

Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel Policy Review 2012/13: Reducing Reoffending

Final Report

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FOREWORD FROM THE LEAD SCRUTINY MEMBER FOR RESPONSIVE SERVICES AND CUSTOMER CARE

I am pleased to present the findings and recommendations of the Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel's first policy review which looked at reducing reoffending.



There is little doubt that the drive to reduce reoffending in our city is critical. By reducing re-offending the social and economic costs to our communities are reduced. In Sunderland, we found that the wide range of partners supporting this agenda are committed to reducing reoffending, there are a range of services and initiatives in place to address, and a willingness to work differently to achieve better results. That being said, levels of reoffending remain higher than other areas of the country which can be attributed in part to the social and economic factors present in the city;

We are also in a period of major reform to criminal justice and health care; provisions outlined in the Breaking the Cycle Green Paper, Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 will provide criminal justice agencies with new challenges, not least the need to create and embed links and relationships with the Health and Wellbeing Board and Police and Crime Commissioner.

A seamless and effective transition from custody to the community dramatically improves the chances reducing or ceasing offending upon release, and given the changing landscape for prisons across the country it is vital that we work closely with prisons in the NE to give priority to this.

Stable and secure accommodation is a fundamental requirement if an offender is to be rehabilitated. We saw positive work being undertaken by the Council to address this, but we remain concerned about the limited availability of supported accommodation and social housing. In the context of likely further public sector budget reductions, future commissioning and new and innovative ways of working are crucial to improving the accommodation offer for offenders and in particular women offenders.

Finally, we recognise the importance of understanding the complex needs of veterans who offend and consider that we need to work better with organisations in the community who work with veteran offenders.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who contributed to what has been a very interesting policy review. In particular the Panel members; supported accommodation providers, the Integrated Offender Management team, the HMP Northumberland team and the officers who supported us in carrying out the review.

Councillor David Errington
Lead Scrutiny Member for Responsive Services and Customer Care

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel's Policy Review 2012/13: Reducing Reoffending.

2. AIM OF THE POLICY REVIEW

- 2.1 Within the revised scrutiny arrangements Lead Scrutiny Members and their respective Panels will undertake up to two policy reviews per year, of approximately three to four months in duration. This way of working takes account of the rapidly changing policy environment within which the Council and its partners are operating. Given the timescales in which to complete the review, the Scrutiny Panel decided to focus its attentions on three areas of the Safer Sunderland Partnership's key priorities for reducing re-offending as follows:-

- (i) The city's Integrated Offender Management Unit (IOM);
- (ii) Offender support in custody and the initial transition into the community; and
- (iii) Tackling accommodation issues for offenders.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 3.1 The agreed terms of reference for the review were:-

- (a) To understand the importance of reducing re-offending in the city, how this contributes to the council's corporate outcomes framework and how national policy and legislation is translated to a local level;
- (b) To examine the role and responsibilities of the local authority and partners in regard to reducing re-offending;
- (c) To consider the role of the Integrated Offender Management Unit in the city and measuring progress to date against expected outcomes;
- (d) To investigate the Safer Sunderland Partnership's key priority to reduce re-offending by working in partnership to bridge the gap between custody and the community; and
- (e) To investigate the challenges and opportunities specifically in regard to tackling accommodation issues.

4. MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 The membership of the Responsive Services and Customer Care Panel consisted of Councillors Errington (Lead Scrutiny Member), Curran, Gibson, Heron, Kay, Lawson, Richardson, Scott, Thompson and Wiper.

5. METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

5.1 The following methods of investigation were used for the Review:

- (a) Desktop research (including consideration of best practice from other local authorities and the VCS);
- (b) Attendance at the Offender Accommodation and Support Conference held by No Offence;
- (c) Evidence from individual offenders;
- (d) Evidence from Housing Providers, Homelessness Projects and Shelter **(Appendix 1)**;
- (e) Evidence from the Sunderland Armed Forces Network;
- (f) Evidence from the Integrated Offender Management Unit;
- (g) Evidence from the City Council's Officers;
- (h) Evidence from HMP Northumberland; and
- (i) Evidence from Northumbria Probation Trust.

6. FINDINGS OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

6.1 Sections 7 to 13 outline in detail the findings of the Policy Review; Reducing Reoffending.

7. SETTING THE SCENE

“The social and economic costs of re-offending are estimated between £7 billion and £10 billion a year”
(National Audit Office)

“Half of all crime is committed by people who have already been convicted of a criminal offence”

“ 75% of young offenders sentenced to youth custody re-offend within a year”

7.1 These statistics are concerning however a relatively small number of prolific offenders tend to be responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime. Recent evidence suggests there is a group of 16,000 active offenders nationally at any one time, each with over 75 previous convictions.

Pathways Out of Offending

7.2 The Social Exclusion Unit report *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners* published in 2002 recognised a range of factors that contribute significantly to the likelihood of an individual re-offending - known as ‘pathways out of offending’. These were refined in 2004 in the National Re-offending Action Plan and added to as a result of the review undertaken by Baroness Corston in 2010:-

- 1. Accommodation and Support
- 2. Education, Training and Employment

3. Mental and Physical Health
4. Drugs & Alcohol
5. Finance, Benefits and Debt
6. Children and Families;
7. Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour
8. Women affected by sexual exploitation and rape; and
9. Women affected by domestic violence.

Legislation and Policy Drivers

7.3 The Government has proposed reform to the criminal justice system in recognition of concerns that half of all adult offenders released from custody re-offend within a year and the expense involved in prison sentences.

- *Breaking the Cycle (Green Paper)*

Presented to Parliament in December 2010 proposing radical reform, this policy includes:-

- (a) Punishment and payback: prisons becoming places of hard work, more community sentences, financial reparation to victims;
- (b) Rehabilitating offenders to reduce crime: supporting them to abstain from drugs/alcohol for good, ensuring they pay their way and managing those with mental health problems;
- (c) Payment by results: paying providers by the results they get;
- (d) Sentencing reform: simpler sentencing framework easier for courts and public to understand, better use of community sentences; and
- (e) Youth justice: preventing offending in the first instance, effective sentencing, payment by results

- *Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012*

Provisions within the Act include:-

- (a) Legal Aid: some cases may not be eligible;
- (b) Sentencing: new powers to extend curfews to cover more hours in the day and increase maximum sentences a Magistrates court can pass; from 6 to 12 months;
- (c) Bail and remand: reduce the numbers of those who are unnecessarily remanded into custody; and
- (d) Release on licence: additional restrictions for early release on home curfew and supervision of young adult prisoners of less than 12 months.

