

# BETTER TOGETHER: PREVENTING REOFFENDING AND HOMELESSNESS

## SUMMARY



**“It’s a cycle...my probation officer didn’t agree with my keyworker, but I need to keep both of them happy. I need to keep my keyworker happy so I can keep my accommodation. But if my probation officer isn’t happy, I’ll end up back in jail!”**

Client

**There are complex links between homelessness and re-offending, where each can be a cause and a result of the other. Over 75% of homelessness services in England support clients who are prison leavers.<sup>1</sup> In turn, ex-prisoners who are homeless upon release are more likely to re-offend than those who have stable accommodation.<sup>2</sup>**

Despite these links, little attention has been given to understanding how homelessness and criminal justice agencies work together to support clients. How do those in the criminal justice sector address an individual's

housing needs? How do staff in the homelessness sector help their clients to stop offending? And for the client at the heart of it, are we getting it right?

Over 400 individual staff members from across the sectors told us their views, and more than 75 clients spoke to us about what has helped them to make positive changes in their lives. This short report provides homelessness and criminal justice agencies, and policy makers with a summary of the issues that need to be addressed.

# THE CONTEXT

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**“Getting housing providers to give someone a chance and look beyond their offending history is a challenge that we face almost daily.”**

Staff, criminal justice agency

Across criminal justice and homelessness services, from the frontline to senior management, we all have a part to play in improving the lives of our clients. However, limited resources, external pressures and different working styles sometimes make it hard to find solutions and can put up barriers between the sectors.

**“There is a poor understanding of how to work in partnership and its value...We have very good links with frontline staff, but little contact higher up because we don't fit into their boxes”**

Housing provider

Many individuals have complex needs which don't fit within organisational boundaries and specialised job roles. And while challenges exist, there is a strong desire to find new ways of working and forging links at a local level.

## KEY MESSAGES

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**Partnerships need more co-ordination:** To ensure cross sector working underpins all our work, partnerships shouldn't be seen as an extra – they are a must-have.

**“There are lots of people working really hard and wanting to make a difference, but a lack of a co-ordinated approach when it comes to joint working”**

Staff, criminal justice sector

**Addressing offending and housing needs head on:**

Housing providers need to see offending as a support need and should be equipped to tackle it, whilst the criminal justice sector should be encouraged to always support clients with their accommodation needs.

**“They ask you a lot about offending and stuff when you arrive, to make sure you're not going to set fire to the place, but that's about it really.”**

Client

**Learning from each other:** Both sectors can improve their understanding of each other's culture, needs and working practices. Despite perceptions, we do share mutual aims for service users, and have a lot to offer each other.

**“Communication is the biggest thing that needs to improve. A clearer understanding of the problems, issues and risks that offenders face is much needed”**

Support Worker, Drug & Alcohol Service

**Small changes equal big results:** Some of the things that make the difference can be easily overlooked. These can range from building and joining local networks, using inclusive language, and fine-tuning the processes used on a day to day basis.

**“It's hard to find time for the ‘nice bits’ of building relationships. I'd like more links with probation, not just around individual cases but so we can bounce ideas off each other too. We should push for this to happen more.”**

Deputy Manager, supported housing service

## PRINCIPLES FOR CROSS SECTOR WORKING

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**Joint working needs to be embedded at every level. Prisons, police, probation, local authorities, homelessness services and service commissioners all have a role to play. These principles draw on the experiences shared by staff and service users about what works.**

### 1) Help from on high: the strategic vehicle

Effective cross-sector working needs to be driven at a strategic level to provide the impetus and continued focus on partnerships. Jointly owned strategies, working groups or partnership frameworks can help achieve this.

### 2) Overcome the culture clash

A shared understanding of mutual goals is an essential foundation for more productive working relationships.

### 3) Colocation, colocation, colocation

Positive cross sector working and client support is often the result of colocation between agencies. This should be explored as an option where possible.

### 4) See eye to eye: benefits of face to face contact and networks

Personally knowing who to contact for a query or referral sounds simple, but it makes a real difference and we need to invest more time into building these links.

### 5) All at the table: multi-agency panels and support

Clients had a consistently positive experience of joint sessions and the difference this made to their support. Where a client is in contact with more than one agency, multi-agency panels and support planning should be common practice.

### 6) Common knowledge: cross-sector learning

Many staff we spoke to would like training about how each sector can complement the other's client support. The few who had received this training found it was positive for clients and staff alike.

### 7) Pass it on: share information wisely

Even with protocols and agreements in place, we are often reluctant to share information that might prevent somebody's homelessness or reoffending. All staff need to be empowered to take the initiative to pro-actively share information for the benefit of the client.

**“Cross sector working... it's the keystone to Integrated Offender Management”**

Police respondent

## EFFECTIVE SUPPORT: KEY FINDINGS

**How do homelessness agencies support clients to reduce their risk of re-offending? How does the criminal justice sector assist these clients with their housing needs? And for the client, at the heart of this, what makes the difference?**

### WHAT WORKS: CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVE

#### 1) A roof of one's own: accommodation

Clients said homelessness in itself had a major impact on their likelihood to offend. Finding the right accommodation and support to maintain it is paramount.

#### 2) Not a number: an individualised approach

A good support worker makes a real difference – someone who is committed, persistent and who believes that change is possible.

#### 3) Better in myself: self-esteem building

Offending has a clear link to a person's expectations and aspirations. Self-esteem was described by clients as a motivating force for action and was strongly linked to reduced offending behaviour.

