

Children of Offenders Review

A joint Department for Children, Schools and Families/Ministry of Justice review to consider how to support children of prisoners to achieve better outcomes

June 2007

department for
children, schools and families



Ministry of
JUSTICE

Executive summary

This report is the output of a review carried out jointly by the Ministry of Justice (National Offender Management Service) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (then Children, Young People and Families Directorate, DfES). We are grateful to the experts, practitioners, families and policy makers who have been involved.

The aim of the review

The review set out to:

- Examine evidence of the extent to which children who have a parent in prison have poorer outcomes
- Generate recommendations to ensure existing systems effectively support this group
- Increase awareness of this high risk and vulnerable group, enabling the needs of children of offenders to be met more effectively

What we now know

- Children of prisoners are at risk of poorer outcomes
- Many of these children have complex needs and are from socially excluded families
- But whilst there is a strong correlation, poorer outcomes are not proven to be caused by parental imprisonment
- The group is surprisingly large and is estimated to be growing

What our field visits confirmed

- Children of prisoners are an 'invisible' group: there is no shared, robust information on who they are, little awareness of their needs and no systematic support
- There is a lack of knowledge, evidence and understanding about what works
- The support system is fractured both over time, and across the family unit

What we should do

In order to improve outcomes for children of prisoners and better support their families there is need for:

- A mechanism to enable local authorities to systematically assess and meet the child's needs, underpinned by evidenced-based guidance, awareness raising and coherent information
- Close work with the Social Exclusion Task Force to incentivise delivery partners to adopt an approach that improves outcomes for the whole family, and fully engages and supports socially excluded families

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Scope of review

The review set out to:

- Examine evidence of the extent to which children who have a parent in prison have poorer outcomes;
- Generate recommendations to ensure existing systems effectively support this group;
- Increase awareness of this high risk and vulnerable group, enabling the needs of children of offenders to be met more effectively.

The review team was staffed jointly from DCSF and MoJ (NOMS) upon direction from the Inter-Ministerial Group for Reducing Re-offending. To produce this report, the review team undertook a series of steps:

- Desk-based research: to review academic literature and documentary evidence
- Focus groups: to provide a sounding board to test our assumptions, findings and recommendations
- Fieldwork: extensive series of field visits to local authorities, prisons (male, female, YOI), VCS groups, families of prisoners, probation service, and children's services
- Interviews: face to face and telephone interviews with key experts, families, national stakeholders and practitioners
- Schools survey: written questionnaire to head teachers of primary and secondary schools across the country, followed up by additional questioning

Annexes A, B and C give an overview of the review process, and a summary of fieldwork sites and interviewees.

Children of prisoners are at risk of poorer outcomes

BE HEALTHY

- Children of prisoners have about three times the risk of mental health problems compared to their peers¹

STAY SAFE

- Parental imprisonment can lead children to experience stigma, bullying and teasing³
- Children's caregivers often experience considerable distress during parental imprisonment⁴, and children are often subject to unstable care arrangements⁵

ENJOY & ACHIEVE

- Children of prisoners also experience higher levels of social disadvantage than their peers⁶

MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION

- Children of prisoners have three times the risk of anti-social/delinquent behaviour compared to their peers¹

ACHIEVE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

- Imprisonment has a negative financial impact on families, leaving families vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt and potential housing disruption⁸
- 72% of prisoners were in receipt of benefits before coming into prison⁷

CRIME REDUCTION

- 65% of boys with a convicted parent, go on to offend⁷

But whilst there is strong correlation, poorer outcomes are not proven to be caused by parental imprisonment

Family impact



Children's futures are heavily affected by family circumstance: the evidence suggests that the impact parents and family have is rarely neutral.

Existing social exclusion



As parents, prisoners are often subject to pre-existing disadvantages: most prisoners have a history of social exclusion before entering the prison system⁷ and are more likely than the general population to be unemployed, of low social class, to have low skills, multiple mental health problems, other criminal convictions, relationship difficulties, and to have experience of abuse and neglect⁹

Differential impact



The effects of parental imprisonment on children may differ according to both the child's and family's characteristics, and the wider social context in which the child lives¹. However, the experience for the child is generally negative.

Correlation not causation



While there is a strong correlation between parental imprisonment and poor child outcomes, research does not prove a causal link. There is little conclusive evidence on whether imprisoning parents actually causes these outcomes for children, or makes poor outcomes even poorer. Nonetheless, it is clear that children of prisoners are, for multiple reasons, at higher risk than the wider child population, and are likely to require extensive support.