- *Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC)*

PCC's are intended to strengthen the links between police and communities and were elected by the public on 15 November 2012. The introduction of PCCs was established in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act (2011). PCCs will have responsibility for:-

- Appointing the Chief Constable and holding them to account for running of the force;

- Setting out a five year Police and Crime Plan based on local priorities (developed in consultation with the Chief Constable, communities and others);
- Setting the annual local precept and account force budget; and
- Making grants to organisations aside from the police (including, but not limited to, Community Safety Partnerships).

The reforms within the Act pose challenges for the Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP), particularly from a funding and commissioning perspective. The Home Office Community Safety Grant the Council receives on behalf of the SSP will be transferred to the PCC from April 2013. It won't be clear immediately how the PCC intends to re-allocate this funding, possibly commissioning all services themselves, offering grants to providers or passing funding back to the SSP to commission. The outcomes of the initiatives that are currently funded will need to be evidenced to be re-commissioned. It is possible some services could end up being merged for efficiency across boundaries.

Local Context

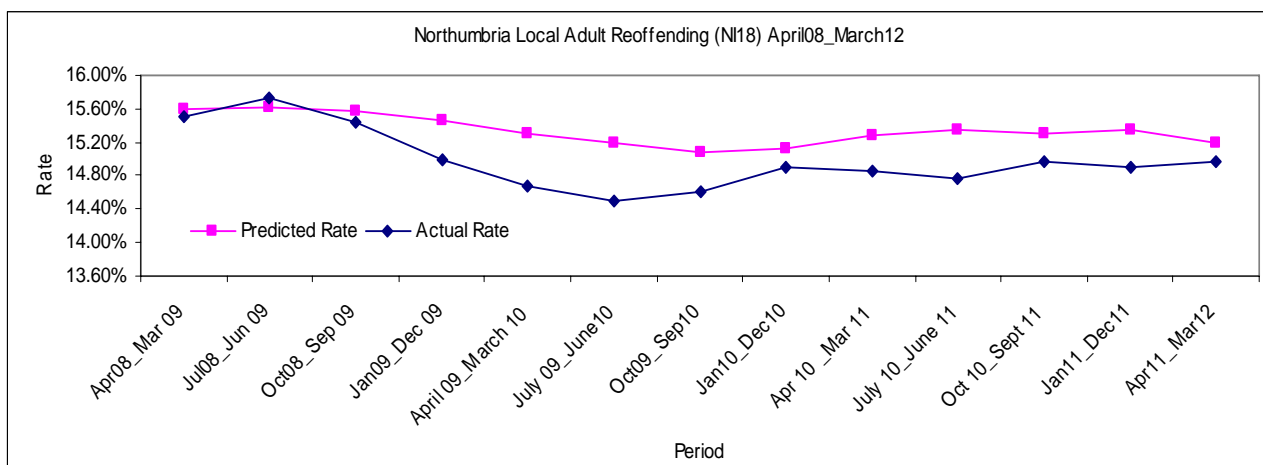
- 7.4 The Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP) brings together the public, private, community and voluntary sectors to deliver the Safer Sunderland Strategy. There are currently six 'responsible authorities' who form the SSP which are Sunderland City Council, the Primary Care Trust (PCT) (replaced by the Clinical Commissioning Group as of April 2013), Northumbria Probation Service, Northumbria Police, Northumbria Police Authority (to be revised) and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service. Collectively each member has a legal duty to work in partnership, to carry out an annual strategic assessment and implement a partnership plan to tackle crime, disorder, substance misuse and re-offending.
- 7.5 Reducing re-offending is a strategic priority for the Safer Sunderland Partnership and a delivery group comprising of crime and disorder partners drives the work of the SSP to address re-offending, of which there are sub-groups to address each reoffending pathway.
- 7.6 In September 2012, the breakdown of offenders from the city was 338 in custody and 186 on licence¹, not taking account of those on community orders. The actual rate of reoffending across the Northumbria force area has remained below the predicted rate now for three years. That being said, the difference between the actual and predicted rate of reoffending in the last data was the smallest it has been for over two years.² In Sunderland, the actual rate of reoffending has fallen by around 1.6 per cent. Worryingly, offenders in the Northumbria area are more likely to reoffend than other areas of the country, although Sunderland's figures are slightly lower than regional counterparts. Data shows that around 15 per cent of offenders will reoffend within three months and Proven Reoffending³ data states that this will rise to

¹ All offenders sentenced to 12 months or more are supervised by Northumbria Probation Trust when they come out of prison on licence.

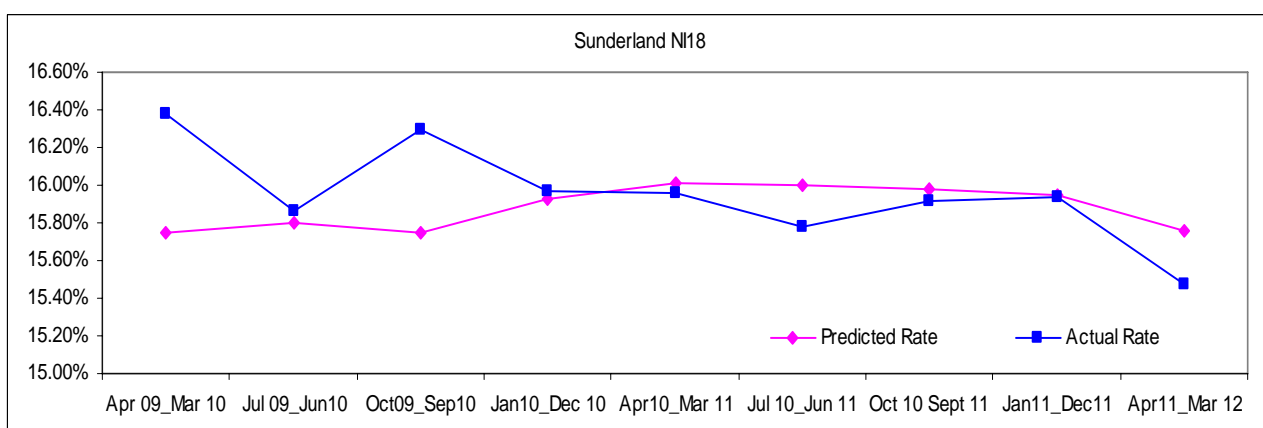
² The actual and predicted rates of reoffending are calculated taking into account the type of people on a probation caseload and includes factors such as age, gender, offence, sentence and number of offenders.

