



How can we reduce tensions, conflict and violence in prison?

A Prisoner Policy Network Consultation

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About the Prison Reform Trust

The Prison Reform Trust is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective prison system. For further information about the Prison Reform Trust, see www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/

About the Prisoner Policy Network

The Prisoner Policy Network is a network of prisoners, ex-prisoners and supporting organisations. It is hosted by the Prison Reform Trust and will make sure prisoners' experiences are part of prison policy development nationally. Contact ppn@prisonreformtrust.org.uk or call 020 7251 5070 for more information.

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Glossary

SO	Supervising Officer
CM	Custodial Manager
DIRF	Discrimination Incident Reporting Forms
IEP	Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) is the scheme through which prisons reward good behaviour or penalise those that break prison rules.
IPP	Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) is a form of indeterminate sentence no longer in use whereby the prisoner has a minimum term they have to serve in prison (tariff), but to be released they have to satisfy the Parole Board that they no longer pose a risk of harm to the public.
HDC	Home Detention Curfew (HDC) is a scheme which allows some people to be released early from custody if they have a suitable address to go to.
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
PSIs	Prison Service Instructions
PSOs	Prison Service Orders
ACCT	Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) is the care planning process for prisoners identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm
EDS	Extended Determinate Sentences (EDS) An Extended Determinate Sentence comprises of a custodial sentence and an extended period on licence.
Active Citizens	A PRT initiative similar to PPN that conducts prisoner consultations around policy issues, however Active Citizens is not a membership network and focuses solely on local policies and procedures, whereas PPN is a framework for consultation on national policy issues.

How can we reduce tensions, conflict and violence in prison?

1. Introduction

The Prisoner Policy Network (PPN) was launched in July 2018. It continues to grow in membership and energy. There is now an active membership of roughly 950 people, most of them currently serving time in prison, but also relatives and supporting organisations, who are in regular contact with the PPN team at the Prison Reform Trust (PRT). It is because of the efforts of our network members, that we have been able to draw on the personal experiences of so many people, both in their own personal contributions, but also the perspectives of many other prisoners through prisoner-led discussion groups or wing consultation exercises.

Previous consultations considered what incentives work in prison and what is needed to make the best use of time in custody. The current topic arose frequently in these consultations and has been a regular feature of media reporting on prisons over the last few years. It will not be a surprise to our readers, especially those who live, work, or have an acute interest in prisons, that the Prisoner Policy Network chose reducing tensions and preventing violence as the theme of our third consultation.

The *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile 2019* shows that over the last seven years, ‘people in prison, prisoners and staff, are less safe than they have been at any other point since records began, with more self-harm and assaults than ever before.’ The consultation focused on tensions and conflicts, because to prevent violence, we first need to understand where it comes from, beginning by listening to those at the blunt end of the crisis in prisons. In all, we received contributions from over 1000 serving prisoners, as well as former prisoners, family members and members of staff. The quotes used throughout the report represent 54 different prisons in England and Wales, from every security category, men and women, young offender institutions as well as foreign national prisons.

Safety from physical assault is an essential requirement of an effective and humane penal system. The feedback we received not only provided insights into the factors that lead to assaults, it also described the conditions, treatment and practices that are effective in preventing violence. This consultation was not simply an exercise in listing everything that is wrong with the prison system. There was a concerted effort on the part of prisoners to think positively on the subject, and to make suggestions as to how things can be improved. This consultation makes clear that, despite discontent, there are initiatives, practices and approaches that prisoners feel are effective in reducing tension, conflict and violence. We hope that this report will bring attention to what prisoners have said helped them, and that these ideas might be put into practice more widely across the prison estate.

The structure of this report presents the input from prisoners under the themes they identified as factors in prison safety. Verbatim quotations and summary notes from discussion groups are used liberally to illustrate each theme with minimal analysis or interpretation from the PPN team. Under each theme, we present the problems described by the respondents, and then

practices that they believe work effectively to address them (problems and solutions). At the end of each section is a list of things prisoners highlighted as examples of good practice in relation to reducing tension, conflict and violence.

It is important to note that the quotes used in the report are those expressed by respondents to the consultation, as are the contents under the heading of 'what prisoners said helps' at the end of each section. These are things that prisoners have brought to our attention and are not necessarily initiatives that PRT has endorsed.

The feedback clearly linked the following themes to conflict and violence:

- Prison Life
- Deprivation
- Mental distress
- Sentence planning
- In-prison relationships
- Money in prison
- Processes and rules
- Boredom and lack of purpose.

These themes overlap. The order in which we discuss them are not by priority or in sequence. Each theme interacts with the others. The evidence demonstrates that there is no single cause or explanation for violence, and no single solution.

However, the message was clear that while not easy, change is possible. Also clear was the alignment between the prisoner responses and the few responses we received from prison staff and management (NB. We did not set out specifically to speak with prison staff, but were happy to receive their contributions throughout our prison visits)

Yes we can reduce violence, tension and conflict. But only if all parties involved are prepared to listen, learn, amend, change, embrace and care.

Launch event, HMP Stafford

2. Methods

At the launch of the second report at HMP Stafford, we invited those in attendance (n=115, including 25 serving prisoners from the host prison) to 'break out' into 13 groups to consider the question: How can we reduce tension, conflict and violence in prison?

We then visited 32 prisons, conducting discussion groups, workshops and wing walks to reach as many prisoners as possible including those in education, health care and segregation.

The prisons visited by the PPN team for this consultation were:

Altcourse, Ashfield, Brinsford, Bristol, Brixton, Bronzefield, Channings Wood, Coldingley, Dartmoor, Durham, Eastwood Park, Exeter, Gartree, Guys Marsh, Hewell, Hull, Humber, Huntercombe, ISIS, Leeds, Long Lartin, Lowdham Grange, The Mount, Nottingham, Portland, Rye Hill, Send, Stafford, Stoke Heath, Swansea, Swinfen Hall, Thorncross

We reached out to our existing network members, who responded enthusiastically. We received 165 letters, essays and reports, some containing the responses of up to 100 prisoners following the organisation and facilitation of prisoner-led events. These included a number of prison councils which discussed and debated the question before providing a submission. We received in-prison newsletters and meeting minutes as evidence of positive, progressive work in prison. In total, we had responses from 60 different prisons, 54 of whom are represented in the quotes.

Obviously because of the scale of the response we received and the vastness of the data, we could not use it all. We looked at the major themes that emerged from the workshops and used them to guide conversations we had with prisoners via letter. As themes became more prominent, we used further workshops to go into more depth on particular issues. Many responses we received were worthy of inclusion but simply could not fit into what is already the largest consultation report we have done or were already covered by other quotes.

3. How can we reduce tensions, conflict and violence in prison?

3.1 Prison Life

a. The problems of prison life

“Prisons are painful places” was frequently stated during this consultation. People wanted to convey that by its nature, imprisonment was difficult, traumatic, loud, tense and violent. Many described the individuals living within prison as ‘on the edge’ and others emphasised that prison could change you as a person (for the worse).

By nature of people in prison, who have just lost family and friends, there is bound to be anger and small things can push people over the top. Noise, food, verbal abuse and boredom.

HMP Bure

A prison is, in a real sense, an expression of force or violence, which is to say that conflict and tension are inherent in the practice of imprisonment to a certain irreducible extent.

Unknown location

The shock of imprisonment and the soul-destroying prospect of years passing slowly creates such space for guilt with no respite that I can't tell you how narrow the gap between living and dying is. You can be on either side of the gap in a nano second.

HMP Long Lartin

Prisoners argued that the state of prisons contributes to the distress already felt because of incarceration. There were many references to prisoners’ basic needs going unmet. Several letters and one discussion group referred to a lack of toilet paper. One prisoner explained that J-cloths were being used in place of toilet paper, until these were removed from prisoners’ possession due to them being used for a purpose other than that for which they are intended.

We refused to bang up because there was no toilet paper; in the end the SO [supervising officer] persuaded us to bang up because he promised he would sort it, but he didn't until the next day. That says it all doesn't it?

HMP Bristol

There was substantial frustration with the perceived ineffectiveness of services.

The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing.

HMP Bronzefield

Poor handling and loss of applications, supporting paperwork etc. Loss of personal data.... Licences not being prepared on time or correctly.

HMP Leyhill

Some post stays in the staff office for several days and not delivered as soon as it should be. Some legal mail is time sensitive and not returning it could have a detrimental effect on an appeal or another matter.

HMP Stafford

Several others cited problems prisoners can have with their sleep, which results in heightened irritability. This is caused by noise and mental turmoil, but also due to cracked windows and “inadequate mattresses”. Others referred to the stress of sharing a cell, which we know to be common practice.

Prisoners having to share cells designed for one with unscreened toilets and little or no ventilation, can for obvious reasons be a source of conflict.

HMP Littlehey

Many respondents felt that there were too many people in custody, many of whom should not be in prison. Their numbers were seen as an unnecessary draw on limited resources, but there was also a sense of injustice fuelling the tensions inside.

Overcrowding, sentence inflation, IPP unlawful and arbitrary detainment, incarceration of those with mental health disorders.

HMP Leyhill

Overcrowding – there are too many people in prison when some should have received community-based sentences. The use of HDC and tagging is underused by the courts and a lack of attention to detail in court papers.

HMP Stafford

Until you do something about the mass of people crammed into these jails, you won't see much rehabilitation going on.

HMP Lowdham Grange

Those on long sentences often expressed frustration at having to live with people on much shorter sentences.

You can get banged up with someone on a two-week sentence, I'm struggling to get D Cat, I've got enough to worry about.

HMP Hewell

It doesn't make sense having them together, what works as an incentive for one does not work for the other.

HMP Altcourse

I'm a lifer, so I have to be extra careful about the way I act, if I'm sharing a cell with someone who's causing trouble, it'll cost me more than him.

HMP Stoke Heath

Prisoners said that they found things more frustrating in prison than they would on the outside. This is because of all the existing tension mentioned, but also because there was little else to focus on, “everything put under a microscope.”

Emotions are heightened, might not matter outside but in here it's a big thing, like if your canteen doesn't come.

HMP Bronzefield

A prisoner's life is small and banal. Spilt coffee can be a big issue for a prisoner, not for public.

HMP The Mount

Everything feels bigger than what it is, the smallest thing can set something off because everyone's charged up from being banged up.

HMP Hull

Another factor which contributes to the mounting tensions is a culture of disrespect (see also, in-prison relationships, below).

There is a lack of consideration and a lack of care – all that needs to change, and a start would be a change in culture.

HMP Leeds

I get off the bus and see those signs at reception which say, 'we treat prisoners with respect', I just laugh to myself because I think how long before I witness the precise opposite. Most likely within the first hour.