Trigger point for early intervention



Parental imprisonment thus presents an opportunity to identify children at risk of poor outcomes and to offer support to mitigate the effects of both parental imprisonment and family circumstance.

This group is surprisingly large... and growing

- It is estimated that there are around 160,000 children with a parent in prison a year¹⁵
- This is around two and a half times the number of children in care, and over six times the number of children on the Child Protection Register
- 7% of children will see a parent imprisoned during their school years¹⁰
- 25% of men in Young Offender Institutes are, or are shortly to become, fathers¹¹
- More than 60% of women prisoners are mothers and 45% had children living with them at the time of imprisonment¹²

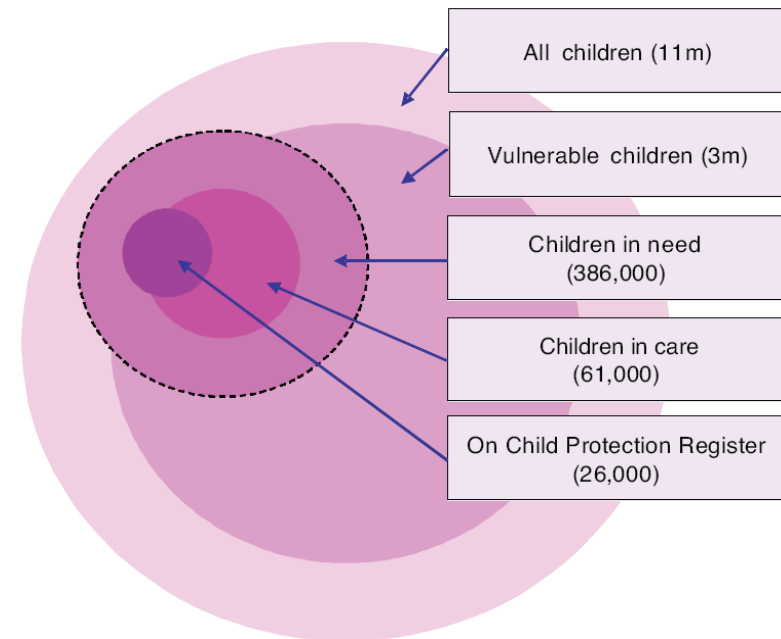
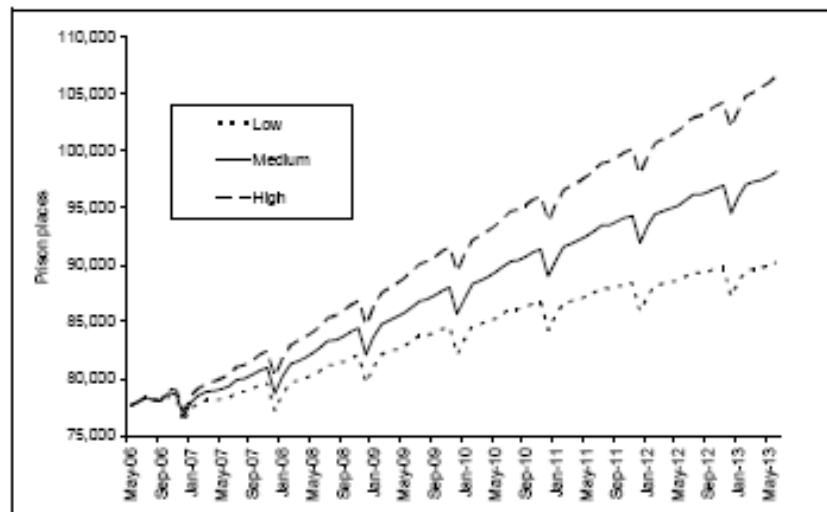


Chart 3: Projected monthly population (all scenarios)



- Given the over-representation of black and minority ethnic groups in prisons, it would be logical to assume that this translates to the children of prisoners group
- Around 55% of female prisoners have a child younger than 16 and 33% a child under 5¹³
- Based on the projected prison population growth, this group could rise to around 200,000 within the next 5 years

Practitioners on the ground are increasingly aware of the risks

“Despite calls from lobby groups, no one regularly monitors the parental status of prisoners in the UK; there may be literally millions of unidentified children experiencing parental imprisonment” *Academic*

“What support are these children getting? It is a really good question – and one I feel I should have given more attention to in the past”
Headteacher