³ A proven re-offence is defined as any offence committed in a one year follow-up period and receiving a court conviction, caution, reprimand or warning in the one year follow up or a further six months waiting period.

40 per cent within twelve months. This disparity can be attributed in part to factors including economic deprivation and high unemployment rates.



Reoffending Rates for Northumbria Probation Trust – April 2008-March 2012 (Table 1)



Reoffending Rates for Sunderland – April 2008-March 2012 (Table 2)

8. MANAGING THE CITY'S MOST PROLIFIC AND PRIORITY OFFENDERS

8.1 The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) is an overarching framework that allows local partner agencies to work together to manage the most prolific offenders within local communities in a coordinated way. Common key principles include:-

- (1) All partners tackling offenders together;
- (2) Delivering a local response to local problems;
- (3) Offenders facing their responsibility or facing the consequences;
- (4) Offenders are provided with a clear understanding of what is expected of them; and
- (5) Making better use of existing programmes and governance.

8.2 All offenders at high risk of causing serious harm and/or re-offending are eligible for the scheme. The intensity of management relates directly to the severity of risk of an offender, irrespective of position within the criminal justice system.

8.3 Sunderland's IOM unit is made up of:-

- Probation Officers;
- HMP Durham Prison Seconded;
- HMP Northumberland Prison Seconded covering South of Tyne (recently recruited);
- Three Northumbria Police Officers and one Police Community Support Officer;
- DISC (Developing Initiatives, Supporting Communities) staff dealing with substance misuse recovery;
- Turning Point staff delivering the drug intervention element);
- Youth Offending Service Officer;
- Shelter and Accommodation Worker (Council's Access to Housing Service) to address accommodation issues; and a
- Mental Health Nurse - Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust.

8.4 For those offenders subject to court orders, engagement and attendance at appointments is mandatory. Clients on the scheme are some of the city's most difficult, challenging and chaotic offenders. The Panel learned that outcomes and achievements for this category of offender can often be a reduction in the level and seriousness of offending, rather than a complete abatement. At the time of writing, the unit was working with 11 clients in the community and a further 29 serving custodial sentences.

8.5 The non-statutory element of the IOM works with a group of offenders not subject to statutory court orders or licence, but who nonetheless have been identified as being at risk of committing high levels of crime in the city. From March to September 2012, the team worked with 24 offenders, with positive results, including an 81.9 per cent reduction in arrests and an 87.2 per cent reduction in convictions whilst on the scheme.

8.6 IOM staff reported early engagement as being crucial to engagement. 'Contacts' are made whilst an offender is in custody to develop a relationship and gain an understanding of the offender's issues when they leave custody and an opportunity to address those prior to release or immediately upon release.

8.7 The Panel recognised this type of supervision of offenders to be extremely resource intensive; however thought that where success could be demonstrated and evidenced there was a strong case for extending this model further.

Experiences of a Client on the IOM Scheme - Colin

Colin is from another area of the country originally. He is an ex-heroin user, in and out of prison for around seven years. He was subject to a DRR (Drugs Rehabilitation Requirement) order and requested to have his order transferred to Sunderland as his Father lives here and he felt he could make a fresh start.

He started the scheme in April 2012 and has been struck by the difference in approach by the IOM Team as opposed to the more traditional supervision approach at his previous IOM, which involved a quick 'chat' and a signature. The IOM scheme in Sunderland is more intense and there is a lot more support available to him.

He is currently living at his Father's house, but has recently started to look for his own accommodation with the assistance of the IOM.

He has regular contact with staff from DISC, Turning Point, his Probation Officer and the GP, who assist him in staying 'clean', which he now has been for six months. He has also been taking part in a bike making skills course which has given him a level of normality and fills in his time (which previously had been spent offending to gain money for heroin).

It is early days, but he feels positive for the future and feels the move he made from his home town gave him the fresh start he needed and the IOM scheme has helped to keep him on the right track.

Managing the City's most Prolific and Priority Offenders – the Importance of Partnership Working

- 8.8 The Panel were pleased to note a strong ethic of partnership working, made easier and more seamless through co-location and a true multi-agency approach.
- 8.9 Several mechanisms give staff the opportunity to share information and raise issues of concern both with the team and with other agencies. This includes:-
- (a) Monthly IOM Meeting – to discuss statutory and non statutory offenders engaged in the scheme;
 - (b) Nominations' Panel – reviews nominations for the scheme. These come from a variety of places including the Police Neighbourhood Teams and LMAPS (Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving) groups, of which Elected Members participate; and
 - (c) Cases for Concern – a regular meeting involving a range of agencies looking at those individuals whereby ongoing or new developments may lead to an increased risk of harm or offending.

9. MANAGING THE TRANSITION BETWEEN CUSTODY AND THE COMMUNITY

- 9.1 The National Offender Management Agency (NOMS) is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice, bringing together the Probation Service and HM Prison Service. The two bodies remain distinct but have the same purpose; to protect the public and reduce reoffending. Prison and probation services ensure the sentences of the courts are properly carried out and work with offenders to tackle the causes of their offending behaviour.

- 9.2 The Probation Service assess offenders and produce court reports; advising the judiciary as to the most appropriate sentence for the individual concerned. For custodial sentences longer than 12 months probation offender managers supervise the offender working closely within prisons and with prison staff to identify the most effective programmes and interventions for rehabilitation.
- 9.3 The Panel found there was a concern for those offenders sentenced to short term prison sentences i.e. less than 12 months, who are not subject to any statutory supervision upon release. This could mean a lack of access to necessary support, increasing the risk of an offender failing to get appropriate accommodation or access health services. These offenders are more likely to re-offend than those with sentences of over four years. Short term prison sentences remain a vital option for courts; however there is growing evidence that properly enforced community sentences which combine punishment, payback and rehabilitation can be just as effective.
- 9.4 On licence, offenders must attend regular appointments with probation staff, complete set programmes/work, provide information about where they live and work and comply with any other conditions of the licence. This might include restrictions on movements and behaviour.
- 9.5 Probation staff can ask to include extra specific conditions in some licences, including:
- Where the offender must live;
 - Attendance on treatment programmes relating to their offending behaviour;
 - Not visiting specific areas or making contact with certain people;
 - Not living in a house with children under a certain age; and
 - Any offender who breaks the rules of their licence will be returned to prison to finish their sentence (recalled).
- 9.6 The SSP has links with HMP Durham, Holme House, HMP Northumberland and Low Newton; all of whom address reoffending pathways with offenders. The Panel decided to take evidence from HMP Northumberland as anecdotally it was informed that this establishment had a robust strategy in place across all seven pathways.

