the OASys assessment process. However, we are concerned that this process is not sufficiently robust or joined up between reception procedures, induction procedures and post-induction assessments. **We believe that the early stages of custody is the most opportune moment to include an evaluation of prisoners' housing, income, skills and financial situation so that any outstanding issues on entry are immediately addressed. We recommend that the resultant action plans from these assessments include the provision of independent, quality assured advice where required to enable them to address all the problems that are identified.**

- 6.12 The first few weeks after being released from prison may be critical for an offender; however the system is stacked against them. On leaving prison many ex-offenders find it difficult to sort out practical problems such as benefits, housing and employment. Services can be difficult to access due to their locations, and take far too long to activate. Too often individuals may be left without means of support or stable accommodation whilst government agencies process their applications. As a result of the obstacles they face, many offenders may feel that they have little option but to return to crime.
- 6.13 Our report shows that resolving these problems from within prison is often hugely difficult. For example prisoners have restricted access to telephones, may need advice and assistance to successfully complete the necessary procedures and may be lacking essential identity documents. Advice and support to help them get their affairs in order may help offenders to steer clear of criminal behaviour. **Citizens Advice considers that a comprehensive pre-release strategy needs to be implemented. Building on the NOMS pathways, the strategy must encompass two critical areas: access to welfare benefits and sustainable accommodation. The strategy must be reinforced by detailed guidance and funding for advice services.** The aim of this strategy should be to ensure that the needs of the offender are critically assessed and addressed prior to release.

A joined up approach to funding and delivery

- 6.14 As set out in the NOMS National Commissioning Plan, joint commissioning, co-commissioning and partnership working between prison and Probation Services should become normal practice. This should be made a particular priority for the procurement and delivery of advice services. Fragmented delivery of pre-release support and rehabilitative programmes to offenders, with separate and disconnected services across custodial and community settings, is a missed opportunity for reducing re-offending. Programmes are variable and patterns of service provision are based too often on historic relationships rather than offender need, with limited involvement of the voluntary sector in strategic planning. Offender support services need to be coherent across custody and the community with more programmes delivered by provider consortia with the public and voluntary sectors working together.
- 6.15 Citizens Advice has significant experience of this problem. Despite the increased focus within NOMS on addressing the practical needs of offenders in order to aid their rehabilitation, the total numbers of CAB outreach services in prison and probation settings has decreased from 2001. Projects which have grown up and developed in an ad hoc way (see Appendix 1), are relatively short-lived, not because of the quality of the service, but because funding runs out and no replacement funding can be found. Some of these are run on a shoestring. An example of effective partnership working is the Citizens Advice ROTA project where the CAB service and the Prison and Probation Services are collaborating with the Legal Services Commission to provide advice to both prisoners and their families, with funding from HM Treasury. However, this funding will run out in April 2007. Fortunately a new funding stream has been secured for two years from April 2007, thanks to the

Northern Rock Foundation. What this demonstrates is the vulnerability of projects that rely on short-term funding.

- 6.16 As Appendix 1 shows, advice services in custodial settings may have multiple funders to maintain the most basic service level, so the stability and sustainability of services can be disproportionately affected by the structural decisions and policy settings of any one particular funder. For example, the Legal Services Commission is a significant contributor to advice services in prisons, but there is now considerable uncertainty about the future of this funding stream and many prison advice projects due to the introduction in April 2007 of the procurement changes recommended in Lord Carter's legal aid review.⁸⁴ **It is therefore vital that NOMS enables such projects to continue and enters into a Memorandum of Understanding between funders to avoid such situations in future. They must ensure that funding sources for different projects are mainstreamed.**
- 6.17 There is a clear business case for investing in capacity building of offender support services in the advice sector on a long-term strategic basis. We estimate it would cost £18.4 million per year to provide a CAB advice service in every prison.⁸⁵ In comparison the Government intends to spend £1.5 billion to provide 8,000 additional prison places by 2012, and a further £0.35 billion on annual running costs.⁸⁶ On average the costs of a CAB prison advice service serving the whole UK prison population may amount to as little as £319 per prisoner per year, compared to the costs of £35,000 per year keeping them in jail if they return. Capacity building in the voluntary sector should therefore be at the heart of NOMS's commissioning agenda.
- 6.18 Despite widespread consensus behind the 'end-to-end' approach to offender management, NOMS has been criticised by politicians of all parties over the past two years for lack transparency and direction, and confusion over budgets and accountabilities. Ultimately, more resources will be needed for NOMS to deliver coherent services appropriate to offenders' needs on an end-to-end basis. **Citizens Advice believes that this will require a ring-fenced NOMS budget for offender support services to achieve a more strategic approach to service procurement and delivery.**
- 6.19 The real test for the achievements of NOMS however should be outcomes-based. What in practical terms is NOMS delivering on the ground – in custody and communities on a day-to-day basis? **In order to meet its target of reducing re-offending by 10 per cent NOMS should report annually at the national level to Parliament on initiatives taken to improve offenders' access to services.**