“It’s strange to think that the majority of these boys are dads too” *Prison service officer YO1*

“If the estimation is right, I could have up to 2,000 children of prisoners in my area and I didn’t even know about them” *Local Authority, Children’s Services*

“As I sat in the visitor’s hall waiting to see my husband I thought to myself, at this rate, in another 5 years I’ll not just be visiting my man in jail but my son too”

Partner of a prisoner

“Ironically the mother would get a better service if she were to say that the father is dead”
A Local Authority

“Families are the forgotten victims of the criminal justice system” *VCS worker*

There is the opportunity for us to do a lot more

We know that:

- These children get a bad deal – and through no fault of their own
- The outcomes for children of prisoners are poor
- Many of these children have complex needs and are from socially excluded families
- There is a high probability that children who grow up in poverty and disadvantage will go on to experience the same kind of outcomes as their parents as adults⁷, hereby trapping families in generational cycles
- This group are at the heart of Every Child Matters agenda, central to the 'maintaining family ties' strand of the reducing re-offending plan, to the crime reduction programme and targeting patterns of familial offending

There is an opportunity for us to do a lot more:

- Momentum and understanding around the importance of family in improving outcomes is growing. A number of important pieces of cross-government work are underway (Social Exclusion Task Force *Families at Risk Review*, revision of NOMS commissioning framework)
- NOMS have highlighted the importance of families and are leading a strand of relevant work (see annex E) which includes the establishment of Children & Families Pathway and action plans in all regions (part of National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan), and a pathfinder to provide practical support for children & families. On the criminal justice side, this is an opportunity to clarify expectations of offender managers, what information is shared and which mainstream resources can be accessed, and to maximise the benefits of regional and local partnerships
- Yet, we need to do more to improve outcomes for children of offenders. The focus should not be on creating a new strategy but rather personalising and developing the existing offer to children and families and embedding this in existing cross-government work on improving child outcomes and reducing re-offending. We need to act now to reap the short & long-term gains that better supporting this group may bring

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We know very little about children of prisoners: they are an invisible group...

Lack of information

- There is no transparent, shared, robust data on this group. We do not know who is a child of a prisoner, where they live or which services they are currently accessing
- Local authorities have no picture of the current demand for support, prisons do not know which prisoners have children, and we do not know how many children are in care as a result of the imprisonment of their primary carer
- Where information is collected, it is patchy and not systematically shared
- Yet there was a demand to have accurate information: every school in our survey reported that they “ought” or “need” to know; some local authorities have identified a need to focus on this group

Data Collection Case Study

- Review team undertook a scoping study with London Probation to look at what information is currently recorded on the dependents of offenders in custody
- Around 40% of all the prisoners with dependents had already been identified
- Time consuming to extract the information about prisoners' dependents – about 15-20 minutes per case – because much of it is recorded in individual transactions in the Delius case tracking system and accessing the system manually is labour-intensive
- However, in a significant proportion of cases offenders' children are identified by name and age etc.
- Wide variations in the level of other detail recorded about children, dependent upon whether an OASys assessment has been undertaken and whether a full risk of harm assessment is needed. For example, cases include considerably different levels of information on the address, varying from just town to full address details including postcode. The most complete case even recorded details of the child's offending behaviour

... and receive no systematic support

**There is no
systematic
support**

- Parental imprisonment does not automatically trigger an assessment of the child's needs
- Many of these children may be accessing services, but in numerous cases services did not know that their parent is in prison
- Support nationally is patchy: there is no systematic support from mainstream services and whilst there are small pockets of VCS support (such as POPS, Ormiston, PACT) they remain at a local, or possibly regional, level
- Interviewees reported that children of prisoners are rarely signposted to support services within their local communities

Our schools survey confirmed both of these findings:

Schools Survey Results

- There is no systematic mechanism for informing a school of parental imprisonment
- Only 2 schools had been informed by agencies, and in both cases it was because the children had been taken into care
- 70% hear directly from the family or indirectly via the community
- There is no 'standard' of support: In-school support varied dramatically and, where it did exist, involved combinations of a counsellor, social services, education welfare officer, Head of Year, learning mentor, pastoral manager, financial support, connexions