HMP Northumberland

- 9.7 HMP Northumberland was formerly two separate prisons; HMP Acklington and HMP Castington. On 31 October 2011, the merged prison became known as HMP Northumberland. HMP houses 1348 prisoners, most of whom are from the North East. HMP structures activities to reduce reoffending around the seven Pathways out of Offending outlined in the aforementioned National Re-offending Action Plan.
- 9.8 Prisoners are managed through the Offender Management Model which aims to manage the needs of the offender from court to custody and onto resettlement back into the community. Every prisoner is assessed and a personal sentence plan is developed, which maps out the sequence of required interventions.

- 9.9 Whilst the Panel was impressed with the range of services in place for offenders within HMP Northumberland it became apparent throughout the visit that it has great difficulty in measuring its specific impact upon reducing reoffending. This is for a number of reasons, not least because very often an offender leaves custody and is often subject to further supervision, support or interventions. This was judged to be detrimental to measuring the effectiveness of the programmes in place and could hamper improvements/changes to the way programmes are delivered in the future.

Education, Training and Employment

- 9.10 Offenders face significant barriers to entering the labour market upon release from custody. A criminal record is an obstacle to overcome in itself but just under half of prisoners nationally (47 per cent) have no qualifications and 13 per cent have never had a job.
- 9.11 Employment is a critical issue for offenders on the IOM scheme in the community. A key part of recovery is engagement in positive activities. Clients undertake a timetable of work each week which may include activities such as fishing or allotment based activities. All activities provide volunteering opportunities to provide experience and improve employment prospects. Staff reported that where employment is secured this dramatically increased the chances of a long term success story.
- 9.12 HMP Northumberland provide a wide range of courses to prisoners including; functional skills; employability; business admin; and creative techniques, as well as more challenging vocational training courses including motor mechanics, bricklaying, painting and decorating, plastering, woodwork, catering and hospitality (basic skills are embedded within all vocational areas).
- 9.13 The Breaking the Cycle green paper outlines the intention to make prisons places of hard work and industry, with more prisoners engaging in a longer working week. At the time of the Panel's visit an inspection report revealed that whilst provision was good, there wasn't enough of it and up to a third of prisoners remained in their cells during the core hours of the day.
- 9.14 The Panel were given the opportunity to observe prisoners undertaking vocational training within a workshop making prisoner garments as part of a national contract of HM Prison Service. Prisoners can access industry recognised qualifications and provides an opportunity to develop required workplace skills, such as team working and communication. In addition, HMP provide life skills training in areas such as personal budgeting.

Mental and Physical Health

- 9.15 It is widely understood that offenders experience significant health inequalities compared to the general population. They have higher rates of suicide, drug and alcohol misuse, mental and physical health issues, and often lead unhealthy lifestyles such as bad diet and lack of exercise. These issues are made worse by poor access to and take up of health and care services.

- 9.16 The statistics highlight some of the health inequalities experienced by offenders, including:-
- In the week following their release female prisoners are 69 times more likely to die than females in the general population, and male prisoners are 29 times more likely to die than males in the general population;
 - In prisons the smoking rate is as high as 80 per cent, almost four times more likely than the general population;
 - 63 per cent of male prisoners and 39 per cent of females are hazardous drinkers;and
 - Among female prisoners, 40 per cent have a long standing physical disability, and 90 per cent have a mental health or substance misuse problem.
- 9.17 The ongoing review being undertaken by the Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel into Mental Health Pathways has found that there are a range of services in place across the city and access to these services through various routes is good. Similarly, there are a wealth of services in place to address physical health issues, but ensuring offenders access these services is not easily addressed.
- 9.18 Positively, the agencies the Panel took evidence from actively work with offenders to address health needs in the transition between custody and the community. For example, prior to release from HMP, GP appointments, dental appointments and hospital appointments are secured whenever possible. The IOM and Probation Teams also refer offenders to health services and can accompany them to appointments to ensure they attend.
- 9.19 At HMP, it was evident to the Panel that physical activity plays an important part in purposeful activity and engagement with prisoners. Many offenders consider the gym to be a positive part of their custodial sentence and it can be used as an incentive to stimulate positive behaviours. The Panel reflected that physical activity and education around healthy lifestyles is a vital part of providing offenders with the skills they will require to maintain and improve their health once they return to the community. It recognised a gap in offenders continuing physical activity and healthy lifestyles upon release, and attributed this in part to a return to offending. Positively, the prison worker seconded to the North of Tyne IOMs has engaged with local gyms, sports providers and community venues to increase the opportunities for offenders to continue physical activity upon release. The recently recruited prison officer for the South of Tyne provides an opportunity to replicate this arrangement to Sunderland; the Council could assist in this by signposting to sport and physical activity provision.
- 9.20 The Panel deemed the mental and physical health of offenders to be a key issue within the city and considered that generally, if offender health issues are to be tackled effectively it must be at a strategic level. The reforms to the health and social care system in the Health and Social Care Act 2012, specifically the creation of Health and Wellbeing Boards and Clinical Commissioning Groups, provide an opportunity for more effective local joint working to tackle these issues through better identification of need as part of

the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment⁴ (JSNA). The JSNA will inform the Health and Wellbeing Strategy from which commissioning plans are formed. Furthermore the NHS Mandate from the Government to the NHS Commissioning Board⁵ illustrates the role of the NHS in wider society and promotes the development of better healthcare services for offenders and people in the criminal justice system which is integrated between custody and the community.

- 9.21 The Panel acknowledged the steps that had already been taken to begin joint working. In March 2012, the SSP presented a report to the HWB which made a number of recommendations to promote joint working to address the health needs of offenders including progress with the treatment system redesign and for the Board to receive. It was evident that criminal justice agencies must have a strong influencing role on the HWB. Furthermore the SSP's links with the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner would be crucial in influencing the commissioning of initiatives to address community safety.