The road to rehabilitation

- 6.20 Our report has found examples of good practice, and evidence of the positive effect of advice on offenders' lives. However, we also found that practices,

⁸⁴ *Legal Aid, A market based approach to reform*, Department of Constitutional Affairs, 2006

⁸⁵ See Appendix 1 for details as to how this figure has been calculated

⁸⁶ *Hansard*, 18 October 2006, Column 1290W

particularly with respect to prison procedures and the availability of support services, varied widely between different prisons and within parts of the Prison and Probation Services, often to the point of failure. As our evidence suggests, offenders face practical challenges in resettling in the community in meeting their basic needs, and may also experience barriers to accessing mainstream employment, goods and services. These barriers can persist long after sentences have been served and convictions spent, but they may increase the risk of re-offending.

- 6.21 Effective pre-release support can offer pathways to rehabilitation; however changes in policies in practices are also needed, from uprating discharge grants to earlier and speedier processing of benefits and bank accounts, and improved guidance to local authorities on re-housing ex-offenders. Unless joined up action is taken at all levels, offenders will remain trapped in multiple levels of social exclusion. As the SEU report concluded too often, ‘the failure of mainstream agencies to deal with these aspects of social exclusion means that the Prison Service and Probation Service are in many cases being asked to put right a lifetime of service failure.’
- 6.22 CAB evidence in this report has provided an important insight into some, though by no means all, of the key issues facing offenders and the challenges that these present to service providers and policy-makers. We hope that the recommendations in this report will be taken forward in a context of wider initiatives to reduce crime, tackle the causes and consequences of offending behaviours, close the revolving door between custody and the community, design strategies for rehabilitation and getting people out of criminal activity, and developing alternatives to custody.

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Appendix 1 – A suggested national advice model for NOMS

Our report has welcomed and endorsed the NOMS emphasis on achieving consistent joined up services on a regional basis. However it is vital for this approach to be combined with local and national considerations. Some voluntary and community sector organisations operate nationally and locally, as well as regionally. Greater focus should be given to both to the national and local frameworks for the delivery of services. The recommendations set out in Chapter 6 point towards the need for some relationships, especially with the voluntary sector, to be better managed through National Strategic Partnerships with NOMS providing a framework for the management of local commissioning processes and delivery partnerships.

Such partnerships could build on established infrastructure, with the detail of the delivery determined at regional and local level according to local circumstances, but within the framework and values set by national networks. In this way projects would be both consistent and responsive locally and the framework would save projects a substantial amount of negotiating time, by building on the agreed national models. A funder's framework for costing capacity and outcomes already exists in guidance on the Government's voluntary sector compact. As the table below demonstrates, the funding and service levels of CAB prison projects and offender services varies enormously according to locality and community, relationships between funders, and locally agreed liaison and referral arrangements with prison and Probation Services.