HMP Brixton

Multiple respondents, especially those on indeterminate sentences and lifers, felt there was little prospect of positively changing the prison system.

It feels like the prison system is stuck in the past. It'll never change.

HMP Bristol

There's no hope in jail, I've spent a long time in prison, and as far as I can see it's got worse.

HMP Hewell

b. Solutions for tensions in prison life

Despite the hostile environment, for some there was a sense of camaraderie between those living and working in prison which could be beneficial when managing tense situations.

Some suggestions for change were made that would be beneficial to all, including the staff – and many reflected some of the more basic elements to prison life.

Food portions need to be adequate.

HMP Dovegate

Maintenance of the fabric of the establishment as a basic requirement.

HMP Littlehey

Decent beds and mattresses – back, neck issues, pain, medication, poor sleep = cost, unrest, people on edge.

HMP Littlehey

Others gave suggestions based on their own experiences of prisons which were decent and well-functioning.

The initial impression will always last. The team here set their stall out early. Clean, tidy, well maintained, going into reception and seeing “Welcome to Stafford” with a friendly greeting, soft seating, no graffiti, clean and tidy, it looked professional.

HMP Stafford

Lowdham was the best prison I went to. There were so many courses, so many things to do, everything ran on time. We played a lot of sports and group activities, they took their football tournaments seriously there!

Former prisoner

There were several calls for more time in the fresh air.

Outside areas for visits where possible.

HMP Dovegate

Going outside alleviates stress, we should be out more.

HMP Bronzefield

Previous consultations raised the need for more time outdoors and outside of the cell. This time it was directly related to the reduction of tension. For example, one prisoner said that he struggled when temporarily transferred to a busy local prison.

I remember being in High Down and constantly being indoors, I didn’t realise until I came here how stressed I was there, how much it was affecting me. ... I could feel myself changing inside myself, I’m just glad to be back here. I remember when I first came back, I sat on that bench outside by the ducks and just breathed out a big sigh.

HMP Guys Marsh

There were also multiple suggestions regarding improved user involvement, prison councils, and prisoner decision making within prisons. This, they believed, would go some way to balancing the tensions prisoners feel about being locked away, may improve some of the services which are ineffective and causing frustration, and begin to rebuild lost confidence and self-respect in prisoners.

One respondent explained the impact of this at an individual level:

There is opportunity, personal input to the day and running’s of the prison which leaves people with a feeling of achievement. They do not feel like they’re just a number.

HMP Stafford

A few prisoners commented that councils are only effective if the prison is prepared to act on their recommendations for change.

As prisoners we are offered opportunities to become representatives or council members, in which we have an opportunity to ask for better facilities or reparation of existing resources. We are promised the earth by placating governors and they consistently fail to deliver.

HMP Whatton

The opportunities here to get involved are plentiful, but if we are just being used as stooges by the staff, raising hope and expectations amongst prisoners that something is going to change, then it isn't good for us.

HMP The Mount

One example of good governance that was cited by a prisoner was at HMP Oakwood:

The PLIs there [prisoner-led initiatives] were taken seriously, we all reported directly to the number one. We'd have regular meetings with all the different peer leaders, the governors would all be there including John [McLaughlin]. He'd have his governors report to him regularly, giving him updates on what progress they have made tackling issues raised at the last meeting. If they didn't have an acceptable answer, he'd basically give them a kick up arse and tell them to report back in two weeks. Seeing how serious they were taking us meant a lot, that's why it works there.

HMP Stoke Heath

Several prisoners thought user involvement should extend beyond the walls of the prison to national policy level.

Policy makers should be the experts, i.e. officers and senior officers still working on the wings, serving prisoners in a consultation before the policy, proof reading before it is issued, and 6 months after to see if a) it is having any effect, b) any issues with the implementation which need rectifying, c) can it be improved or removed d) if any improvements are made then another six month review will be required.

HMP Wakefield

Prisons hold something like 100,000 people, about the same size as an average parliamentary constituency – why not an MP for the constituency of 'prison'. This would give each prisoner the ability to write to an MP with their issues, much like a regular voter and on matters of government policy at least one MP would voice the opinion of the prisoner in parliamentary debate. Currently no MP has to care about any prisoner as they can't vote. As well as a more balanced debate on the outside, prisoners on the inside would be more engaged and feel a degree of representation.

HMP Brixton

What prisoners said helps:

HMP Rye Hill – have begun giving out IEP [Incentives and Earned Privileges] booklets to staff (see image) which makes the recording of positive and negative entries more transparent. When writing an entry, three copies are made through the tracing paper booklet, with one given to the resident who is subject to the IEP entry. This helps reduce instances where negative entries onto P-NOMIS are made without the knowledge of the resident subject to the entry. Staff are also encouraged to make positive entries where appropriate using the booklet. It also encourages greater recording of positive actions as the image below shows there are a number of ways people in prison can earn positive entries.

HMP Rye Hill
I.E.P. POCKET BOOKLET

Name: Number:

IEP challenges	Awarded
Negative entry	
Breach of compact	
Healthcare none attendance	
Negative IEP	
Proven adjudication	
Non-compliance with sentence plan/Oasys	
IEP commendations	Awarded
Positive entry	
Positive IEP	

(PLEASE TICK WHERE APPROPRIATE)
This will be entered on your P-NOMIS case notes / wing file.
This entry may count towards your I.E.P. Status being raised or lowered.

Reasons for issue:

Please keep this for your records.

Officer: Date:

Sign: Time:

HMP The Mount - have peer-led decency checks to ensure the prison is meeting basic standards. A number of prisoners set up a database using Microsoft Access, and trained up peer workers to go around the prison doing decency checks using the same indicators used in HM Inspectorate of Prisons reports. The database allows peer workers to flag up items based on how urgently they need to be addressed. Once an item reaches the 'red' status, an alert notifies the governor with a direct message.

3.2 Deprivation

a. Problems arising from deprivations

Loss of liberty is a defining feature of imprisonment, but people lose more than their freedom when they go to prison. This section discusses the deprivations people experience and the ways that those losses cause stress and increase tensions.

The loss of liberty is not only having to live within the walls: prisoners are dependent on prison staff to meet almost every aspect of normal life. For most prisoners, eating, showering, using a telephone, going to the library or gym can only be achieved when an officer unlocks the door. Delays or denials of these needs are a constant source of frustration for many. Goods for purchase cost the same as they do outside, but prison pay is not the same as the pay outside to allow for this. It can be as low as £2.50 per week when a prisoner is unemployed or unfit for work.

The responses predominantly focused on deprivations in health care; family contact; and information.

Healthcare services were described as being stretched to a point where they were becoming (or had already become) ineffective. The lack of access to health care was a source of frustration.

It takes 13 weeks to see a dentist, four weeks to see a doctor, two to three weeks to see a nurse. There are problems with daily meds, nurses argue and disrespect prisoners with mental and personal problems.

HMP Garth

I've had a flask bashed over my head, the police are involved and yet I've still not seen a GP... It's been three weeks!

HMP Exeter

Medication problems, meds prescribed in one prison don't make it over to the new prison upon transfer, or the dosage is disputed and adjusted by the prison.

HMP Bristol

Another alleged that the prison was circumventing medical decisions:

I've had the taxpayer pay for psychologists and psychiatrists who have written reports saying I need this medication, and yet the prison can take it off me without taking notice of what the professionals have said.

HMP Exeter

Loss of access to family and friends was cited as a reason for distress. The separation from loved ones may interact with other deprivations of imprisonment to increase a sense of frustration and anger. As with previous consultations, many people wrote that phone calls were too expensive and prevented important family contact. They spoke about always thinking of home and missing the people who lived there. They spoke honestly about feelings of insecurity and frustration about how life was going on without them. And they spoke about grief, of missing family. They reported that though visits could be hard for some families, they were an important part of life in prison; "family contact makes prison easier".

These women are taken from their kids and they are grieving when they are taken from their children.

HMP Bronzefield

People get frustrated when they don't know what their partners are getting up to.

HMP Lindholme

When opportunities for connection became difficult or challenged, tension mounted. Examples given included feelings of guilt after seeing family, extreme loneliness, and family visits denied to people who wanted a visit from a nephew or niece. Closed visits with children were cited as immensely stressful. For one prisoner, the anticipation of seeing his family was disrupted by prison regime. He explained that the frustration led to aggressive behaviour, which he felt was out of character:

I'm not an angry person, but I've lived under regimes in closed conditions where it breeds anger and resentment. I remember once having to kick off just to get a shower before a visit. I'd been the gym in the morning, spoke to the officer and said, 'I need a shower before my visit at 2 pm'. He palmed me off. I went to my cell, rang the bell and politely asked again. The officer came to my door and slammed the flap in my face while I was speaking. I'm now thinking, 'It's one pm, and I've got a visit in an hour. I need to get this shower right now'. That's when I started kicking off so I could get my way. I felt bad afterwards, like, 'What's gotten into me?' I'm not normally like that. But at least I was clean on my visit.

HMP Guys Marsh

Many commented on the distance and cost of travel for family members to visit people in prison.

The average distance one-way for families to visit residents here is 150 miles, and two thirds of residents don't get visitors.

HMP Rye Hill

My family travelled all the way from London, got here minutes late so got turned away.

HMP Portland

One person had family in other prisons which meant he was not able to have visits. He had requested inter-prison phone calls, but this not been facilitated.

A lot of staff don't know how to do them.

HMP Isis

A third deprivation that was often mentioned was information. People felt that being denied information they needed was unfair and unreasonable.

I don't have access to legal documents, can't access a solicitor, can't get access to the terms of my pension, and that makes me angry because I feel I'm going to lose everything in here. It's like banging your head against a wall.

HMP Guys Marsh

Access to PSI's [Prison Service Instructions] and PSO's [Prison Service Orders] is limited. [They] used to be available on the wings, now only in the library, access to which is limited.

HMP Bristol

One of the biggest 'unfairness' issues for prisoners is the lack of access to computers to do their legal work and correspondence. 'Legally' the prison only needs to provide a few books and give the prisoner some writing paper and a pen!! Now we can get some big lawyers talk about the increasing number of prisoner litigants and the need for 'equity of arms'. Is it fair that the CPS have use of computers and the prisoner not?

HMP Lowdham Grange

b. Solutions for deprivations in prison

There were several suggestions for changes offered regarding prisoner deprivation, mostly in relation to maintaining family contact. Respondents suggested that the cost of phone calls should be reduced and that prisoners be able to make and receive telephone calls from their cells.

We should be able to use the phone for 20 minutes at a time, a decent phone call can calm your emotions and 20 minutes is good.