Drugs and Alcohol

- 9.22 Substance misuse is strongly associated with offending; for example only 20 per cent of offenders on the IOM programme do not have any drug or alcohol issues. The perception that drugs and alcohol are always the only cause of offending can be misleading, and often substance misuse issues are one part of a much wider range of complex needs. Most offenders accessing supported accommodation, for example have at least one other support need - likely to be a drug and/or alcohol issue.
- 9.23 In 2010, the Government changed the focus on rehabilitation using prescribed substitutes to an abstinence based model, whereby the user refrains from using any substance or drug substitute. The Panel noted that those working with offenders with substance misuse issues viewed this as a positive change. The new approach to recovery through abstinence, rather than ongoing medical substitution is mirrored in HMP's strategy to address drug and alcohol issues. The Panel had previously found that where offenders did not effectively address drug use in prison and were released on high doses of methadone, it presented a barrier to addressing accommodation and other needs.
- 9.24 The Panel were given the opportunity to meet a group of offenders within the treatment programme. When asked about plans after release and optimism for continued success in the community, they highlighted the effectiveness of the peer mentor scheme. The Panel was aware that a peer mentor scheme was in operation in Sunderland; however the group was not aware of this.
- 9.25 Appropriate aftercare support (support upon leaving custody), greatly increases the likelihood that offenders will not relapse into drug misuse and re-offending. The DIP team provides assessment services within all of the local prisons and offers gate/release pick ups. During the review, the

⁴ The JSNA is used to assess current and future health needs of the local population based on evidence from a wide range of sources.

⁵ The NHS Mandate sets out the responsibilities and expectations of the Health Secretary and the NHS Commissioning Board to ensure the NHS remains fit for purpose and is able to adapt.

Government announced its intention to provide offenders leaving prison with a mentor to meet them at the gate. Notwithstanding the detail needed around who would provide this service and how it would be monitored, the Panel regarded this to as a crucial part of managing the transition from custody to the community for any offender.

Children and Families

- 9.26 Children and families play a significant role in supporting an offender to make the changes to stop re-offending. Relationships can often be broken by offending and families are significantly affected by the offender's behaviour. The Panel was particularly concerned about this issue and, although not part of the review in itself, was continually raised during the evidence gathering for the review and therefore warranted some mention.
- 9.27 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) estimate there are 120,000 families nationally who have complex issues including unemployment, children not attending school and involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. These families cost a large amount of money to taxpayers.
- 9.28 The Family Focus Project is Sunderland's name for the project that will deliver the 'Troubled Families' initiative. It will sit beneath the Strengthening Families Agenda. There is an opportunity with this Agenda to pay closer attention to how families are supported to ensure that the effects of offending on children and families are minimised, which should hopefully have a positive impact on reducing reoffending. One of the outcomes of Family Focus is to reduce reoffending by minors by 33%, which will only be achieved if there is a comprehensive approach to working with the families involved.
- 9.29 The Panel agreed that individuals within many of the families identified in Sunderland may at some point receive a custodial sentence, therefore prisons have an opportunity to undertake some specialised work with the women/men and families concerned. Approaches have been made by HMP to all local authorities to highlight this possibility, but responses had been few. The Panel recognised that whilst this may be a good opportunity there may be some difficulties in local authorities jointly funding work by HMP due to the different approaches to tackling this agenda across the region.

Managing the City's most Prolific and Priority Offenders – the Importance of Partnership Working

- 9.30 There appear to be good links with statutory and other agencies within Sunderland and there is an emphasis on effective communication in order to manage the offender journey from custody to the community. The Panel was informed that a significant issue for offenders being released from custody was the time it takes benefits to be paid and was concerned this may indicate a failure in service from custody to the community. Upon further investigation it emerged that the process is initiated prior to release and delays are occurring due to a backlog of general benefit claims, which is out with HMP or probation's control. A lead within the Welfare Rights Team has been identified to progress this and ensure the needs of vulnerable offenders are addressed.

The Reducing Re-Offending Delivery Network has agreed the following actions to address this priority:-

- Raise awareness of welfare reforms amongst operational partners and the impact this may have on offenders
- Provide Tier 1 training to frontline practitioners to support offenders around finance benefit and debt
- Provide advice and information on where to signpost offenders

9.31 Throughout the visit the Governor and his management team emphasised the willingness to work in partnership with the Council and other authorities to improve reoffending rates by further joint working and cooperation.

9.32 The Panel considered the prison officer secondment to the Integrated Offender Management units South of Tyne to be crucial to strengthening the transition arrangements for offenders and fostering joint working. One area in which this could be explored further is the sharing of the personalised work plan with agencies outside of the IOM or Probation, such as supported accommodation or other community providers. HMP emphasised that the SSP can and should work with the worker to develop the tailor the role to meet Sunderland's requirements.

Further Developments

9.33 On 8 November 2012, three days after the Scrutiny Panel visited HMP Northumberland; the Government announced that the prison would be privatised. The current, public sector management were excluded from progressing to the next stage of competition, leaving only two private companies to be considered in the final decision in 2013. The Government judged that the private companies had produced a package of cost reductions, improvements and a 'working prisons' model.

9.34 Having seen first hand the enthusiasm and commitment of the management team and staff at HMP, it was disappointing to learn of this development and the Panel regarded much of the evidence it had gathered and the conclusions it had drawn from the visit, to be uncertain at the present time. It believed that the Safer Sunderland Partnership would have a crucial objective to undertake in developing new relationships with the new management team.

10. PATHWAY 1: TACKLING ACCOMMODATION ISSUES FOR OFFENDERS

10.1 Nationally, around one third of prisoners about to leave prison have no accommodation arranged for their release. Living in settled accommodation helps to restore or continue family ties and can provide the foundation for engagement in services and interventions to meet offenders' often complex needs. Appropriate accommodation is necessary to access education and training, or obtain employment. Research conducted at a regional level concluded that:-

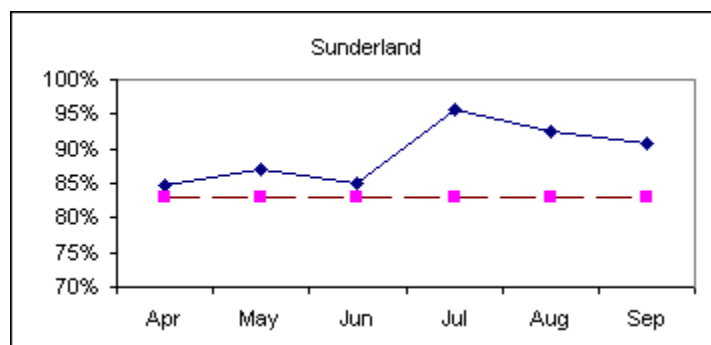
- 14 per cent or 746 people had no settled accommodation on release from a NE prison during 2009/10;

- There are strong links between experiences of homelessness, repeat offending and custodial sentences;
- 16.7 per cent of offenders had a significant problem with the suitability of their accommodation; and
- The age group 25-40 has the highest proportion of offenders and the largest number of people reporting no fixed abode.