Name of CAB prison advice service	About the service provided
Aylesbury CAB	Receives £600 from the Home Office for a volunteer to go every three weeks. The advice service has been running for about 20 years.
Bedford CAB	Does not receive any specific funding for prison advice service. A volunteer provides an advice service once a fortnight. The service has been running for about 10 years.
Bromsgrove CAB	Receives £5,000 from the Hewell Prison Association Trust and may receive funding from DTI Financial Inclusion Fund. A volunteer and a paid worker provide an advice service for six hours per week.
Castle Morpeth CAB	£58,000 from HM Treasury as part of the ROTA project for a full-time advice worker. The project has been running for nearly three years. This funding is due to end shortly, but continuation funding from the Northern Rock Foundation has been obtained.
Chorley and South Ribble CAB	£27,410 from the Legal Services Commission for a paid part-time worker. This project has been running for three months.
Citizens Advice Offender Support Services	Offender Support Services (OSS) has run a telephone-based casework support service for the Kent Probation Area for over ten years. Beginning with one member of casework staff, the project currently employs six staff including a full-time project manager. The service is provided to clients on community punishment orders and

Name of CAB prison advice service	About the service provided
	<p>specialises in welfare benefits and debt casework although advice is given in other areas at generalist level. Being a telephone based project OSS provides a service to all nine Kent Probation offices. OSS has also agreed to pilot a face-to-face surgery in Maidstone Probation Office from April 2007. The current funding for this service is approximately £160,000 per annum.</p> <p>In 2006 OSS also obtained funding from the Legal Services Commission under the two year DTI Financial Inclusion Fund initiative to provide services to serving prisoners and clients on probation in Kent, Surrey, Sussex and the Isle of Wight. OSS provides face-to-face welfare benefit and debt advice and casework services in the following places: in Kent at HMP Blantyre House, HMP Cookham Wood, HMP East Sutton Park, HMP Maidstone, HMP Rochester and to eligible probation clients across Kent; in Sussex at HMP Lewes, HMP Ford and to eligible probation clients in Brighton (Sussex); in Surrey at HMP High Down; on the Isle of Wight at HMP Camp Hill and to eligible probation clients on the Island. The current funding for this service is approximately £215,000 per annum and pays for three and a half posts.</p> <p>OSS also has about £40,000 per annum in other income.</p>
Dereham, Holt and Watton CAB	Core funding used for prison advice service, which has been running for 16 years. One volunteer and one paid worker provide an advice service on one evening per month and two mornings per month.
Felixstowe CAB	Received £600 from the Big Lottery Fund for the prison advice service, which has been running for about 16 years. One volunteer and one paid worker provide an advice service for five hours each month.
Gloucester and District CAB	Receives £12,000 from the prison to provide an advice service. One paid worker provides an advice service for two days per week. The advice service has been running for four years.
Gosport CAB	Does not receive any funding for its prison advice service which has been running for about seven years. One volunteer provides an advice service for half a day each fortnight.
Guildford CAB	Legal Services Commission funding used to provide an advice session for one day every fortnight. The advice session has been running for four and a half years.
Huntingdonshire CAB	Does not receive funding for its prison advice service, other than reimbursement of the travel expenses of the two volunteers who provide the service once a month.

Name of CAB prison advice service	About the service provided
	Casework takes a further two days per month.
Kennet CAB	Receives £12,400 from the prison which pays for two volunteers and one paid worker for three distinct projects. The service has been running for about four years.
Leeds CAB	Receives £32,000 per year from the Big Lottery Fund for one adviser and one admin worker to provide a service for 24 hours per week. The advice service has been running for nearly four years.
Littlehampton CAB	Receives £2,736 per year from the prison to provide an advice service once per week using a volunteer and a paid worker. The service includes specialist debt advice.
Luton CAB	Receives £24,347 per year for two paid workers from the Probation Service. The service has been running for 11 years.
Middlesbrough CAB	Receives £40,000 from the Probation Service for one full time advice worker and an administration worker for eight hours per week.
Milton Keynes CAB	Receives £42,000 from the Prison Service. Three workers provide a service for 50 hours per week. The service has been running for about three years.
North Dorset CAB	Receives £14,454 from the Legal Services Commission for one part-time advice worker and one admin worker for eight hours per week. The service has been running for seven months.
North Liverpool CAB	Receives £250,000 from five funders: the European Social Fund, the prison, United Utilities Charitable Trust, NOMS and the Legal Services Commission. Ten advisers are employed on the prison project: six full-time and four part-time.
Rugby CAB	Receives £20,000 per year from the prison. Two advisers provide a service, one for a half day each week, the other for a day every fortnight.
Runnymede CAB	Does not receive any funding for its prison outreach which has been running for two and a half years. Two volunteers provide a service for two to three hours per week. The service is also provided by Spelthorne CAB.
Solihull CAB	Receives £14,700 from the Probation Service. Two advisers provide the service, which has been running for about 10 years.
Stockton & District CAB	Receives £74,709 from HM Treasury as part of the ROTA project. This pays for one full-time and two part-time advice workers. The funding from the Commission is due to run out in April 2007, but continuation funding has been obtained from Northern Rock Foundation.
Sutton CAB	Receives funding from the local prison for a part-time advice worker. The advice service has been running for four years.