HMP Stafford

Having the phones in our cells makes a huge difference, especially if you're locked behind the door for most of the day.

HMP Lowdham Grange

The prison must support us with our family ties. Family is very important to me. One of the ways they could do this is reducing the price of our phone calls, making sure there are phones in our cells and those with family overseas are also supported by having one member of the family allowed to call into our phones.

HMP Highpoint

There were multiple calls for conjugal visits to reduce stress and to improve family ties, including from some staff.

Conjugal visits are the answer. To everything. Simple.

HMP Dovegate

Conjugal visits, family visits, overnight visits, all would help reduce levels of violence.

Prison officer

Other suggestions focused on improving communication to give prisoners greater access to information and education.

If you've got young people behind the door, at least give them the discovery channel or something to watch, pump them full of education. You shouldn't be left to watch Jeremy Kyle at two in the afternoon.

HMP Exeter

One staff respondent suggested: "More interesting courses, not just the basics." (HMP Isis – staff response)

The library was an important space for filling the knowledge void. However, many reported problems with access to, or limited space in the library. But HMP Dartmoor was cited as an establishment with library staff who want to make a difference.

One prisoner from HMP Highpoint suggested a scheme for improving knowledge sharing on prison wings. He proposed low cost, prisoner led schemes which would aid prisoners to access information. A couple of others suggested that they provided support to those who do not have the same understanding of prison rules.

I try to encourage, especially the younger prisoners to learn their rights, entitlements, and just general information regarding different things that will impact their prison life. (PSOs, PSIs, OASys, Parole Board, Adjudications) as this helps them and staff know where each other stand.

HMP Wakefield

In response to the deprivation of library resources faced by many prisoners, the PPN team actively sources information and reading materials for network members. The knowledge exchange this represents is highly valued by prisoners.

What prisoners said helps:

HMP Guys Marsh - Deputy governor Steve Robertson sends letters to every prisoner's parents (or close family). This opens a dialogue with the family and makes them feel involved in the sentence, reassures them that their loved one is in safe hands.

HMP Oakwood and HMP Parc - the visits centres at HMP Oakwood and Parc were cited as a calming and supportive intervention, including 'lounge visits' which took place in sitting room-style spaces where dads could interact with children in a less regimented, and more natural way. Family visits were also highly valued, particularly the 'Tea Dance at Oakwood' which created a more natural and relaxed environment for prisoners to spend time with their partners.

HMP Stafford - a charity shop helps prisoners manage money by offering cheap clothing and enables prisoners to send gifts out to family.

HMP Foston Hall - are in the process of setting up a 'retail park' that fulfils the same function as the charity shop at Stafford, however there is the added feature of market stalls that will create the feeling of not being behind prison walls.

HMP Foston Hall – extended family visits that last most of the day in a purpose-built apartment on site. Women can cook for their visitors and eat together or go outside in the garden.

HMP Oakwood – HAS Line (Health Advisory Support Line – is a prisoner-led initiative whereby in-cell telephones are used to ring prisoners who have healthcare appointments on the morning of their appointment, reminding them to attend. As a result of the introduction of this initiative, missed appointments reduced significantly.

HMP Lowdham Grange – PAL line – like a similar initiative at HMP Oakwood, is a prisoner-led advice line which again, makes use of in-cell telephony to offer a free, impartial service to other residents which helps address their information and advice needs.

HMP Parc/HMP Guys Marsh – have a small animal farm with a variety of rescued animals including donkeys, goats, poultry and more. Though not many residents get to work there, it is a space of relaxation for those that have access, which is a far cry from the noise and disruption of the wings.

HMP Oakwood - Visitors have been allowed to bring in dogs to see their owners in prison. Previous consultations have included quotes from people in prison who have not seen their family pets in years, citing it as part of the pain of imprisonment.

3.3 Mental distress

a. Problems leading to mental distress

Many of the problems described above, the conditions and deprivations of prison life, contribute to ongoing tensions in the whole prison population. People spoke about anxiety, depression and stress remaining unnoticed and unaddressed, which led to increased violence (to self and others).

People who have pre-existing mental ill-health can be severely unsettled by the lack of attention to their needs when in custody. Problems with accessing health care and the tensions that result are a mutually reinforcing drivers of poor mental health. They may also create a barrier to seeking help.

Throughout the duration of the consultation, mental health was cited as a major factor in conflict, tension and violence in prison. Though many said that being in prison had affected their personal mental health to some extent, it was seeing other people experiencing severe mental health issues that was particularly disturbing for many.

There are so many people coming in who are completely gone, it's shocking. It feels like society is broken.

HMP Altcourse

Several respondents said that many people in prison have mental health problems but choose not to seek support. There was agreement that they were not encouraged to talk about their worries or look for support.

There's a lad on the wing here who had to ask five times for a listener before they got him one. Staff are taking it upon themselves to decide whether you need a listener or not.

Unknown location

A number of respondents said that their requests for help were neglected:

I had three referrals to mental health during a very difficult period. Those referrals were made by officers concerned for my welfare. Nobody has come and seen me to date. The officers whose initial care got them to initiate that action, made no attempt to follow up or chase that up no matter how much I bugged them.

HMP Gartree

This was especially the case if mental health issues are not recognised for what they are:

Staff should be better trained in mental health awareness – if someone is becoming frustrated or irate due to MH, they can get placed on report which makes the problem worse.

HMP Swansea

Some people explained that the lack of structured activities in prisons, combined with long periods of time spent locked in their cells, aggravated any existing mental health issues that they had:

For all addicts, that negative, self-destructive behaviour is our default. It's what we go back to when there is nothing else. And the way most jails are at the moment, there is nothing else!

HMP Gartree

Spending that much time banged up completely messes with your head, you can see the look on a person's face when they really don't want to go back.

HMP Brinsford

The bang up here is mad, I've never spent so much time staring at the same four walls before in my life. It's horrible.

HMP Swinfen Hall

Several prisoners referred to never being able to relax and a feeling that things could change any moment.

Prisoners are constantly being moved cells / wings and even prisons, unable to settle, let alone change and rehabilitate.

HMP Long Lartin

Linked to mental health needs were references to substance misuse. The responses candidly discussed the use of drugs for self-medication, to reduce feelings of distress and to compensate for a lack of support services:

The drugs help you cope behind the door, if I could, I'd speak to that man and ask him what would you like to replace the drugs? Maybe it's chess, time out of cell, swimming lessons, something like that.

HMP Exeter

The focus is always on restricting supply, but no one asks why people take drugs? Why are they self-medicating in that way? What pain are they feeling that makes smoking spice seem like a way to soothe it away?

Former Prisoner

Indeed, during one workshop at a prison that has recently stepped up its security measures and successfully reduced the supply of drugs, a prisoner not part of the workshop climbed up on to the roof in protest, demanding to be shipped out.

This happens all the time here. Basically, addicts turn up here and quickly realise there's no drugs, panic, and climb up on to the roof to try and get shipped out. You can tell he's not thought it through 'cause he hasn't got his vape, not got a coat, no flask of tea. It's an act of desperation.

HMP Stoke Heath

One prisoner spoke about his willingness to perpetrate violence to support his drug addiction. At the time, he did not see the harm he was doing. After he had weaned himself off drug use, he said that if support for mental health and addiction was offered, there would have been “no need to use violence as a currency”.

Others linked trade in drugs to violence, exploitation and bullying, or saw violence as the result of a drug-induced state of mind:

I was punched in the mouth and my lip split by one of the very few people I have met inside that I would consider a friend. The next morning, I had prepared for a fight when he arrived at my door, looked at me and demanded to know who had punched me. He hadn't the foggiest and when I told him he actually shed a few tears. To this day, when he writes to me, he still apologises.

HMP Littlehey.

I came in with an addiction, that's why I was in jail. People can sense weakness and are willing to exploit it. I've been bullied and didn't like how that felt, so I felt I had to become a bully. I didn't have any money coming in, no family here or nothing.

Former prisoner

I've seen people turned more or less into slaves because of debt and addiction.

HMP Exeter

Drugs are the backbone of violence, intimidation, bullying, unrest, debt, tensions within the system. The people who sell drugs in prison are parasites, preying on the weak and vulnerable.

HMP North Sea Camp

With some stating drugs can be used as payment to commit acts of violence against other prisoners or staff.

Drugs are a massive currency so are used to encourage others to commit acts of violence. You will find a spice head on every wing who will commit an assault for a tenner's bit. Some hardcore addicts will assault staff by throwing urine and / or excrement at them for a 'bullseye'.

HMP Littlehey

Loads of the assaults against staff are committed by someone on behalf of another, probably for spice.

Former prisoner

It was also mentioned on numerous occasions by various people in prison that there is a black market for prescription drugs as well as illegal substances.

The medication queue causes massive issues as it is done in the open, everyone knows what meds people are on and some meds are sought after so prisoners can be bullied to give meds for personal or financial gain. This means you have people with mental health issues not on their medication and then you have others who are high.

HMP Stafford

You have people on the wings with acute psychotic disorders who are not taking their medication. Either they're trading them for spice, or they're being bullied, coerced into giving them to others, perhaps to settle debts.

HMP The Mount

Staff commented on the difficulty of making sure people are on their correct medication given the prevalence of people trading their medication, either as a result of debt, or to gain the substances they want.

We have a lot of people medicated here, you know when people are coming to the end of their prescriptions because the whole atmosphere changes. People get more desperate and it becomes a real problem for staff to deal with.

HMP Swansea

It is so prevalent, it's hard to see how we can get on top of it. There are so many drugs flying around and prisoners are really inventive with the way they move them around the prison.

HMP Guys Marsh

Many prisoners commented on the lack of attention paid to prisoners unless they display problematic, disruptive or violent behaviour. One prisoner spoke of how positively he viewed the experience of being placed on an ACCT:

Being on an ACCT, I've never had so much attention, people asked me questions and gave me the attention I needed, now I'm off it it's like talking to a brick wall again. I think I'm better off on an ACCT.

HMP Bristol

b. Solutions for supporting mental health

Recommendations about mental health called for improved mental health services, more resources in mental health teams and more activities to support the wellbeing of prisoners. In one focus group, there were suggestions of 1-2-1 mental health sessions especially for people doing behaviour programmes as they are bringing up potentially traumatic past events in their lives.

Other suggestions included:

On Wednesday it is yoga, the breathing and whatever you do, it's the best night, I sleep like a baby.

HMP Bronzefield

Listeners exist, but not everyone uses them – don't want to be seen as being weak. They need to do more to get people talking about stuff, this would help.