There is a lack of knowledge, evidence & understanding about what works

Lack of evidence of what works

- There are some promising approaches, particularly from the VCS: for example, the First Night programme at HMP Holloway has a data referral system to check on the wellbeing of the children; Ormiston Trust are establishing links to education services; HMP/YOI Askham Grange have made effective links outside the prison to mainstream services
- However, there is a lack of evaluation and independent assessment of interventions and support packages: none of our interviewees could show the link to improved outcomes for children, and few of the interventions had been independently evaluated

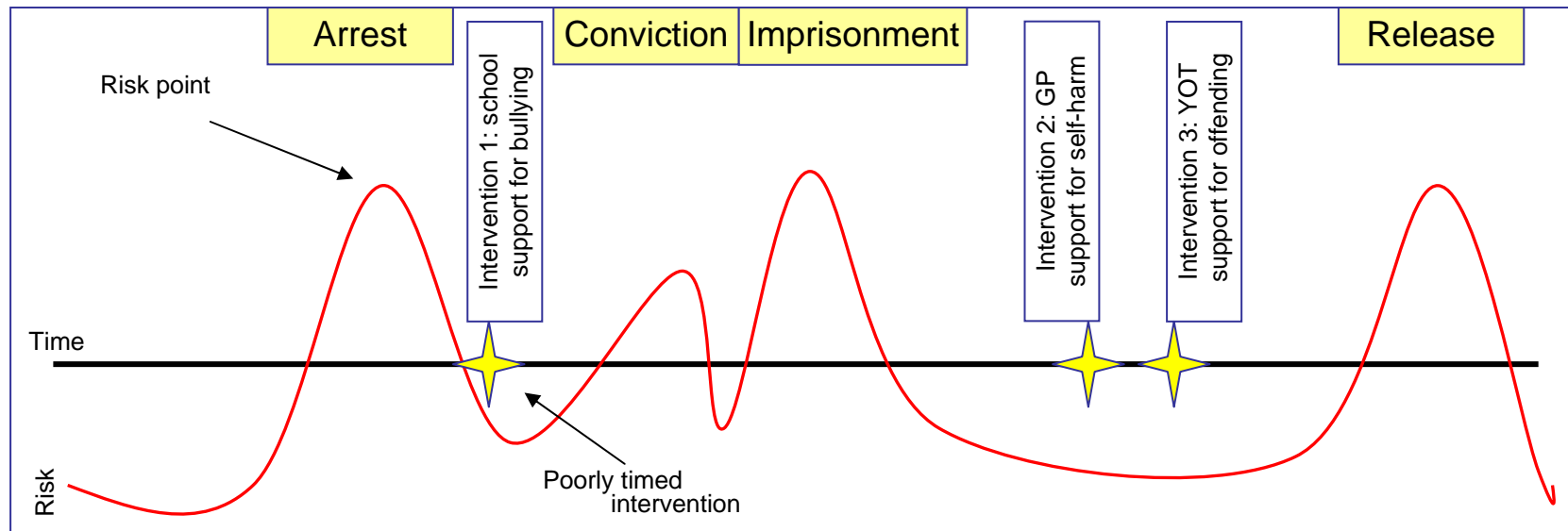
Varied understanding

- Prison and probation did not necessarily see the link with the child. Furthermore, when prison staff did acknowledge the importance of maintaining family ties it was seen principally from the perspective of what would be beneficial to the prisoner, and there were few ideas on how to do this apart from family fun days and programmes such as *Storybook Dad*
- There is little awareness raising for children's workforce and prison and probation staff, and few materials to support practitioners
- Prisons are unaware of effective practice in relation to children's services and some interventions are poorly delivered. E.g. one parenting programme we visited in a prison had participants who were not, nor planning to be, parents. Staff in one prison were planning a family day with no understanding of what activity might best support parent-child relationships
- We found evidence of misinformation: E.g. advice given to families about the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme varied enormously and included incorrect information on entitlements
- There is a poor understanding of responsibilities under Children's Act 2004: whilst it was clear that most probation and prison staff understood child protection responsibilities and that safeguarding principles were effectively embedded, few staff saw a responsibility around wider child wellbeing

The support system is fractured over time...

There is a lack of continuity around supporting the child, offender and their family over time

- For the child, support over time is disjointed, may not necessarily pick up on obvious risk points, or be effectively followed-through. We saw that as a child moves through the system, interventions tend to be made in isolation and can often be too short-term i.e. YISPs.