10.2 The Breaking the Cycle green paper recognises suitable accommodation for offenders as being critical to rehabilitation and reductions in re-offending. Interestingly, with the exception of setting out the intention to ensure offenders receive appropriate housing assessments and advice, all other commitments to tackle accommodation issues are not designed specifically for offenders; but are aimed tackling homelessness generally, within which accommodation and support for offenders will be picked up.

10.3 Several barriers and gaps to securing stable and suitable accommodation were identified locally by those working with offenders in the city at **Appendix 2**.

10.4 Approximately 90 per cent of offenders, or 450 out of 500 within Sunderland Probation Team’s caseload are determined to have suitable and stable accommodation upon termination of their licence or order.



No. of offenders in stable accommodation in Sunderland

10.5 Offenders on licence or subject to community orders are tracked through mandatory contacts with Probation or other agencies therefore accommodation issues are identified and addressed. If an offender is recalled to custody due to a breach of the conditions of release, or are serving a sentence of less than 12 months; they are released without licence, conditions or restrictions, and are able to live where they choose. Shelter highlighted this type of offender as tending to move in to hostel accommodation on release from custody and re-offending quickly, often leading to the ‘revolving door syndrome’.

10.6 A group of offenders the Panel had the opportunity to speak with at HMP reinforced accommodation as a concern; but it became apparent that many were actually against being housed in a Probation Approved Premises or Supported Accommodation⁶ as part of their licence stating that this would encourage them to reoffend due to a separation from a support network of

⁶ Offenders referred to Approved Premises⁶ and other Supported Accommodation as hostels; however it is important to note these are different to the city’s private hostels or Houses of Multiple Occupancy.

family and friends. There appeared to be a generally negative attitude toward probation staff, and a view that Probation's approach could be unreasonable and varied from offender to offender. This was not surprising to the Panel, given Probation's role in managing the risk of the offender to themselves, their families and the community. Prisoners' views about what would stop them reoffending were in direct opposition to that of those working with them; for example the IOM reported to the Panel that where accommodation was located within the community in which the offending had started they would be much more likely to re-offend.

- 10.7 Prisoners also reported that many reoffend intentionally whilst on licence in the community and are recalled, simply to ensure that once they are released they have no restrictions placed upon them around where they can and cannot live, reinforcing the Panel's earlier concerns about a lack of support and monitoring where there is no licence in place. In November 2012, the Government stated it wanted all but the highest risk prisoners to be in rehabilitation programmes by the end of 2015, regardless of the length of sentence. The Panel noted this with interest as potentially assisting with the gaps in support highlighted by Shelter and others for short sentence offenders or those released without licence.

Hostel Accommodation

- 10.8 The Panel wholly supported the view that the use of the city's private hostels was unsuitable and inappropriate accommodation for offenders who are often also vulnerable people with complex issues. The city has a number of hostels, concentrated in one particular area of the city, which creates problems for residents and businesses in the area of crime and anti-social behaviour. The Council, Northumbria Probation and other agencies no longer refer to these private establishments; however sometimes an offender will have no other option but to seek accommodation in them, which is of concern to those working with them. The IOM reported that the vast majority of clients have 'burned bridges' with family, friends and previous accommodation providers.
- 10.9 The Regional Homelessness Group has commissioned a review into the inappropriate use of accommodation to house those in need across the North East. The Panel noted that the recommendations arising as a result of this should be taken into account when considering how offenders are accommodated.
- 10.10 The Council is also taking steps to reduce the number of private hostels and reduce the associated issues; an example of this is the closure of Camrex House in 2014 with discussions taking place with the owner to agree a transition strategy. The Panel was pleased to note that the issue of individuals from outside of the city being referred into Sunderland's private hostels was improving due to work undertaken regionally to raise awareness of the issues. The city's Housing Strategy is in the process of being developed, with this in mind the needs of vulnerable adults are included, of which offenders are specified as a key group. A Hostel Strategy has been drafted and a sub-group has been formed to support individuals affected by

future hostel closures and ensure a co-ordinated response to safely managing individuals with complex needs.

'Through the Gate'

10.11 The Regional Homelessness Group, comprising of all 12 North East authorities, has been allocated approximately £500,000 of funding from Communities and Local Government to develop services that will reduce single rough sleeping across the region and tackle service users who experience chronic social exclusion.

10.12 The 'Through the Gate' project will aim to:-

- (a) Identify and assess the accommodation and support needs of chronically socially excluded individuals with a history of offending, insecure housing and homelessness;
- (b) Provide tailored support to sustain an individual's tenancy whilst in custody, or complete a closure of the tenancy through liaison with landlords, benefit teams and families;
- (c) Provide tailored support leading up to release to ensure accommodation is accessed and appropriate local support services are engaged (complementing the existing service provided in NE prisons by Shelter);
- (d) Address the broader needs of the individual to prevent future homelessness; and
- (e) Reduce reoffending.

10.13 The Panel deemed this to be a very encouraging development in tackling those very difficult and complex issues around the transition of offenders from custody into the community, streamlining current arrangements and allowing for a more seamless offender journey.

Shared Accommodation Rate

10.14 The Welfare Reform Programme intends to save £18 billion per year by 2014-15 through changes to the benefits system, with the intention of reducing benefit dependency and making work pay. The reforms provide for significant reductions in housing benefit entitlement.

10.15 Single, under-35 year olds with no dependants receive local housing allowance in the form of the shared accommodation rate. This means they are only entitled to enough local housing allowance to cover the average cost of a single room in a shared house in the area. This has implications for homelessness and may hamper efforts to prevent reoffending by securing suitable accommodation. Under Phase 2 of the Reforms, under 25s are likely to have no entitlement to housing benefit. The Panel found that these severe changes compound an already strained financial situation for offenders who usually have little or no savings and do not meet the criteria for the Council's Bond Scheme.