HMP Humber

There should be something similar to Listeners for when you just need a quiet chat when you're feeling lonely, or experiencing low-key anxiety, rather than it being an incident of self-harm. It's always better to tackle a problem before it's left to fester, so there has to be support for you if you need it before you're in a full-blown crisis.

HMP Swansea

Gym is good for your head and your health, we need to use it more. Getting as tired as you can, being active in the prison makes the time go quicker.

HMP Swansea

Responses suggested that there is an ongoing training need for staff around mental health.

There's a tension between those self-harming being viewed as a patient, or as someone manipulating the system

HMP Bristol

We spoke to many prisoners suggesting the return of tobacco as a means to reducing conflict, tension and violence in prison, linking the banning of tobacco to the explosion of spice use and overdose.

Spice has got worse since they took away tobacco.

HMP Bristol

As former smokers, we feel we are being forced into giving up smoking. This leads to stress and tension and leads onto conflict and violence. We feel that smoking should be allowed as the ban does not cover crown buildings.

HMP Bure

Others took a harder line on overcoming addiction, drawing on their own experiences of going "cold turkey" without the aid of replacement substances.

They need to take people off the scripts. It's easier to manage someone on a script, that's what it's about. They should be getting support to get clean, not keeping them on a script. I did my rattle, I did 12 steps, I was a raging addict. I'm alright now.

HMP Swansea

What prisoners said helps:

HMP Altcourse – 'Harm Officers' who operate as a first responder to safer custody incidents, including self-harm, suicide attempts and violent incidents. These Harm officers work with violence reduction reps to try to understand the hidden causes of the incident and refer prisoners to support services. People who self-harm are referred to peer support groups

HMP Eastwood Park – The Rubies – is a space for older women (with some exceptions) to relax, socialise, do arts and crafts and generally take time to enjoy themselves in a supportive and communitarian environment. Run by RECOOP, its real value is that it does not feel like

prison, instead it's a judgement free zone where women are encouraged to support each other. The following quotes are from women who have appreciated the service:

I have learnt to crochet sew and knit, can't wait to do it with my grandkids when I am out. I feel relaxed when I am in the group.

Rubies is a breath of fresh air in what is a very troublesome and traumatising situation; the group is keeping me sane.

Rubies is my therapy, I would never self-harm in the group, I am seen and heard here, and that is good enough.

Various prisons - Rise Up CIC self-development project supports people in prison through group work and music to help people cope with prison life and plan for a better future. Led by a former prisoner, multiple PPN members have commented on how valued it is amongst participants.

3.4 Sentence planning

a. Problems with sentence planning

Some respondents expressed their view that tensions and conflict arose out of a sense of being stuck in a sentence and not being able to progress. Prisoners feel frustrated that they do not contribute to their sentence plans, OASys risk assessment reports or have any ownership of either. They are frustrated further when they know the content of the sentence plan but are prohibited from moving prisons to undertake courses.

I have been in custody for 14 months now and an OASys should have been produced and a probation officer I have never met said on 15/12/2018 that it would be done by January. I'm still waiting.

(Letter dated October 2019)

Another frequently cited frustration was a lack of accuracy in sentence planning documents:

The most common document which causes tension is that lack of attention to detail within an OASys report. The report is key as licence conditions and psychology reports are taken from these reports.

OASys should be factual and true and should not be based on personal opinion or hearsay as they are used as a point of information for other report writers, appeals, licence conditions, or parole reports.

HMP Stafford

Some mentioned that the courses required to reduce risk were unavailable, particularly those which addressed violence.

Adequate capacity for meaningful offender behaviour courses – progression for IPP, Lifer and EDS towards achievable parole must become a possibility.

Long Lartin

A few respondents mentioned a controversy about the effectiveness of sex offender programmes, stating that they felt this had caused anxiety and tension.

The completion of offending behaviour programmes is crucial to 'parole' sentence prisoners' ability to progress so as to be able to demonstrate to the Parole Board that he / she is suitable for release. It is not uncommon for completion of such courses to be regarded as a requirement for release ... prisoners are being unwillingly coerced into treatment, there being strong evidence to show it makes you worse. All to satisfy the Parole Boards desire for risk reduction.

Unknown establishment

Many across the prisons we visited or heard from, simply did not have up to date OASys reports or any sentence plan at all, despite serving sentences of over 12 months and having been in custody for a considerable period of time.

I've been here 8 months now and I've not spoken to anyone from OMU, I don't have a sentence plan.

HMP Exeter

There's no progression here, I'm not the only one, I know loads who haven't had their OASys done, their sentence plan is incomplete, or blank, or they've already done the courses, and they're still getting knocked back for D cat. What are you supposed to do?"

HMP Channings Wood

For some more than others, not having an up to date sentence plan showing the progress they have made in reducing their risk of reoffending, is a major source of anxiety and frustration, especially in the run up to a parole hearing.

I haven't had updated sentence plan for over a year. I have parole hearing soon and they will say I am high risk, but I have done everything on my plan.

HMP Huntercombe

Until we get our OASys done and are given a sentence plan what are we doing here?

HMP Nottingham

b. Solutions for improving sentence planning

Many called for more resources to be put into clearing the backlog of people without updated risk assessments and sentence plans.

Get more staff in OMU, I think right now there are four staff there, we have nearly 500 people here who need their OASys and sentence plan updating every year.

HMP Huntercombe

Make sure every wing has a range of staff that makes access to services quicker. That means having healthcare, mental health, OMU on every wing.

HMP Guys Marsh

Several suggestions for change were made regarding better progression for prisoners, with a focus on fairness.

Fair parole hearings and expectations – e.g. being in a prison that can offer you required courses on sentence plans instead of being moved around to complete sentence planning.

HMP Leeds

In terms that echo the current emphasis in the prison service on a 'rehabilitative culture', prisoners suggested:

I've suggested a Rehab Culture roadshow around the national estate, attempting to try and engage staff and residents to begin to think how we can make prisons a more rehabilitative experience

HMP Stafford

Putting rehabilitation at the centre – avoiding setting unattainable / unachievable sentence plan targets (e.g. OBPs and courses that are not available / not available in a reasonable timeframe.

HMP Leyhill

Rehabilitation of those who commit violent crime needs to address the root cause of violent behaviour and include coping mechanisms – TSP [Thinking Skills Programme] is not enough. Alternative programmes need to be offered in prison that translate into real world skills, gang violence, domestic abuse, anger management and vocational training. Accountability needs to be addressed by those who perpetrate violent crime, including more access to victim awareness courses

HMP Leeds

Recalling our previous report on incentives, there was discussion about the need to reward positive behaviour to help prisoners progress onto improved Incentives and Earned Privileges levels and to be de-categorised.

Points based rewards system as well as a punishment system.

HMP Isis

Reward positive behaviour with the same impetuosity as negative behaviour attracts.

HMP Gartree

Giving hope – consider extending opportunity for early release for good behaviour

HMP Leyhill

Increasing the use of ROTL was seen as a good way of calming tensions and providing hope to those that need it.

ROTL should be used for Cat C prisoners, they need something to look forward to rather than waiting endlessly to move to open conditions. If staff feel nervous about it then get body scanners in.

HMP Brixton

They should let us out on ROTL from here if there are no spaces in D Cats, there's no point in me being here now.

HMP Isis

What prisoners said helps:

HMP Frankland - Self-submission form for positive entries on C-NOMIS. "Probably one of the most powerful tools we have access to in Frankland. Although it is suggested these should be completed and utilised by residents at least once every 3 months, they can be utilised at any time if you have progress, events or achievements to report and record. Personal Officers do not have crystal balls to know what is going on in your establishment life, education, workplace, sentence planning targets or your general motivation"

HMP Guys Marsh – OMU has been moved out of the admin building and closer to the residential units to encourage staff to be more present on the wings as well as making access for prisoners easier.

HMP Long Lartin – Though not in operation currently, last year OMU were holding drop-in sessions during visits which family members could attend along with their relative in prison. These were highly valued by those we spoke to, especially families who felt more involved in the sentence planning.

3.5 In-prison relationships

a. Problems with staff-prisoner relationships

There was significant focus on relationships in prison – mostly staff-prisoner, but also among prisoners. Concerns about staff focused on inconsistent responses from officers, inexperience (lack of training), negative attitudes, and an apparent lack of knowledge about the background circumstances leading to violence.

Prisoners commented that when relationships were impersonal or antagonistic, the impact on the prison community was an increased risk of violence:

One of the key grounding problems is the almost non-existent relationship between prisoners and staff, fundamental to disorder and rehabilitation within the prison system.

HMP Long Lartin

Tensions exist when staff relationships are poor, this increases violence against other inmates and officers.

HMP Frankland

Similar observations were raised in PRT's active citizens panels, which also discussed safety and staff-prisoner relationships. One of these panels described how constant changes of officers on a wing undermined relationships. Officers were less likely to get to know prisoners personally and a lack of knowledge about how that wing works could increase their frustrations with staff.

The lack of life experience among many new staff was cited in our consultation, with some prisoners suggesting that new officers need more support from their older colleagues in learning the 'trade'.

Within the privatised prison estate, you can take possession of a set of keys and be responsible for those incarcerated at the establishment within 10 short weeks. This is not enough time to develop the people skills required to work with a number of prisoners, each of them facing multiple issues some of which will require specialist training.

HMP Ashfield

New staff who are yet to learn "jail craft" are often lacking in confidence and intuition to manage situations or tensions well.

HMP Humber

Active citizen panels also suggested that inconsistent treatment was a widespread cause of frustration. They drew attention to the impact of ineffective staff, who were not confident about which rules to enforce (or even what the rules were). As one prisoner responded to our consultation:

Inexperienced staff can, without intending to, escalate a situation by saying the wrong thing, or acting in the wrong way. They need more support.

HMP Guys Marsh

Another respondent claimed that some staff seemed to incite violence deliberately saying:

Prison is a melting pot for violence, and the governors and staff are stirring the pot.

HMP Hull

Attitudes among some staff were raised as an area of concern. Negative attitudes can lead to intensified barriers and anger from prisoners.

One of the main reasons for this is the negative perception of prisoners by staff, which is reflected, and a bad perception of staff is precipitated, creating the barrier that exists today. In my view, staff who receive prisoners in this way and have a misconception of what prisons are for, should not work within the Criminal Justice System.

HMP Long Lartin

The inmates are already going through a stressful time and already on edge. Most have sleep problems and are fragile, so when spoken to like a piece of shit, this puts them on edge and makes them more snappy and angry and fuels their already burning fire inside.