- There is little acknowledgement that prisoner's through-care support is crucial to a child's well-being and we saw cases where there is some support to offenders as parents inside but little or even none on the outside following release. Equally, transition points within the criminal justice system are particularly weak: a family may get some support at the point of arrest, but then none during imprisonment.
- Services tend to 'fire-fight', solving the presenting problem and supporting predominantly those with urgent problems or high level needs. Services do not seize opportunities for prevention and do not have the information to plan support. E.g., schools reported that packages of support are put in place once a regular pattern of absenteeism takes hold rather than planning for the effect of parental imprisonment earlier on

...and fractured across the family unit

There is no single coherent system of support around a family

•Prison and probation services focus on the offender with often no knowledge of the prisoner's child/family, whilst services accessed by the child are often unaware of parental imprisonment. The needs of the offender are not balanced with the needs of their family, the level of support received in prisons is rarely mirrored in the community, and support is poorly planned around a family unit. For example, we saw cases where a father was receiving drugs treatment in prison, whilst the drug-using mother in the community was given no support. Consequently, the outcome of good work around one family member is not maximised and could even be entirely lost when the other family members do not receive a complementary package of support. Furthermore, this approach will have no impact on the family's outcomes:

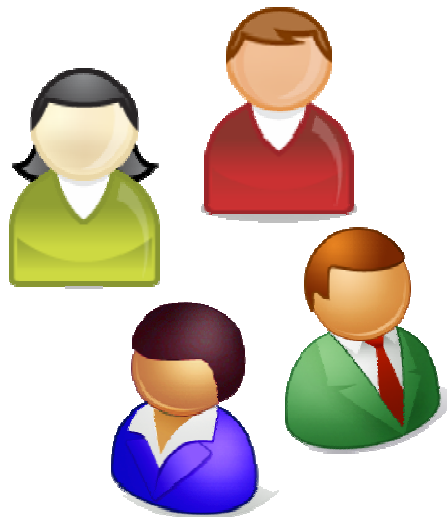
Sue, Mother 33

In community

Receiving: GP support for depression

Not receiving: Counselling support for loss/stigma because of husband's imprisonment

Not receiving: Drug treatment programme



Matt, Son 16 - in YOI

Receiving: Literacy programme

Not receiving: Alcohol treatment support

Bill, Father 36 - in prison

Receiving: Drug treatment programme through CARAT worker

Receiving: Literacy programme

Not receiving: Anger management

Gary, Son 13 – in community

Receiving: Drug treatment support from GP

Receiving: Emotional support from VCS group

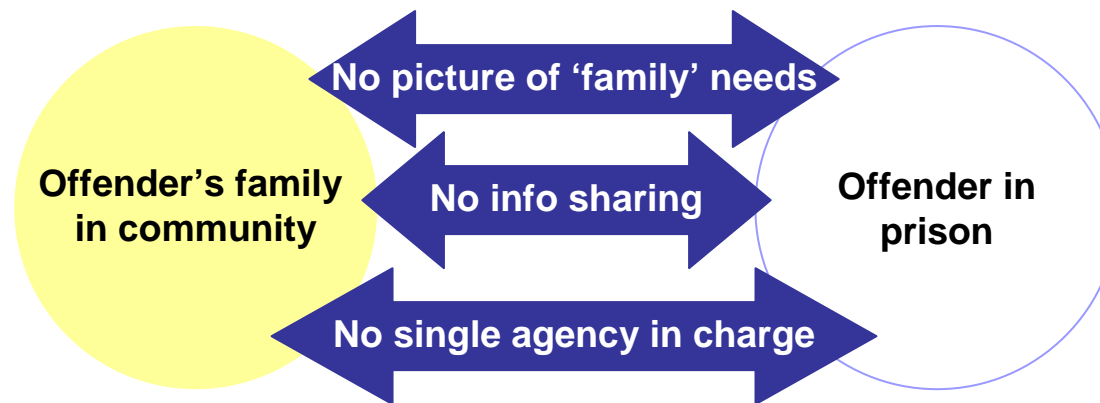
Not receiving: Educational support for truancy owing to drugs use, bullying and visiting his father & brother

The fractures in the family picture:

- Bill is receiving drug treatment but his wife and son are not. Upon release, he may start reusing
- Gary's school does not know his father and brother are in prison
- Sue's GP does not know of her husband's violent and offending behaviour

Services fail to bridge the gaps

- This difference in focus and exclusivity of service is reinforced geographically in that there is a problematic 'gap' between prison and community locations. At an average of at least 51 miles from home¹⁴, a prisoner's contact with their children is disrupted and it is widely reported that, owing to their absence, it is extremely difficult to cope with the strain left both emotionally and financially on the remaining carer.