10.16 In Sunderland, the average rent is £70 per week for a two bedroom house. The average market rent is £100-£120 and the affordable rent level (80 per cent of market rate) is £92 per week. Offenders without any identified need

for support are treated no differently to others entitled to housing benefit, which in Sunderland is around £43 per week. The individual will be expected to make up the shortfall in rent themselves or find alternative, cheaper accommodation.

- 10.17 The Panel was reassured that the Council has thus far taken an innovative and proactive approach to assisting residents in mitigating some of the impacts of Welfare Reform generally, but was gravely concerned that the reduction in housing benefit particularly could lead to increases in offending and reoffending. Indeed, the Cyrenians Project reported having seen the impact of the changes to housing benefit to under 35s already and considered this would eventually lead to an increase in the use of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO's), including private hostels, for offenders.

Social Housing Availability for Offenders

- 10.18 A common theme that emerged from evidence gathering, was the difficulties faced by agencies and offenders in securing social housing tenancies. Policies to recognise and reward excellent customers who show that they can uphold all the criteria within a tenancy agreement can effectively exclude offenders with a history of rent arrears, anti-social behaviour of offending, or issues around the upkeep of a property.
- 10.19 There was also a concern that the city's largest social housing providers may decline to work with an ex-offender due to the severity of their offence. Home Group advised that they are required to operate within strict parameters due to an inability to provide the level of support required by some offenders, whilst Gentoo reported that as an organisation it needed to be sure that anybody given a tenancy has the ability or the support in place to manage it successfully.
- 10.20 The Panel appreciated these issues, but believed the lack of available social housing exacerbated the already very difficult issues faced by offenders in accessing stable accommodation.

Increased use of the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

- 10.21 Housing offenders within the PRS is becoming more prevalent in the context of the reduction in supported accommodation beds and a general shortage of social housing. This is compounded by the use of the PRS as a critical element in government housing and homelessness strategies and changes to legislation including the Localism Act 2011, which allows local authorities to discharge the homelessness duty by offering suitable accommodation in the PRS. Unfortunately, this type of accommodation is not without its issues. Private landlords are often averse to housing offenders even where there is a level of support offered in sustaining the tenancy. Finding a private landlord willing to house offenders was reported as the most significant barrier to housing offenders successfully.
- 10.22 The potential benefits to landlords are:

- A high quality assessment of the suitability of the property for the prospective tenant;
- Ability to always fill properties;
- Some upfront payment –rent in advance, bond etc;
- Single point of contact to support landlords and to resolve problems;
- Advantage of knowing background of clients (although this isn't shared with landlords);
- Initial and ongoing support for tenants (in some instances); and
- Expert knowledge and advice provided.

10.23 'Lets Help You' is a web based scheme which allows landlords to display details of empty properties with local housing allowance rent rates. The scheme will be accessible to all private landlords in Sunderland who wish to use it, and there will be a special logo to indicate those landlords who are accredited by the Council. This will allow the Gateway and the Council's Accommodation Worker to have a better understanding of the properties available at any given time. The Panel also noted that the Strategic Tenancy Strategy was currently being developed and this should certainly take account of offenders as a special group.

10.24 The Panel learned that the IOM can and have worked with private landlords to inform them when a individual client is engaged in the scheme and would encourage the landlord to be actively involved in sharing information about a client's behaviour. Often, the level and intensity of support provided by the IOM encourages private landlords to accommodate clients and the IOM are also available to support providers as to the suitability of a client for a tenancy.

10.25 A significant and recurring theme during the Review was the ability of an offender to commence and sustain a tenancy, be that in social housing or the PRS. Moreover, this was highlighted as a major reason for offenders being excluded from social housing and PRS properties. Increased use of floating support, in which an offender lives independently but is supported in managing their tenancy, could provide the necessary reassurance for private landlords and other accommodation providers and encourage them to house people with an offending background.

Tackling Accommodation Issues – the Importance of Partnership Working

10.26 Homeless Link highlights two key areas of best practice as; going beyond organisational boundaries to meet individual need, and effective partnership working.

10.27 The Supported Housing Gateway is a single point of access for a range of agencies including the police, probation, Children's Services, Health, Housing and Adult Services and health services to refer to. Supported accommodation providers are commissioned by the Council to provide accommodation and support for clients and include Gentoo, Norcare, NECA, Stonham, YMCA, Centrepoint and Wearside Women in Need. The Council provides funding of around £2.8m for housing related support to help prevent homelessness and social exclusion.

- 10.28 The Panel found consistently that information sharing between agencies was good and was facilitated in many instances by the Council in its recognition that providers can offer solutions to some of the issues. This was demonstrated in the development of a panel in which providers will play a key role in identifying and addressing difficult cases, making better use of the intelligence available.
- 10.29 Providers were complimentary about the Gateway generally and new opportunities to work together. They highlighted the sharing of support plans to avoid the duplication of multiple assessments when clients move around as a new approach to joint working. The Data Protection Act limits the extent to which some information can be shared, and there are some issues in gaining information from health services; however, by and large Information Sharing Protocols assist services in managing the risks of information sharing.
- 10.30 The IOM reported having access to a worker from the homelessness charity Shelter for one day per fortnight to assist in working with offenders to secure accommodation. The Panel were informed that the IOM does have good links with the Salvation Army but that links with other registered housing providers are not currently present, although the Council's Gateway provides the necessary central point of contact.
- 10.31 HMP Northumberland also works with Shelter to provide specialist prison housing services, including information and advice to prisoners. The Panel was informed that the Council is very proactive in its approach in liaising with Shelter and HMP staff to secure accommodation for prisoners prior to release. The Council aims to secure housing for offenders by encouraging offenders to complete a homelessness application prior to release, considered to be best practice in minimising the risk of newly released offenders being homeless and reducing the likelihood of reoffending.
- 10.32 Partnership working has also led to a collaborative approach to meeting the considerable challenges of reductions in funding. For example, Norcare and other providers have significantly remodelled service delivery in Sunderland to enable continued high level support to its clients whilst working with smaller budgets. This was viewed to be very encouraging given the further reductions to public spending over the next three years.

Support for Women Offenders

- 10.33 The Corston Report (2007) recommended that the accommodation pathway was in urgent need of gender-specific reform. In particular, she suggested more supported accommodation should be provided for women on release to break the cycle of repeat offending and custody. It is important however that women offender's issues as a whole are taken into account as they are fundamentally linked; for example mental health problems and family issues will add to the difficulties of securing or keeping a tenancy.
- 10.34 The picture of support for women offenders in Sunderland largely mirrors the more general national picture; it is identified as a key issue for the Council and Northumbria Probation Trust as part of the Safer Sunderland Partnership's Reducing Re-Offending Delivery Network.