HMP Bure

In line with MOJ policy on decency, staff should be able to interact with all inmates in a polite and professional manner and address you by your preferred name. It is therefore annoying to have a surname shouted loudly across the wing "... Office" – hardly polite. When addressing a staff member, one is expected to be a mind reader as they do not wear name tags and rarely introduce themselves.

HMP Stafford

Give respect, gain respect.

HMP Risley

One woman explained that having male staff exert their authority can cause real distress. She recalled a time she had a towel on and asked an officer not to come in, but he did anyway. She said this had made her feel uncomfortable and that she still thinks about it when she undresses.

Prisoners said they felt frustrated by staff not having the time, or inclination, to listen to their issues. This could lead to a situation escalating or becoming unmanageable.

I was telling my story, but he (an officer) had an empty look, listening but you know not.

HMP Bronzefield

Sometimes their unwillingness to listen has had a detrimental effect on the inmate who had a small, easily solvable issue (with a quick bit of staff input), but now that issue has now grown. The inmate worries, panics and goes into themselves.

HMP Stafford

There was also a level of apathy towards human suffering highlighted at multiple prisons that made difficult hearing. In one focus group, the men spoke specifically about allegations of sexual assault in prisons holding men convicted of sexual offences. "One young man was sexually assaulted by another prisoner, told the SC lead who told him to get used to it, this happens in prison."

In contrast, a respondent in another prison compared his current treatment to a previous establishment where he felt they made an effort to listen to his concerns:

I've come from Oakwood and Dovegate where people actually listened to what you're saying. Here, there's no attempt to come down to the wings asking people about any issues they may have.

HMP Stoke Heath

Prisoners also suggested that wing staff do not explore the reasons for a violent incident and deal with the situation at an individual level. Participants at HMP Hull felt that following an act of violence, staff worked only to punish the perpetrators rather than understand and support them to change their behaviour. Services stretched to the limits means limited available time for such exploration and support, but prisoners also perceived a lack of motivation among some staff to explore the situations that lead to an incident:

The easy answer is lock everyone up, even if you are not involved. Then you can hear the staff sitting around chatting and doing nothing.

HMP Coldingley

There are never staff shortages when there's an incident. There are always 12 staff in attendance. Always over-reaction. But nothing ever gets treated. They deal with the incident but never the problem.

HMP Garth

b. Problems with prisoner-prisoner relationships

Difficulties with prisoner to prisoner relationships in prison were also reported in our consultation, albeit less frequently than those between staff and prisoners. Some observed that, in comparison to the general population, prisons are more likely to have individuals who have a violent past. For these respondents, aggressive tendencies of others increased tensions and the risk of violence.

By locking up upwards of 1000 men together boosts testosterone, an inbuilt behaviour of testing each other's capabilities. Who is the fastest, strongest, most intelligent or violent.

Launch event, HMP Stafford

One must recognise that prison is hierarchical, and a prisoner will fall into one of three categories; leader, follower or grey man. As a leader or a follower, there is a status to maintain or aspire to and debts and disrespect cannot be tolerated. The resultant effect is violence.

HMP Whatton

One person gave an example of a failure by the prison to keep people separate when it was obvious that they should not meet.

There is a reason why prisoners are usually kept apart, so why would you put them together in a visit room? I have personally witnessed at least 3 fights in the visiting room, upsetting my partner and children and other people's children are crying and very upset.

HMP Isis

One particular concern was regarding the mix of vulnerable prisoners ('VPs') with the general population, which attracted opposing viewpoints from respondents.

VPs should be segregated. VPs remain an easy target for anyone to take their aggression out on. VPs could be exposed to violence through poor management of accommodation when coming into the prison.

HMP Hull

As a prisoner convicted of a sexual offence, I now find myself forced to live in segregated conditions or within prisons solely designed to house MCOSO for 'my own safety'. This segregation highlights to the mainstream population of our prisons who is to be targeted and consequentially creates victims of verbal and physical violence. In days gone by, all prisoners shared the same landings unaware and uninterested in other prisoners' personal affairs.

HMP Ashfield

c. Solutions – improving relationships

Most consultation respondents were keen for relationships to improve and become a source of support and encouragement, rather than a trigger for conflict.

Need to shift thinking to a 'we're all in this together' rather than a them vs us culture.

HMP Leeds

Suggestions for change centred on allowing more time to build bridges and for events to bring people together. The following contribution from the council at HMP Coldingley starts with a suggestion raised by many and ends with some practical ways to bring this to fruition.

It was suggested that facilitating opportunities for staff and prisoners to engage with each other in a less formal setting would enable them to relate to and understand one another better. The realities of life for most prisoners can be far removed from those of staff, reflecting differences which can often get overlooked or lost in translation. Staff-Prisoner sports competitions, for example, can go a long way towards breaking down barriers. Freeing staff up from their core duties so that they can attend special events held during the year, like Black History Month, or Travellers' Day, can also give staff the opportunity to get to know the prisoners in their care in a more natural environment and context.

HMP Coldingley

Another respondent described the benefits of improving relationships informally:

Facilitating opportunities for staff and prisoners to engage with each other in a less formal setting would enable them to relate to and understand one another better. The realities of life for most prisoners can be far removed from those of staff, reflecting differences which can often get overlooked or lost in translation.

HMP Coldingley

A few other prisoners raised the fact that positive relationships could be built with staff in the chaplaincy. One of the key themes which made this relationship strong was the willingness of the team to listen. The following excerpt is taken from a prisoner-made newsletter at HMP Dartmoor and is a good example of how prisoners see the chaplaincy.

This short prisoner-written article can't really begin to describe the multitude of little things that the chaplaincy is capable of and delivers quietly every single day. It does indeed represent a key strut in our prison's support scaffolding, if you choose to use it. You can do this at any time and without obligation. There is no prominent dog collar, no Bible thumping and no visible religion, unless you want it. The result is pretty magic in terms of having a sensitive and wise listening ear – actually several sets of them to suit your needs.

As mentioned, many prisoners were aware of the challenges facing prison staff and some wrote in to say that prison staff need support too, if relationships are to improve. They recognised that staff with low morale and exhaustion will lead to a less effective prison system. We also spoke to several officers and custodial managers (CMs) on our prison visits who felt this was needed.

This is the hardest job I've done, pressure from all sides, no reprieve, a lot of time there's no support.

(Supervisory Officer) HMP Bristol

We are all prisoners [staff and prisoners], we have different uniforms but they all have a number on it.

HMP Bronzefield

Better support for front line staff from middle and senior management.

HMP Isle of Wight

Improved training was suggested by many:

Recruit the right person - suitability and training. We only give eight weeks training. Needs to be an apprenticeship.

HMP Stafford

If I could persuade the total system to concentrate on one theme it would be the training of all staff in human psychology ... I would think this requires an allegiance to ordinary courtesy. It does not help much if an officer in his 20s calls me, who is 84, by my surname loudly.

HMP Bure

The ethos among staff was cited by respondents who advocated attitudes that were positive about personal growth among prisoners, and less punitive.

Staff should be aware of what is available to prisoners and encourage attendance to the life changing courses available.

Staff at HMP Isis

Ensure there are clear goals for staff and prisoners and ensure shortcomings are dealt with constructively, not only to promote staff and prisoner relationship but also promoting confidence, self-esteem and respect.

HMP Gartree

Need CMs [custodial managers] who do not think they are the judge, jury and executioner.

HMP Leeds

Equality – every individual treated and dealt with the same way.

HMP Littlehey

While others simply wanted to feel like they were being listened to.

If an officer pulls the pen and pad out, you know something's getting done.

HMP Hewell

A few consultation responses focused on prisoner to prisoner relationships.

One of the most popular suggestions made in the entire consultation was regarding the power of peer support, guidance and mentoring.

I think the peer support work, mentoring, is really important. I might be saying the exact same thing to a young man as an officer, but because it's coming from me, they sit and listen.

HMP Bristol

Establishing mentoring schemes to develop a sense of perspective in life, self-belief, and motivation.

Staff at HMP Long Lartin

Pregnancy groups run by other women, that's helped. It's the prisoners who are helpful, they don't judge you.

HMP Bronzefield

Many believed that utilising peer workers, giving preference to informal settlements of disputes (within reason), or simply giving people in prison the time and space to properly socialise would be an effective way of reducing tension, conflict, and violence.

Better results are achieved when conflict can be resolved informally, without recourse to official processes which can lead to more damaging consequences – particularly when formal sanctions are used, or records are made on the files of those involved. There is no need to involve the criminal justice system in low-level altercations or disagreements. Indeed, doing so may actually cause more harm than it solves. A proportionate and informal response is often the best answer.

HMP Coldingley

Violence could be reduced by allowing prisoners to have more social time and keeping them in their comfort zone.

HMP Isis

Though others advised caution as to the suggestion of prisoners taking on responsibilities that normally lie with staff, for instance prisoners attempting to intervene in violent incidents could be subject to suspicion by staff.

Mediation without fear of SIR or PNOMIS reports.

HMP Dovegate

If you break up a fight, you'll get done for fighting.

HMP Stoke Heath

There were also calls for violence reduction 'reps' on the wings to support those who were becoming tense or who had behaved violently.

Peers need to be challenging those who are disruptive or who don't respect others and the environment.

HMP Durham

A lot of mediation and conflict resolution happens informally, prisons should do more to support those people who can have a positive influence on others. Give them proper recognition, make them a rep, pay accordingly and train them up.

HMP North Sea Camp

Mediation with prisoners by ex-gang members who had issues but now work together.

HMP Isis

What prisoners said helps:

HMP Oakwood – Peace & Community Engagement (PACE) – a prisoner-led Intervention Team that engages residents to:

- Create a safe environment to live and work
- Strive for peaceful co-existence and harmony at Oakwood
- To engender meaningful co-operation between staff and residents in all areas, particularly in conflict resolution
- Highlight possible areas of friction and challenge anti-social behaviour
- Mentor those with challenging attitudes
- De-escalate violent actions and confrontation
- To provide early interventions, and take proactive steps in securing resolution

HMP Rye Hill - have launched their Violence Elimination Team (VET) which is made up mostly of residents who have previous adjudications against them for violence, “Therapeutic schemes such as this promote inclusivity and ensures that everyone is invested in the best result for all parties ... Conflicts are raised within the community by letter, talking to staff or peer scheme. Both parties are interviewed to ensure they want to be part of the process (incentives should be offered) a short, full investigation of facts by parties are presented to the arbitrary group (a selection of residents who serve a set period and make up the demographics of the prison)”

HMP Dartmoor (DRM – Dialogue Road Map) – A communications tool designed to break down barriers and get engagement when the other person is resistant, hostile, angry, violent or resentful. The following description of DRM is lifted from a magazine produced by residents of HMP Dartmoor called ‘Tor Times’:

The aim of using the Dialogue Road Map at Dartmoor is to help prisoners who are struggling to understand their issues and explore their options. They do this by talking to DRM Facilitators who are also prisoners. DRM Facilitators undergo intensive training and use tried and tested processes to help prisoners who are struggling to reduce violence and improve community on the wings.