Name of CAB prison advice service	About the service provided
Teesdale CAB	Receives £38,288 per year from HM Treasury for a full-time advice worker as part of the ROTA project. The service has been running for two and a half years.
Teignbridge CAB	The prison advice service that they provide is self-funding. The service has been running for six years and three volunteers each visit the prison once a month.
Telford and the Wrekin CAB	Receive £33,000 per year from the Probation Service for one full-time adviser and one part-time administration worker. The service has been running for about twelve years.
Walsall CAB	Receives £18,878 from the Probation Service for three part-time advice workers.
Wandsworth CAB	Receives £57,000 per year from the Legal Services Commission for one full time advice worker. The prison advice service has been running for less than a year.
Warwick District CAB	Receives £37,000 per year from the Probation Service for one full time and one part-time advice worker. The service has been running for 13 years.
West Devon CAB	The service is self-funding. Two volunteer advisers provide a fortnightly service which has been running for three years.
Winchester CAB	The prison pays the CAB £10 per visit. Four volunteer advisers provide the service. Each adviser spends two hours per week at the prison.
Wolverhampton CAB	Has just started to receive £25,000 from the DTI Financial Inclusion Fund. Visits started in January 2007 and the funding, which increases to £80,000 in 2007/08 will allow the CAB to employ four to five part-time advisers.
Wormwood Scrubs CAB	This is the first and oldest CAB service operating in prison with the support of the Prison Service. The CAB operates on a full-time basis in the prison with two caseworkers and an admin worker. Initially the project was funded by the City Parochial Foundation, but eventually received support from the Prison Service.

How much additional funding would be needed to deliver a national model?

Whilst there are considerable benefits to retaining local flexibilities, the delivery of services across NOMS, the prison estate and Probation Trusts⁸⁷ will require a national funding framework and model to achieve consistency in service levels.

Our experience suggests that a funded caseworker with appropriate support staff will achieve the best results. These posts would be best organised in units of two advisers plus a full time administrative worker.

⁸⁷ The Offender Management Bill proposes to replace Probation Boards with Probation Trusts.

On current indicative figures the cost of a unit of two caseworkers and an admin worker per prison would come to a total of £123,000 per year. Each caseworker could deal with about 200 cases per year. On the basis that there are 141 prisons in England and Wales, we estimate that this will cost £17,324,550 per year. We would also need to provide Citizens Advice regional and central units to support the prison advice workers, at an additional cost of approximately £690,000 per year. The total cost would be £18,014,550 per year. This level of funding would enable the CAB service to help about 56,400 prisoners – an average of £319 per client.

This advice provision could link into the OASys assessments of offenders, which enables systematic assessments of their needs and is moving towards enabling evaluations of how effective various interventions prove to be.

With further service development, the CAB CASE electronic case recording system could enable prison advice services to link together, and the transfer of client information between them. This could help address the problems caused by the 'churn' in the prison system, – which often leads to cases being started but being unable to be concluded because the prisoner has been relocated.

What else can be done to deliver better advice and information?