- There is little support for parents as carers of a child of a prisoner, poor understanding of how support to the carer can indirectly support the child, and little recognition in the criminal justice system that prisoners are parents. For example, sentencing does not take into account children's wellbeing and child care arrangements.
- Our field visits confirmed that there are few incentives to bridge these gaps and to work with a family as a whole, and no single agency charged with leading a network. For example, there are currently no mechanisms or incentives to replicate the encouraging, but small-scale, 'family' approach work that Thames Valley Partnership are doing locally on a national scale.

We need action to improve outcomes for the child and their family

To improve the child's outcomes

Aim:

Use parental entry into prison to trigger a process which enables the secure sharing of relevant information between agencies, and systematic assessment and support of the child

To do this:

- Explore the legal and resource implications and feasibility in establishing a secure information sharing mechanism to identify the children of prisoners
- Systematically assess the child's need to gauge level of vulnerability and need
- Enable service providers to better meet these needs through guidance, information and awareness raising

"Think Family"

Aim:

Refocus the system so adults' and children's services collaborate through a 'whole family' approach that maximises the impact of individual interventions on the whole family's outcomes

To do this:

- Criminal justice system needs to see families as a resource which are part of the solution, and ascertain how it can use its efforts to best effect
- NOMS to develop a robust vision for families of offenders and set clear and achievable expectations of offender managers and local partners to ensure improved access to mainstream services
- Work with Social Exclusion Task Force to take forward the Families at Risk work and incentivise a joined up family-focused approach across national and local government

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Annex A: Review Process

Stage 1 - Feb

- 21/02 Issue Tree Workshop
- 27/02 Children and families of Offenders Reference Group

Stage 2 - March

- 08/03 Problem and Scoping stakeholder Workshop
- 20/03 SETF conference
- 20/03 Thames Valley Partnership
- 30/03 SCIE

Stage 3 - April

- 02/04 KIDS VIP
- 03/04 PACT HMP Pentonville & HMP Holloway
- 10/04 NCB
- 11/04 Ormiston Trust HMP Norwich
- 17/04 YJB
- 17/14 ADCS
- 19/04 POPS Manchester, HMP Hindley & Forest Bank
- 26/04 Essex CC & Probation Service
- 27/04 Tower Hamlets CS

Stage 4 – May/June

- 16/05 HMP Askham Grange
- 04/06 Children & Families of Offenders reference Group
- 12/06 Sound Board Stakeholder Workshop
- 18/06 Submission to Ministers

Stage 5 - July

- 03/07 Submission to Inter-Ministerial Reducing Reoffending Board

Scoping & Set up

Diagnosis & Planning

Field-work

Reporting

Follow-up

Activities

- Scoping meeting
- Agree review purpose and output
- Identify relevant policy areas to engage with
- Agree reporting routes
- Issue tree exercise to establish key questions
- Agree key baseline info requirements with analysts
- Agree timelines and project team
- Set up Seminar

- Review existing evidence
- Identify delivery chain
- Hold seminar
- Test questions
- Agree visits & interview lists for fieldwork
- Prepare interview pack/brief
- Confirm arrangements for visits & interviews
- Develop initial hypothesis
- Circulate to steering groups

- Undertake fieldwork visits
- Interviews: key departmental staff, stakeholders, people on delivery chain
- Carry out further analysis
- Focus group/team meetings to test initial hypotheses and build initial storyline

- Team workshop to confirm findings and report structure
- Close data gaps
- Draft report
- Team meeting to agree recommendations
- Test findings and recommendations at 'sound board' workshop
- Present report and send to senior customers
- Draft Ministerial Submissions

- Update on Ministerial response
- Presentations to departments on next steps
- Draft and agree Action Plan to take forward review recommendations
- Agree teams to implement recommendations
- Identify and agree resource commitments

Annex B: Fieldwork



Annex C: Fieldwork summary - the review team visited a range of areas, selected to provide a broad view of the issues

Yorkshire and Humberside

HMP/YOI Askham Grange: 131 operational capacity, open women's prison, 10 mother-baby places
GOYH

North West

HMP&YOI Hindley: Sentenced young adults (not lifers) and both convicted and unconvicted juveniles. Operational capacity 455
HMP&YOI Forest Bank 800-place B Male Local Prison, operational capacity of 1064. young offenders from greater Manchester area
POPS
Grassroots
English Churches Housing Group