DRM The Dialogue Road Map™ is a much more modern intervention, based on honest and open communication in one-to-one and group settings in order to find peaceful solutions to conflict and thereby greater inner peace. Dartmoor is one of only a few prisons in Britain operating the innovative approach and its success over just a couple of years so far is testament to its enduring effectiveness.

HMP Coldingley - Racism – a short play put on by prisoners offers a good example of the potential for misunderstanding amongst staff, based upon a lack of cultural awareness and latent institutional racism. A group of young black men are seen gathered together, gesticulating and shouting in an animated fashion. The dialogue is inaudible. The staff audience are asked what they think is happening in the scene. Answers vary from ‘a fight is brewing’ to ‘they’re dealing drugs’. The scene is re-enacted, this time with the conversation included. It

turns out that the boys are talking about last night's football match.... Prejudice and discrimination influence how staff interpret or misinterpret exchanges between prisoners. Racism, or perceived racism has tended to be at the heart of the unrest and disquiet felt.

We understand that other prisons have held events bringing people together, such as at HMP Rye Hill who hold Unity games bringing people from various wings together. Group activities include dominoes tournaments, chess, sports.

HMP Altcourse do regular personal training sessions on the football pitch.

HMP Lowdham Grange has a photo booth in visits so dads and children can take photos together.

3.6 Money in prison

If I were to hazard a guess, I would say that most conflict is a result of debt.

HMP Bure

a. Problems with a lack of money inside

Respondents believed that debt was one of the primary causes of prison tension, conflict and violence. They observed that people who get in serious debt may feel more vulnerable and frightened. The respondents drew the obvious links between debt and trade in drugs but also recognised other contributors.

Low prison wages were raised as a source of frustration by many.

Some prisoners work manual labour for £0.16 an hour (Not at HMP Pentonville but at other establishments).

HMP Pentonville

Not everyone can have money sent in.

HMP Isis

A second factor raised in the consultation was the 'inflated costs' of the canteen provider:

Canteen's another thing as well, we pay £3.99 for vapes that cost a pound in Poundland.

HMP Bristol

When ordering from catalogues, why are we being charged handling, when we have no choice?

HMP Bure

An active citizens panel that focused on structural causes of violence pointed out that conflicts were bound to result in more fights when canteen prices went up without a corresponding rise in pay. "Prison pay doesn't cover basic needs, so people look to exploit others."

There was general dissatisfaction in the consultation responses with the canteen provider:

Two main factors from my perspective cause tension. One is canteen. When you order something, the money goes straight out. Sometimes they write back and say they don't have the item in stock, but they don't always give you your money back. That's happened a few times, to me and others.

HMP Guys Marsh

One of the specific frustrations was about the withdrawal of products, which can happen without warning or consultation. This inspired one particularly lengthy response

In our rather finely balanced, restricted-customer environment, any withdrawal of an item should be treated more seriously than in a supermarket on the out. To elaborate, withdrawal is not being described as a deprivation, but all disappearing items are invariably much discussed and mourned by prisoners. Psychologists would have a field day looking at the disproportionately destabilising effect that this can have.

HMP Dartmoor

Many prisoners spoke specifically about prison debt in relation to canteen and poor wages, with the cost of vaping contributing to the problem since the smoking ban was introduced.

At High Down, one issue that creates conflict, tension and violence is the first canteen order [on arrival to a new prison]. The new canteen order is received approximately 3 weeks later. Unfortunately, this is a legacy process where even existing prisoners have to wait 2 weeks to receive canteen. Naturally this creates cycles of debt, conflict and violence.

Pay a prisoner a decent wage, when you earn £8-12 a week and you vape 3 boxes a day costing £11.97 you will end up in debt to support your habit. Say what you like about smoking but 80% of prisoners are smokers and at least when we could smoke, those less able to budget were able to get by on dog-ends.

HMP Wakefield

The cost, low supply and demand for vapes has created loan sharks.

HMP Bronzefield

There was also dissatisfaction with the cost of phone calls, which some felt led to debt, especially given the low prison wages.

Phone calls again – The pay needs to be seriously revised, too. You have some prisoners not able to buy toiletries because they have to vape and then after that, they are left with £2-3 to make calls to family and friends.

HMP Isis

The prison system and BT ensure that more cannot afford to phone home and as such turn to illicit mobile telephones, which in themselves are related to the culture of violence due to the nature of 'rental fees' having to be paid with dire consequences to those who miss payment.
HMP Ashfield.

Some prisoners made clear that they saw bullying, exploitation and intimidation as being driven by lack of money and basic goods.

The current system creates and fuels a debt culture as prisoners buy on tick, sell items and borrow. When they don't pay it, it leads to conflict.
HMP Risley

Pay is too low, it necessitates debt and borrowing, which inevitably leads to violence when people can't pay what they owe.
HMP Durham

Pay disparities were also seen as a source of contention, with the way different jobs were valued seen as unfair.

People working as a carer get £17.50 a week and they only deliver two meals a day to other inmates. However, someone who works 6 hours a day in workshops or education gets £9.25 – hardly fair.
HMP Stafford

The work that they're getting us to do for charities... if we went to them on the outside, they wouldn't look at us twice, so why are we made to work for them?
HMP Dartmoor

b. Solutions to money problems in prison

Suggestions for change were unsurprising given the above contributions. Higher wages and lower costs were key, with the response below being representative.

A decent living wage in prison for people to phone home and buy essentials will curve the need to 'tick' items on usually 'double bubble'.
HMP Guys Marsh

The rising costs of canteen and phone calls and wages not keeping up with inflation. This is creating a need for prisoners, in some way or another, to earn extra money. This is creating a hotspot for dealing. By bringing wages in line with these rising costs, there will be less need for prisoners to deal, bringing down violence overall. It is worth mentioning that some prisoners do not have financial support from their families/ friends and even for the ones that do, families / friends should not be expected to fund the shortfall.

Offenders should get minimum wage, working for £2.50 per day is not good enough in my opinion.
HMP Isis

It was interesting that several prisoners did not feel that the current work undertaken in prisons was worthy of minimum wage pay. They were not in favour of increasing wages for the current roles, but instead wanted to see more 'real work for real pay' opportunities in prison. This is in line with suggestions made to tackle other sources of frustration such as feeling underutilised and bored.

Prisoners in the closed conditions should also be supported and encouraged to take up work outside of the prison. Prisoners working in the prison should be paid minimum wage to support themselves, family and have some saved up for when they leave prison.

HMP Highpoint

Some prisoners offered practical suggestions for avoiding debt and bullying.

Have a card reader at reception to buy some necessities to last the first two weeks and avoid debt.

Your cash balance on ATM machines on the wing should not be shown unless you request it. Anyone can see what you have, and this can lead to bullying.

HMP Dovegate

Additionally, one prisoner suggested the way money is earned and spent in English and Welsh prisons could be overhauled to reflect successes elsewhere.

A better wage that could be split 3 ways, following the Dutch system; 30% to victim support, 30% to prisoner for everyday use and 30% for savings.

HMP Stafford

Respondents reported that having to rely on family members to support them financially was demoralising. They are also aware that on release they will receive a discharge grant of £47 which does not cover most transportation costs. Therefore, if they were able to save £20 a week even for a three-year sentence they would have enough for a deposit, pay bills and buy clothes. Such financial independence would give them hope and a future over which they would have more control.

Ultimately, there was a quiet resignation to the fact that money has been diverted away from the prison system in recent years.

More money in the system would help sort out the basic, little things, then you can work on the bigger things and move on to rehabilitation.

HMP Exeter

I don't see how you can do any of this without some money. Where is the money. Let's have an open conversation about money.

HMPPS @ HMP Stafford

What prisoners said helps:

HMP Guy's Marsh – 'Golden Tickets' – prisoners who find themselves in debt and are self-isolating for fear of reprisal are given the opportunity to do some work within their cell. In exchange they can earn a 'Golden Ticket' that can be redeemed on the canteen for items used to repay the debt. The actual transaction, converting the ticket for the canteen items, is performed by a peer-worker who supports the correct transfer of payment to the creditor.

HMP Altcourse – Relatively high wages are offered to workers; £20 per week is not seen as unusual, allowing residents to save money and reduce the need to borrow from others and get into debt.

3.7 Processes and rules

a. Problems caused by processes and rule

The most frequently cited cause for frustration was the perceived inconsistency by which prison rules were enforced and the way that regime can be changed so easily without warning.

When people believe the process of applying the law is fair, it influences their views and behaviours. When people feel treated fairly and justly, they have more confidence in the authority, see this as more legitimate and are more likely to accept and abide (or commit to abide) by decisions and rules.

HMP Stafford

I believe greater care and communication should be taken over changes in the regime. Frequently association periods are cancelled with the offenders being told on the spot that their time has to be sacrificed due to staffing levels.

HMP Isis

Some examples given of frustrating incidents where a lack of consistency was felt by prisoners

Adjudications – can be dismissed if prisoner doesn't turn up and dismissed due to passage of time.

HMP The Mount

How can you get caught with a phone and get a job the next day when another person can do the same and get moved wings or shipped out.

HMP Bristol

My mate is yet to receive a red band even though he holds a number of trusted positions. Another prisoner commented that Brian is a model prisoner and causes way less trouble than he does, and yet he has a red band and Brian doesn't. This is seen as an injustice and is an example of the mystification of what the local policy actually is.

HMP Stoke Heath

One guy can have a digi box while another cant. Somebody asks politely for X box, gets told no, another threatens to smash up or cuts themselves, gets rewarded with an X box.

HMP Coldingley

You're not allowed to wear black tops – this is obviously so you can't look like staff. It therefore causes tension and conflict when you see four other inmates in black tops in the yard.

HMP Stafford

This can affect behavioural choices:

If Joe Bloggs who has five nicks a year and has just got off basic and gets a kitchen job to keep him quiet, then I get told I can't have a job because two months ago I got an IEP warning for wearing slippers on the landing, naturally I begin to think that it would be to my advantage to behave like Joe.

HMP Littlehey

Staff spoke about this with the PPN team too. Most staff would also prefer a stable regime but emphasised it can be out of their control.

Staff work hard but are often stressed and sometimes this means procedures can be unpredictable. As a teacher, this is not a big problem, but the impact on prisoners can be extra frustrating.