Citizens Advice Bureaux have been continually finding innovative ways of providing services to those in custody. For example at present we are experimenting with the use of kiosks. One such kiosk has been placed in a Visitors' Centre in HMP Woodhall, (via Milton Keynes CAB), and is proving a useful way of enabling visitors to access information. An initial evaluation of the six sites where kiosks have been placed found that 19 per cent of those using the kiosks did not then need to go on to obtain further help, and that when this was combined with pro-active help from a member of staff working on reception, this figure rose to 50 per cent. Another major project has been the option of training prisoners in peer advice services and mentoring schemes or even as advisers; however this is a highly controversial approach and must be subject to a high level of risk assessment.

All options should be open for consideration as part of the contestability process. We would urge NOMS to explore an open partnership approach drawing on best practice from around the advice and voluntary sector and recognising the importance of full cost recovery.

Appendix 2 – Discussion guide: semi-structured interviews with prisoners

Prisoners with access to CAB advice

How old are you?

Is this your first custodial sentence/time on remand/time on probation?

How long is your sentence?

Have you been moved around since the start of your sentence?

Advice

- When did you first seek advice?
- Apart from Citizens Advice have you used other advice services?
- Can you tell me how you found the advice process?
- What did you seek advice about?
- What was your experience of these issues before coming into prison? Had you sought advice about these problems before coming to prison?
- What has been your experience with these issues since you have been in prison?

Probe particularly on the following:

- Benefits – have you previously claimed benefits; which ones; were you claiming prior to the start of your sentence?
- Debt – do you have debt problems? Is this is problem that has started since your incarceration? Have you sought money advice before?
- Housing – before the start of your sentence, what was your accommodation situation? Did you have any problems with your accommodation before your arrival? What is the situation now?
- Employment – where you employed before your incarceration?
- Family and friends – is the prison easily accessible for your family and friends to visit?

Evaluating advice

- What was the outcome of you seeking advice?
- Do you think seeking advice helped or hindered your situation?
- Are there still things that you would like to talk about?

Structured interviews in non-advice settings

- How old are you?
- Is this your first custodial sentence/time on remand/time on probation?
- How long is your sentence?
- Have you been moved around since the start of your sentence?

Availability of advice

- Is there anything worrying you at the moment?

Probe particularly on the following

- Benefits – have you previously claimed benefits; which ones; were you claiming prior to the start of your sentence?
- Debt – do you have debt problems? Is this is problem that has started since your incarceration? Have you sought money advice before?
- Housing – before the start of your sentence, what was your accommodation situation? Did you have any problems with your accommodation before your arrival? What is the situation now?
- Employment – where you employed before your incarceration?
- Family and friends – is the prison easily accessible for your family and friends to visit?

Advice

- Would you seek advice on these problems, have you ever tried to seek advice?
- Do you think advice would help you?
- If you cannot get advice what do you think will happen?
- What kind of advice would you like?
- Can they think of examples when, had they had advice it would have helped them or prevented something happening?
- Thinking towards leaving prison, what are the main issues that you are worried about?
- Is there anything that you would like to raise that we haven't discussed so far?

Appendix 3 – Discussion guide: structured interviews – probation

- Ask how old the interviewee is
- Ask how long they have been and will be on probation for
- Is this their first experience of being on probation?
- Ask whether they are serving probation as part of a community sentence
- Ask when they were released and how long their sentence or remand was if they have served a sentence.

Advice

Ask how they found out about Citizens Advice Offender Support Services – explore information pathways and ease of access, for example, how long to wait for an appointment.

Ask why they sought advice:

- Benefits – have you previously claimed benefits; which ones; were you claiming prior to the start of your sentence? What is your situation now you are on probation?
- Debt – do you have debt problems? Is this is problem that has started since your incarceration? Have you sought money advice before?
- Housing – before the start of your sentence, what was your accommodation situation? Did you have any problems with your accommodation before your arrival? What is the situation now?
- Employment - were you employed before your incarceration? What is your employment situation now?
- Family and friends – is the prison easily accessible for your family and friends to visit?
- Ask a general question about resettling in the community/rehabilitation
- Were you able to seek advice in prison? Did you?
- If you have been on probation before how do your experiences compare post-release?