South

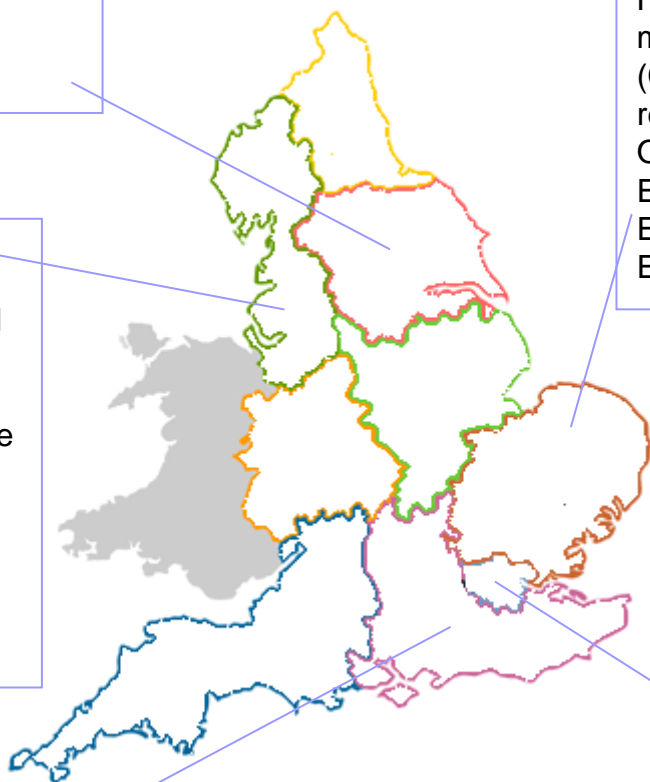
HMP/YOI Highdown: 747 capacity, 3 family days/year with 7 families. Currently operating as an overflow for YOs from HMYOI Feltham and HMP Chelmsford.
Surrey CC
Thames Valley Partnership

East

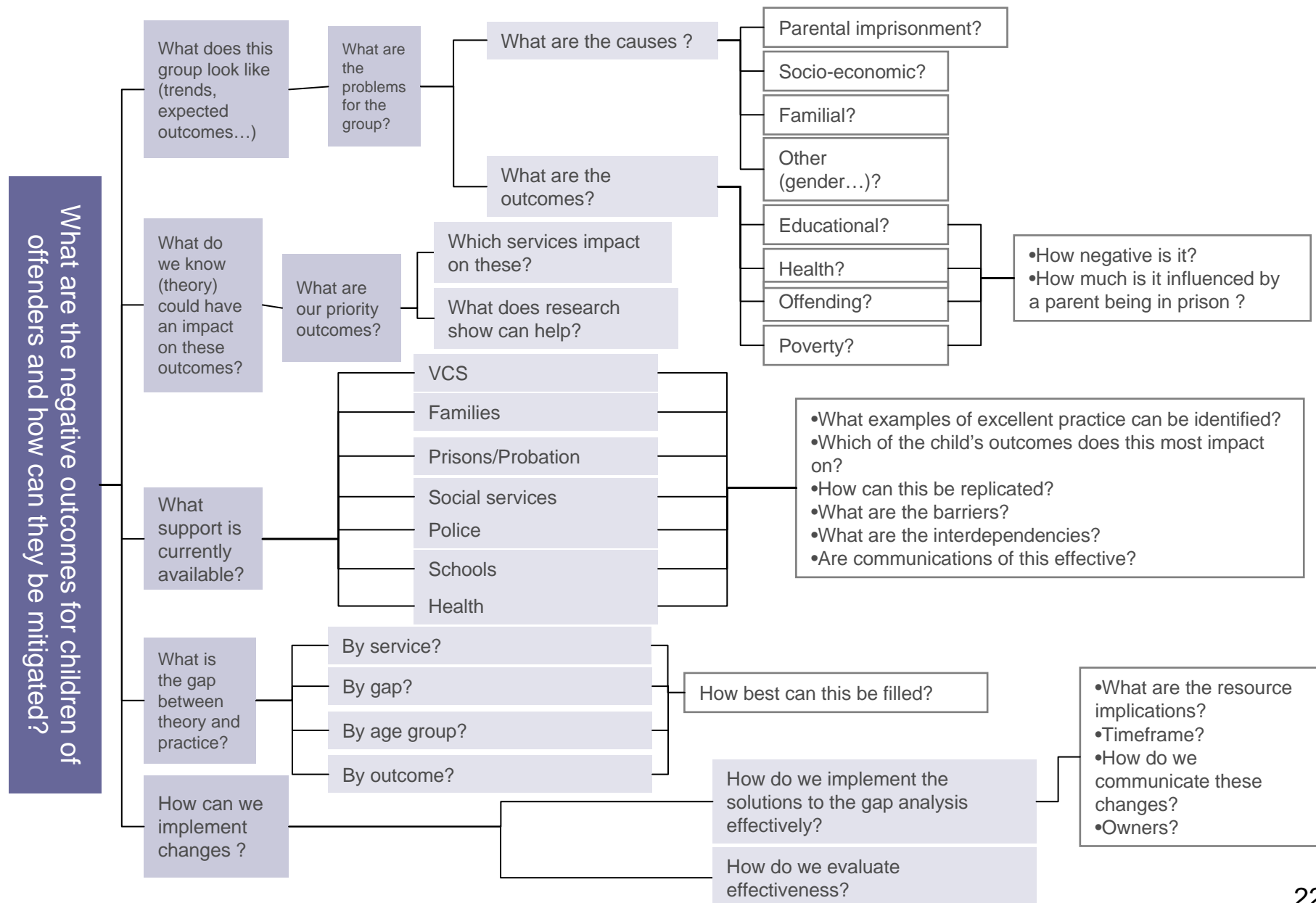
HMP&YOI Norwich visitor's centre: adult men and young offenders, convicted (Category B & Category C) and on remand. Operational capacity of 824
Ormiston Trust
Eastern Region Partnership
Essex CC
Essex Probation service