HMP Isis

Ultimately, prisoners and staff both cited the strain on resources in the prison service as a whole as a major factor as to why a consistent regime was not always possible.

There is a direct correlation between the staffing numbers being at their lowest in 2014 and the sudden increase in assaults and serious assaults. The number of assaults continues to rise, despite staffing levels increasing but one must take into account the decreasing experience levels of prison officers.

HMP Whatton

If we had more staff, there would be a better regime and staff would be under less pressure.

HMP Isis

This was not just about staff numbers, but the qualities of those recruited.

There's not enough experience around, I'm not saying that older staff are always better than newer ones, but you've got the situation now prisoners are being asked how things work. I shouldn't have to explain to staff how the kiosks work.

HMP Parc

However, another of the issues raised was the limited communication prisoners have when regimes are changed, which leads to frustration.

Better communication when the regime changes suddenly, when not unlocked as expected. Not letting us know causes anxiety, tension, frustration and anger and resentment to staff.

HMP Risley

Indeed, several prisoners wrote in about their frustrations with communication in general, not just about inconsistency in regime and regulation.

General fatigue and frustration that nothing gets done and communications are poor between officers and prisoners.

HMP Leeds

A lot of my frustrations come from a lack of communication from a large percentage of staff, both wing staff and help from other groups for the likes of resettlement to education to general help from our so-called personal officers.

Anonymous

Communication has to be effective and as efficient as it can... it is SO frustrating putting apps in constantly.

HMP Bristol

Communication plays a pivotal role in mediating tensions. The outcome may not change but understanding the reasons for change helps to accept it. For this to be considered effective, communication needs to be honest and timely. There were numerous reports of being 'fobbed off', which appeared to have the opposite effect to reducing tension.

Challenge of the prison not communicating and explaining things properly, for example not getting canteen on time because it wasn't explained that there was a deadline for when it had to be submitted.

HMP Bronzefield

The other day we had bang up cause one of the officers was at a wedding... are you telling me that they didn't know in advance about a wedding? Course they did.

HMP Eastwood Park

Sometimes you just want the truth. Got my cell packed up and told I was moving out as the Governor's office is next to my cell and it got robbed. They said it was me, no questions were asked. It wasn't. They then unpacked my stuff and said sorry and that I could stay. Give a reason (or justification) when you give a punishment.

HMP Stafford

It was notable how angry and intolerant prisoners were about other prisoners who disrupted the routine due to their behaviour.

No one talks about what this means to people at local level and those disrupting the system need to understand the impact.

HMP Leeds

There was a guy setting fire to their cell while on spice, everyone on block is banged up because of him, next day, he's back running up and down the stairs.

HMP Bristol

Also, many felt that the litany of processes and rules that they are meant to follow were infantilising, and not necessarily helpful in terms of encouraging pro-social behaviour.

All of the stupid rules treating us like children then expecting us to behave like men is the cause of so much frustration and eventually violence.

HMP Wakefield

This place is like a kids jail, they're treating grown men like little kids and then act surprised we're acting out like kids.

HMP Swinfen Hall

There are grown adults here, like 40 years old, but the prison is run like it's for children. They talk down to you, they give you IEP for every little thing. We didn't listen to our parents at home why am I gonna listen to some 20 year-old in a uniform?

HMP ISIS

The need to present yourself as either violent or undergoing a mental health crisis in order to receive attention from staff and healthcare professionals was mentioned by many others.

If you keep your head down, do your bird and just try and go through the processes, put in apps, speak to officers, you get absolutely nowhere. If you kick off, smash up your cell, keep ringing the bell, eventually they'll give you what you want.

HMP Channings Wood

They reward bad behaviour here. I've been trying to get transferred out for time, but then a bunch of guys start a riot and they've all been shipped out. What does that tell you? Do they want us to riot so we can leave this place?

HMP Long Lartin

We put these points to staff at one of our workshops who responded that people who don't fit into extreme categories (self-harm, violent, disruptive) are largely overlooked, "We don't know anything about them".

When you're in a busy jail, people are constantly vying for your attention. On one end you've got the self-isolating, self-harming, vulnerable prisoners that are on an ACCT. On the other you've got the guys starting fights, smashing up their cell, assaulting staff. In the middle there is this whole range of people getting on with their sentence without making much noise, and they're often overlooked.

Staff at HMP Exeter

b. Solutions to improving processes and rules

Some raised quite practical, physical suggestions for alleviating violence, including the use of 'wands' that can scan for banned items.

Wandering on and off the wing. Weapons Amnesty.

HMP Dovegate

There was a clear preference for adhering to a fixed regime over a more flexible system.

Stick tight to the regime and ensure only those who behave good get rewards.

HMP Dovegate

Correct regime, getting to activities on time ... correct timetable.

HMP Isis

There is much unrest when prisoners are not clear about expectations.

Staff at HMP Isis

Many were punitive in their responses about how they would manage these prisoners, preferring again a consistent, regimented procedure akin to 'put all the unruly characters in one place'.

When one person is bullying their cellmate, it's the person being bullied that gets moved onto a different wing, should be the other way around. People who shout the loudest get what they want.

HMP Stafford

Punishments of extra days were not seen as enough of a deterrent for those who are violent

HMP Leeds

Make sure that any act of violence from a prisoner results in recategorization immediately.

HMP Bure

The complaints system, an obvious point of call for people wanting to address the issues described above, did not appear to be well respected. One prisoner wrote about the new complaints policy framework, see below, and said it should have been the start of something positive but there is a lack of trust in the system.

More support, advice and guidance for those with complaints -large amounts of conflict, tension and violence can be avoided or resolved through the appropriate use of 'Complaints / DIRFS' especially when involving officers and staff. ... unreasonable / inaccurate or confusing answers tend to frustrate / irritate and anger the plaintiff causing them to be a ticking timebomb.

HMP Whitemoor

Military and other servicemen will understand the concept of closing ranks, but prisoners are often subjected to this phenomenon. Double and triple punished by adjudications, VRS (Violence Reduction Scheme) and IEP reviews. Prisoners lose hope and trust in the system and this disillusionment leads to added conflict.

HMP Whatton

PRT's active citizen panels also recognised that staff had a vital role in stopping prisoner-on-prisoner violence. The active citizen panels believed that officers make a huge contribution to safety when they readily engage with prisoners and are respectful, professional and consistent. They advocated policies to ensure that officers remain vigilant in challenging exploitation, intimidation and other harmful behaviour.

However, there were some more positive offerings, starting with the first, which is about ensuring positive behaviour is rewarded.

This is what I know from personal experience works well in Spain. 1) violence is never rewarded in any way, even indirectly. 2) Offenders are removed from the wing instantly and the incident is never discussed on the wing. 3) Wings are graded with better facilities on the more stable wings – good conduct is in theory being rewarded 4) Inmates move down immediately for bad behaviour whereas well behaved inmates move up.

HMP Rye Hill.

One prisoner referred to the possibility of prison officers acting as role models, saying they should,

be challenging and pulling people up addressing challenging behaviour.

HMP Bronzefield.

Another prisoner spoke about the use of suspended punishment in adjudication, which can lead to positive outcomes. She gave the example of case in which the sentence was suspended on condition that they engaged with an art course and the result was beneficial to the individual.

It was suggested that every prison wing should have prisoners or volunteers fully trained in the complaints procedures ready to help prisoners submit their complaints.

They should be able to pass the competency in prison law course which would help them to navigate PSI / frameworks with ease in order to support, advise and guide the plaintiffs. They would also benefit from the mediation course which could assist them in resolving the complaint.

HMP Long Lartin.

It was important for prisoners to see that everyone was taking the role seriously and there was accountability for all. This feeds into relationship building between officers and prisoners.

We need the culture of the staff to change drastically. How are we meant to own up to our own mistakes when officers act with impunity and the superior officers back them blindly rather than correcting the mistake.

HMP Wakefield.

Promises made to obtain information must be promptly dealt with and prisoners must be patient.

HMP Bure

Get officers to answer questions and requests honestly not just say what they think is the answer sought. I've seen peers given the wrong answer and know that in time that will be a cause of future anxiety.

HMP Wymott

Visible, capable management – management taking responsibility for issues and resolving them, not losing sight of achievable wins.

Littlehey

Hold staff accountable, meticulously, for their behaviour.

HMP Gartree

Although we are talking about reduction / prevention, fully operational and effective safer-custody departments can play a big part. If people in prisons know situations are dealt with promptly, effectively and actively, hold people accountable for their actions then they are less likely to allow themselves to get to boiling point.

HMP Isle of Wight.

What prisoners said helps:

HMP Bronzefield – One-on-one complaints response – We met a manager who responds to complaints in person and promotes this as good practice to colleagues. The women there stated how valued they felt by this approach, and how it helped to reduce tensions, making them feel heard regardless of whether or not the complaint was upheld.

HMP Frankland - Sentence plan support packs – given out to prisoners all over the prison (although it was developed for those on the Planned Progressive Pathway (PPP) which is a compact)

HMP Bronzefield – Leap Confronting Conflict have been working with the women in Bronzefield to develop two intervention approaches to reducing conflict and violence in the prison. As part of the prison's Wellbeing week they led one day Understanding Conflict training courses on the induction wing. They now run a 2.5-day leadership course once a month for residents to become 'peer workers'.

3.8 Boredom and lack of purpose

a. Problems related to boredom

Respondents gave details of spending many hours in their cells with nothing to do. The boredom they felt lead to frustration, rumination on the past and on the pains of imprisonment. Prisoners felt this could potentially lead to drug use, as a way of escaping the reality of being stuck inside. One prisoner even stated that “staff get bored too. They look for something to kick off, or will get petty just to pass the time.”

At least 50% of every wing are behind their door every day. Many people are unemployed or underemployed.

HMP Stoke Heath

Sometimes you can be banged up Fri, Sat and Sun here.

HMP Eastwood Park

Out of cell time was also criticised as being under-resourced and of insufficient quality, although this does differ considerably by establishment.

The education department is deeply flawed. Whilst the tutors do their best for the prisoners, there is a lack of funding available and constant barriers being put in place. The courses that are available do not exceed level 2 and only run for a matter of weeks, some even a week, so prisoners get very little or nothing from them. This is contributing to the conflict, tension and violence in prisons, particularly creating boredom and a lack of self-worth among prisoners.

HMP Long Lartin

Prisoners felt like this was contributing to a sense of mental and physical deterioration.

More critically, the talents and skills that people need to make a positive community wither away when they cannot be put to good use behind bars. Prisoners end up worse off than when they arrived.