Evaluating advice

- What was the outcome of you seeking advice?
- Do you think seeking advice helped or hindered your situation?
- Are there still things that you would like to talk about?

Appendix 4 – List of Citizens Advice Bureaux that submitted evidence between January 2005 and August 2006

EAST REGION

Bedford & District
 Bishops Stortford
 Braintree, Halstead & Witham (Braintree)
 Brandon & Mildenhall
 Cambridge
 Chelmsford
 Citizens Advice Broxtowe (Eastwood)
 Dacorum & District
 Dereham Holt & Watton
 Dunstable
 Elstree (Hertsmere)
 Huntingdon
 Ipswich & District
 Leighton-Linslade
 Luton
 Maldon & District
 North Walsham & District
 Norwich & District
 Peterborough
 Rochford & Rayleigh
 Southend-on-Sea
 Sudbury
 Three Rivers (Abbots Langley)
 Uttlesford
 Watford

LONDON REGION

Bromley
 Feltham
 Greenwich
 Havering
 Holborn
 Lewisham
 Royal Courts of Justice
 Southwark
 Westminster
 Wormwood Scrubs

MIDLANDS REGION

Bromsgrove
 Cannock
 Coventry
 Daventry
 Derby
 Dudley
 Lichfield
 Malvern Hills District
 Mansfield
 Market Harborough
 Nene Valley
 Newark
 Northampton
 North West
 Leicestershire
 Rugby
 Rugeley
 Solihull
 South East Birmingham
 Stoke-on-Trent
 Stourbridge
 Tamworth
 Warwick District
 West Lindsey

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ballymena
 Coleraine
 Rathcoole

NORTH REGION

Blyth Valley
 Boothferry
 Calderdale
 Castle Morpeth
 Chapelton
 Hambleton
 Harrogate
 H.M.P. Holme House
 R.O.T.A. Project
 Hull City Centre
 Leeds
 Middlesbrough
 North East Doncaster
 North Tyneside

North Tyneside (North Shields)
 Selby District
 Sheffield Mental Health
 Stockton & District
 Advice & Information Service
 Teesdale
 York
 Washington Tyne & Wear

NORTH WEST REGION

Altrincham
 Bolton
 Bury District
 Carlisle
 Chester
 Combined Hospitals
 Crosby & Formby
 Morecambe & Heysham
 Netherley
 Preston & District
 Salford (Eccles)
 South Lakeland (Kendal)
 Tameside
 Trafford
 West Lancashire
 Wigan
 Winford (Vale Royal)
 Wirral

SOUTH EAST REGION

Aldershot
 Ashford
 Banbury
 Bicester
 Bracknell
 Brighton & Hove
 Camberley
 Canterbury District
 Chichester & District
 Chiltern (Chesham)

Crawley
Crowborough
Didcot & District
Eastbourne
Edenbridge &
Westerham
Epsom & Ewell
Fareham
Folkestone (Shepway)
Gravesham
Guildford
Hastings & Rother
Havant & District
Haywards Heath
Leatherhead
Lewes
Littlehampton & District
Lymington
Milton Keynes
Newport Isle of Wight
Portsmouth
Reading
Runnymede
Sevenoaks
Surrey Welfare Rights
Unit
CAB in Swale
(Faversham)
Thame
Tonbridge
Tunbridge Wells &
District
Walton Weybridge &
Hersham
Waterside
Wealden (Hailsham)
Wealden (Uckfield)
West Berkshire
Winchester
Wokingham
Worthing
Woking

SOUTH WEST REGION

Bath
Bournemouth
Carrick (Truro)
East Dorset
Kerrier District

Mid Somerset
North Cornwall
North Devon
North Somerset
North Wiltshire
Poole
Restormel (St. Austell)
Salisbury
Sherborne
Taunton & District
West Wiltshire Wide
Weymouth & Portland

WALES

Aberystwyth
Llanelli
Merthyr Tydfil
Neath
Newport
Rhyl
Swansea