London

HMP Brixton: Time for Families
HMP Pentonville: local male prison, operational capacity 1152
HMP&YOI Holloway: women, operational capacity 478, fully integrated resettlement / induction strategy and offending behaviour programmes
PACT
London Resettlement team



Annex D: Issue tree



Annex E: Cross-government reducing re-offending delivery plan - Children and Families Pathway

- Children and Families Pathway- part of the National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan
- Inter-Ministerial Group on Reducing Re-offending has agreed pathway should be priority for development
- Pathway aims to ensure interests of offenders' children are addressed through:
 - Maintaining family ties, where appropriate
 - Improved parenting
 - Developing better materials – e.g. translations for Minority Ethnic Families
 - Advice and guidance to families
 - Developing a family friendly focus in prisons and through visitor centres
- Pathway boards in all regions, often led by the VCS, and established at local level in prisons
- Three year West Midlands pathfinder aims to provide practical support for children and families – focusing on BME families and those who are not engaging mainstream services.
- Currently consulting on a Framework to improve support for children and families and inform NOMS' commissioning, joint-commissioning and partnerships

Annex F: Reference Literature

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 - ³Boswell, G. and Wedge, P. (2002) *Imprisoned Fathers and their Children*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
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 - ⁸Grimshaw, R., Smith, R., Romeo, R., Knapp, M., (2007) Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families, Joseph Rowntree foundation
 - ⁹Singleton, N. et al. (1998). Psychiatric morbidity among prisoners: summary report. Office for National Statistics. London: Stationery Office.
 - ¹⁰Shaw, R. (1992). *Prisoners Children: What are the issues?* (Ed.) London: Routledge
 - ¹¹Inside Fatherhood, a guide to giving inmates, children and partners a fresh start (fathers Direct, 2004) commissioned by the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit DfES
 - ¹²Wolfe T. *Counting the Cost: The Social and Financial Implications of Women's Imprisonment*, (1999)
 - ¹³HMPS website http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/prison_life/femaleprisoners/
 - ¹⁴In 2005 male prisoners were held an average of 51 miles from their home, and women were held, on average, 62 miles away from home (distances will be even further for women coming from Wales). Home Office House of Common Written Answers, 11 Jan 2005
 - ¹⁵It is estimated that during 2005, 160,000 children had a British national parent in prison at some time, . Based on the resettlement survey Niven, S. and Stewart D. 2005 'resettlement outcomes on release from prison in 2003' Home Office Research findings no. 248; Home Office; London., which showed the average number of children per prisoner was 0.87. This figure was multiplied by the number of British nationals who were in custody at some point during the year. Some prisoners were in custody more than once during the year and therefore will have been counted twice.
- Murray, J., & Farrington, D. P. (2006). Evidence-Based Programs for Children of Prisoners. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 5, 721-736.
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