#### 4) At the intersection: cross sector support

Where cross sector support doesn't work, the result is frustration and conflict; where it does more co-ordinated services bring a positive sense of being valued and moving forward.

### 5) Work works: employment

Many clients identified the importance of employment in reducing reoffending. It made a big difference in clients' lives and provided a lot in return. But, the gap to employment can be huge, not only related to skills, but also self-belief and attitudes of employers.

### 6) Clear headed: drugs and alcohol

Many saw a strong link between their offending and substance use. While we can't assume addressing one will solve the other, receiving support around substance use issues is essential to many individuals.

### 7) Keeping busy: structure in daily life

Boredom is highly destructive, often a trigger to offending. Structured and meaningful activity which achieves something valuable, often for others, has far-reaching benefits.

### 8) All about me: personal responsibility

Clients said that external support won't work until the person is ready to change. However, a supportive environment can contribute to a client reaching and acting on this point of change-readiness.

**“I meet every few weeks with probation, my drug worker and my keyworker at the hostel. Everyone knows what's planned and what the other one is doing”**

Client

### WHAT WORKS: AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

#### 1) Get in: referrals and assessment

There is a disconnect between the risk assessment of clients in criminal justice agencies and homelessness services. Suggestions on how to overcome this included:

- Greater consideration of the client's engagement level, or distance travelled, alongside offending history or risk level.
- A common multi-agency assessment tool for risk and support needs to improve referral processes.

#### 2) Share the load: joint commissioning and investment

Linking up services and creating new opportunities for joint investment and partnerships reduces 'siloed' support provision. Integrated Offender Management (IOM)<sup>3</sup> and Community Safety Partnerships are good starting points at a local level.

#### 3) Upfront: addressing offending head-on

Addressing offending should be a part of core training for staff in homelessness services. A better understanding of risk, identifying triggers and appropriate interventions from a criminal justice perspective is critical.

#### 4) How it all works: building life skills

We shouldn't underestimate the need for life skills in reducing reoffending and homelessness. Those who have been in care or in prison multiple times are likely to need extra support to develop and maintain these skills.

## 5) Multi-tasking: don't compartmentalise support needs

Services stressed the need to think laterally about support needs, such as supporting clients to access employment or meaningful activity rather than assuming other needs – particularly substance use – must be stabilised first.

**“What's helped has been taking time to understand the cultures, learn how each other work, and what pressures we each work under.”**

Staff, criminal justice agency

## WHAT NEXT?

**Our research has shown that there is significant will and energy to improve partnership working and address the long-standing challenges. With greater financial pressures, and as we shift to a more localised response, joint approaches will prove ever more crucial in meeting our shared aims of reducing reoffending and homelessness.**

### AT A LOCAL LEVEL

**Agencies must look beyond organisational boundaries:** and take a fresh look at who their local partners are.

**Partnership isn't optional, it must be a responsibility at every level:** from strategic and commissioning, through to the frontline.

**Organisations in both sectors must ensure that staff have the right knowledge to address housing and offending needs:** working with complex individuals requires a special set of skills, opportunities to gain these need to be more widely available.

**Every IOM should involve the homelessness sector as a key partner in its approach:** housing should be represented in every IOM structure, while homelessness services have a responsibility to get involved with their local IOM team.

**All agencies should make better use of data:** as 'Payment by Results' models develop, we need to be smarter about the data we collect and analyse. Suitable housing should be built into this as a matter of course.

**Local authorities must protect longer term funding for homelessness services:** homelessness services help to reduce reoffending and this must be explicitly recognised by Local Authorities, including the way services are commissioned and assessed.

### AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The **Ministry of Justice** should send a clear message to every prison and probation trust about the importance of improving partnerships with homelessness organisations. Housing and support must be available for every person leaving prison, including those serving short sentences.

The **Home Office** should promote the importance of integrating homelessness providers throughout the rollout of the IOM programme.

The **DWP** must recognise ex-offenders as a potentially vulnerable group who face multiple barriers to the labour market, and as such require greater support in their journey to employment.

**We must challenge the restrictions faced by ex-offenders in housing:** there are opportunities for the Homes and Communities Agency, National Housing Federation and local authorities to work with housing associations and private landlords to remove unfair practice.

**Homeless Link will work with both sectors to take forward the learning from this project through:**

- the publication of our full report with detailed findings and case studies from the project
- sharing learning through events
- seeking opportunities to develop training and further resources.

**“Need to have a place, some structure when you're released, somewhere to get away and start a new life. Can't do it on your own, you need help and a normal routine.”** Client

### FURTHER INFORMATION

For the full report, case studies and related information please see [www.homeless.org.uk/criminal-justice-project](http://www.homeless.org.uk/criminal-justice-project)

To find out more, or to contribute your own case study:  
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Homeless Link is the national umbrella organisation for frontline homelessness charities in England.  
[www.homeless.org.uk](http://www.homeless.org.uk)

1 Homeless Link, SNAP 2011 available at [www.homeless.org.uk/snap-2011](http://www.homeless.org.uk/snap-2011)

2 Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 'Guide to Housing and Housing Support Options for Offenders and People at Risk of Offending' London, 2005

3 Integrated Offender Management is a framework to encourage a multi-agency approach to working with offenders in the community. See [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/reducing-reoffending/iom/](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/reducing-reoffending/iom/)