HMP The Verne

Some prisoners spoke to us about their identity as prisoners and how any stretch of time in prison creates not only a physical but a psychological distance between them and mainstream society, which is considered stressful. One respondent felt that improved collaboration between the community and prisons could be beneficial to more than just prisoners' self-worth:

You can't lock every man up forever who commits a crime worthy of a prison sentence, so public perceptions of what an average prisoner is like need to be addressed... There are many opportunities to utilise prisoners for the good of society which would also, no doubt, improve public perception.

HMP Brixton

b. Solutions to dealing with boredom

Having something to occupy time was seen to be important, for multiple reasons. Firstly, to alleviate boredom, but also to develop skills and help to remain connected to society in some way.

Give us more in cell work. Hobbies, music etc. A wider variety of hobbies should be allowed that are not a danger to health.

HMP Bure

Lack of education or ability to amuse themselves is a cause. Many people in today's society have to be continually stimulated and get bored very quickly.

HMP Stafford

Give prisoners the sense that they are not spending dead time... make us feel we have a place in society.

HMP Dovegate

There was a strong sense among the prisoners we spoke to (and some staff) that prisons need to better utilise existing skills within their population. Many showed a desire for purposeful activity that contributes to prison life, builds confidence and self-esteem, and improves their chances of success on release.

Make it mandatory for all prisons to have car repair shops. Brick laying, tiling, plumbing, paint shop, building trade workshops where it can lead to self-employment.

HMP Isle of Wight

Having more therapeutic activities such as growing fruit and veg and having chickens.

HMP Isis

More activities for the men to take part in to improve morale / confidence.

HMP Isis (staff)

Bring back prisoner workmen, we have qualified electricians, engineers, construction workers etc sewing prisoner clothing while the MOJ spend billions on Carillion type companies ... we need jobs that are relevant to our skills which instils pride and self-esteem.

HMP Wakefield

One prisoner gave his own story of success, finding opportunities to occupy his mind on a long prison sentence.

I slowly came off the medication and started reading a lot of books. I engaged with the prison regime and decided to enrol onto a course in the education department. I have since done all the courses offered by the education department here in Long Lartin and also took part in two art exhibitions within the prison. I entered some of my art at the Koestler art awards and achieved an award. I wanted to stay positive, help fellow inmates with apps, writing letters and emotional support. I am now a Shannon Trust mentor, a peer mentor and I also help new inmates on inductions.

HMP Long Lartin

We have been sent multiple magazines and newsletters detailing prisoner led initiatives and good opportunities for prisoners. Many of them can be found below:

What prisoners said helps:

HMP Guys Marsh – Hen farm - In total the hen farm employs 12 prisoners, and they are in the process of designing an accredited qualification in animal husbandry for future participants. Prisoners we spoke to told us of the impact working there had on their own progression. They all referenced one prisoner in particular who's spent nearly 30 years in prison. He was described as being hard to reach, reclusive, and did not engage with staff or other prisoners. Through working with the hens, he has become much more confident, and in the words of one of the prisoners we spoke to:

He's a completely different person now, it's been amazing to see the transformation.

Plans are being made to expand the farm and introduce new animals, and the initiative has even been featured on television.

HMP Stocken – has introduced buskers on the work route between residential units and industries and workshops. According to respondents to the consultation this has improved morale and led to a reduction in violent incidents on the way to work.

HMP Lowdham Grange – Inside Media - video editing and production workshop led by a former BBC producer who has trained up a number of residents in video editing and production techniques. A highly valued and innovative project, Lowdham have taken 'storybook dads' to a new level. Residents learn the skills required to create animations and storybook backgrounds which are then matched to video footage of residents reading stories for their children. We saw incredible footage of fathers acting out bedtime stories within an animated world based on the popular children's book, 'Leo the Lion'.

This free service works by uploading the finished video onto a secure platform which only the intended recipient can access. Families receive a time limited, unique passcode which they use to log on to the platform from home, without being able to access anyone else's video. Over time residents can create multiple videos which can always be accessed by their loved ones.

HMP Maidstone – the garden and horticulture are well established, run by an enthusiastic member of staff and clearly supported by the Governor and SMT. This leads to obvious and tangible benefits including 16 prisoners engaged on a full time basis, mostly undertaking formal training, a lot of plants and shrubs in beds, containers and hanging baskets throughout the prison, use of the garden area during family days, including signs and information to help dads interact with their children, growing herbs for use in cooking and the Tai Chi class using the garden in the summer months. (submitted by a prisoner at HMP Ford)

HMP East Sutton Park – knitting and crocheting – “its keeping my hands busy”, “Making my own jumper and clothing for my grandchildren, so satisfying”, “passes the time (of which I have too much), “It helps my arthritis, as I need to keep my fingers moving”, “Its relaxing and calming”

HMP Dartmoor - desktop publishing and braille

HMP Nottingham – VR headsets as an incentive for people in employment. Residents are allowed 10 or 15 minutes to wear the headsets either at the end or during their shifts. Headsets allow residents to momentarily remove themselves from prison, with VR footage including mountain tops, beaches and others.

4. Recommendations

There were more ideas for reform than we can list in a report of this kind, but some emerged as particularly influential or innovative. They are described here:

- Reduce the number of people in prison. This will reduce violence, as cell sharing in unsuitable accommodation escalates tension, with potential for violence, and overcrowding drives many of the behaviours, such as seeking to engineer transfers, which create conflict.
- Prisons should as a general presumption avoid mixing long sentence prisoners on wings with short sentence prisoners and avoid them sharing cells.
- Ensure regular access to well-maintained outside spaces and fresh air to reduce mental distress.
- Access to family should be prioritised with well-resourced family days, including innovative ideas such as access to pets, events geared to teenage children, and held in more relaxed surroundings.
- User involvement approaches, with prisoners being given opportunities to contribute to prison life in a meaningful way, are essential.
- Every prison should train prisoners or volunteers in the prisoners' rights framework (the rules and instructions that apply to them and the means to challenge decisions in a legitimate way), to ensure prisoners are able to self-advocate and resolve misunderstandings, mistakes, and failures by staff to adhere to the relevant frameworks.
- Prisons must place more value on enabling more time out of cell and promote meaningful social interaction through activities such as sports, reading, recreation, creative arts and gym. They should see this as part of a wider effort to reduce mental distress, boredom and frustration in prison which ultimately leads to conflict and violence.
- Reception prisons should have a debit card reader in reception to allow prisoners to deposit money into their prison account if they have a debit card with them on arrival, thus avoiding prisoners without cash immediately falling into debt.
- Restorative approaches to understand and heal the incidences of conflict in a prison should be prioritised.
- There should be a much greater emphasis on recording a prisoner's positive contribution to the prison on PNOMIS, including opportunities for prisoners to suggest entries of this sort themselves.
- Dynamic sentence planning with regular reviews should form the basis of the prison experience, with regular communication with both prisoners and families.
- Prison wages should be reviewed in line with inflation and the cost of living in prison and be consistent across all prisons.

- Building better relationships with staff should be facilitated through involving prisoners during staff training.
- Prisons should explore peer support initiatives designed to tackle the problem of debt leading to violence. Where possible, prisons should create in-cell work for people who are self-isolating because of a fear of reprisal from those that they are indebted to, and train peer support workers in conflict resolution and mediation.
- Leap Confronting Conflict, Rise Up and Dialogue Road Map were highlighted by prisoners as being particularly effective in conflict resolution while having a strong peer-led approach. Prisons should look to examples across the system of similar approaches which promote a greater understanding of conflict among participants, alongside practical support in dealing with conflict when it arises.

5. Conclusion

Prisoners have told us that they accept that bringing people together in one space who all have significant challenges, whether that be previous trauma, drug addiction, mental ill health, guilt, shame or a predilection to use violence to resolve issues both towards themselves and others, is no easy task for prisoners themselves, nor the prison service to handle. They told us of the stress of imprisonment itself, the overcrowding, noise, sleeplessness, loneliness, isolation, lack of hope and the fear of an uncertain future. It all makes for an uneasy journey through the system.

They told us of the lack of basic amenities, such as toilet roll and access to fresh air, the lack of access to mental health services, drug services, and the unreasonably high cost of living within prison. Many bemoaned the barriers put in the way of maintaining meaningful contact with family members, the cost of phone calls, the stress and debt caused by low prison wages. They also told us of how poor staff prisoner relationships can create a tension that escalates into conflict and can end in violence.

But what is clear from these responses is that the men and women living through the experience of imprisonment see the complexity of the causes of violence, that there is no 'silver bullet' shortcut that can address the factors all at once, and that complex, nuanced and sophisticated responses are required.

We travelled to 32 different prisons during this consultation, and received responses from people in 60 different prisons across England and Wales. What became clear to us was that there are beacons of immense good practice. There are initiatives, governors, staff teams, voluntary sector organisations, chaplaincies and supporters who are working in the system and doing tremendous work to mitigate the stress of imprisonment. They are creating the conditions where people who live or work in prison can do so in a place of safety.

If there is an overriding message from prisoners it is that elements of the HMPS initiatives known as 'Enabling Environments' or 'Rehabilitative Culture' hold the key to responding to the tension, conflict and violence in prison. These initiatives are grounded in an understanding of trauma, of the need for transparency and honesty, of the need to model citizenship and build the social capital of prisoners. They have the potential to create the opportunities for self-development, agency, growth, and hope needed to withstand the challenges that will be faced upon release. Prisoners identified the need for experienced staff to lead such work, and to build a consistent, transparent regime, based on a clear understanding of the rights of prisoners and their families as the platform on which to build.

The challenge to policymakers is how to support those staff and prisoners who are actively grappling with the challenges and promoting the elements within the Rehabilitative Culture approach. How can examples of good practice be expanded and spread across the estate, and the underlying principles that form the basis of the good work already being done, be systematically promoted and maintained across a diverse prison system? Through this report, prisoners have spoken. We should listen and act.

The Prisoner Policy Network's third report *How can we reduce tensions, conflict and violence in prison?* focuses on tensions and conflicts, because to prevent violence, we first need to understand where it comes from. We did this by listening to those at the blunt end of the crisis in prisons.

In all, we received contributions from over 1000 serving prisoners, as well as former prisoners, family members and members of staff. The quotes used throughout the report represent 54 different prisons in England and Wales, from every security category, men and women, young offender institutions as well as foreign national prisons.

Safety from physical assault is an essential requirement of an effective and humane penal system. The feedback we received not only provided insights into the factors that lead to assaults, it also described the conditions, treatment and practices that are effective in preventing violence.

This report makes clear that, despite discontent, there are initiatives, practices and approaches that prisoners feel are effective in reducing tension, conflict and violence. We hope it will bring attention to what prisoners have said helped them, and that these ideas might be put into practice more widely across the prison estate.

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