- 10.35 In October 2012, over a third of offenders (34.5 per cent) on Northumbria Probation Trust's Sunderland Local Delivery Unit caseload were women. Of these, a third (32.6 per cent) had an identified accommodation need and the vast majority also had one or more other issues, such as mental health, drug/alcohol dependency or be a victim of domestic violence.
- 10.36 Northumbria Probation Trust have developed a Project Group to identify and work with those women who offend or are at risk of offending. Premises at St Mary's Church in the city centre have been identified to host a Community Hub or 'one stop shop' for women. Resource has been identified for one year for the Hub which will be staffed by Probation but will also involve input from partner organisations, thus ensuring its sustainability going forward. Support will include accommodation advice, as well as debit and finance advice, addressing substance misuse issues, relationship issues, and education training and employment.
- 10.37 All agencies involved in the Panel's review highlighted the difficulties in finding suitable accommodation for its female clients due to there being no provision in Sunderland for women. This was reported as a significant factor in the failure to rehabilitate female offenders with drug or alcohol dependency. The Women outside Walls (WoW) (**Appendix 1**) project is making progress in working with female offenders in the city to successfully house them, but this is limited by the available provision. Following the evidence gathering considering accommodation issues for women the Panel were informed that the Salvation Army is aiming to provide a women only wing. The Panel were pleased that this was being considered and a demonstration of providers working differently to maximise the available resource.
- 10.38 Current housing related support provision ends in March 2014. Throughout 2013 the Council will be reconsidering its future commissioning intentions and considering where there are gaps and how better use of the accommodation that is already available might be made. The Council, via the Gateway, is currently gathering intelligence to support this. The Panel considered that in the context of there being a lack of capital available to build anything new, future commissioning and working innovatively to change levels of provision for women, and offenders in general, was key to making progress in this area.

Support for Veterans

- 10.39 The exact number of former Service personnel in prison in England and Wales is at present unknown. Despite a number of attempts to produce a reliable figure, the most accurate figure asserts that 3.5 per cent of all those currently in custody in England and Wales had served in the Forces.
- 10.40 According to research veteran offenders largely fall within the following groups:-
- Those who have experienced traumatic and difficult lives during childhood or adolescence and had witnessed or suffered extreme violence, problems with drugs or alcohol prior to enlisting;

- Those who experience difficulties arising in military service, sometimes the reason for discharge, such as mental health or physical injury; and
 - Those who experience post-Forces problems and had difficulty in adjusting to civilian life due to a lack of life skills, which may have contributed to, or been exacerbated by, family or relationship breakdown. It is suggested that veterans may sometimes feel more comfortable in a custodial setting as it is similar to the highly structured routines of the army.
- 10.41 Three factors are prevalent in the majority of offending by veterans; social isolation and exclusion, alcohol, and financial problems.
- 10.42 In October 2012, there were 27 veteran offenders out of a total 524 (5.1 per cent) on Northumbria Probation Trust's Sunderland Local Delivery Unit caseload, however this is very likely to be an under-reporting. Of these only 4 (14.8 per cent) were identified as having an accommodation need, which can be viewed positively. More starkly, 22 (81 per cent) had an identified alcohol need, which could jeopardise a stable tenancy.
- 10.43 The Panel found that the identification of veteran offenders has only taken place in the last 12 months and the agenda is relatively new. Northumbria Probation Trust has a Veteran's Champion within each of its Local Delivery Units who meet regularly to share information and progress. Sunderland's Veteran's Champion is ex-armed forces himself and sits on the Sunderland Armed Forces Network.
- 10.44 Sunderland's Armed Forces Network (SAFN) was set up by Veterans to bring together local and national statutory bodies, agencies, and charities who are involved in delivering welfare and support for armed forces personnel, Veterans and their families. The Panel were informed that the SAFN network meetings do provide a useful opportunity for support providers to exchange information and believed it vital that the momentum of this agenda be maintained and the meetings be well attended by key representatives working with offenders to address accommodation for offenders.
- 10.45 The Panel were informed that the Newcastle Veteran's Centre is an example of a targeted supported accommodation project which is demonstrating positive outcomes. The Centre has been open for two years and is purposely small, housing up to five residents to blend in with and become part of the local community. The Centre also has Outreach Programmes in Durham Prison and Byker Community Centre and works alongside the Veterans in Custody Support Officers in Durham Prison and Kirk Levington in order to secure engagement before release to reduce the risk that an offender goes 'underground'. The Centre also has a Family Liaison Officer who helps veterans build bridges with families.
- 10.46 The Panel agreed with the findings within a review undertaken by the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee of North East Local Authorities in 2011 which concluded that the presence of veterans in the criminal justice system was a 'thorny' issue and supported the recommendation that local authorities should work closely with ex-service charities and other agencies to join up services for veterans but regarded that this should be extended to the Safer Sunderland Partnership.

10.47 The Panel highlighted the forthcoming redundancies in the forces and the significant effect this may have upon Sunderland, given that the city has traditionally been a high recruiting area for the armed forces. It was advised that this issue has already been recognised and Norcare and other ex-service charities are working closely with local authorities to analyse the figures of resettlement in the North East and the impact that is likely to have on services going forward. In addition, the Safer Sunderland Partnership are aware of the potential increase in the amount of veterans coming into the area and are putting plans in place to deal with this increase on the demand for health services.

11. CONCLUSIONS

11.1 The Scrutiny Panel have made a number of conclusions based on the evidence gathered throughout the review:-

- (a) By reducing re-offending the social and economic costs to society are reduced. In Sunderland, partners are committed to reducing reoffending and there are a range of services and initiatives in place to address this, however levels of reoffending remain higher than other areas of the country, attributed in part to social and economic factors;
- (b) Major reform including the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 provide an opportunity for further local joint working to tackle the health needs of offenders, whom often experience greater health inequalities than the general population. The Safer Sunderland Partnership has begun to link with the Health and Wellbeing Board and the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner; however it is evident that these links will require further embedding;
- (c) There appear to be robust links between statutory agencies and those in the voluntary and community sector, and good examples of joint working producing positive outcomes for offenders. A key development in this regard is the recruitment of the prison officer to the IOM teams South of the Tyne. This will enhance the provision already in place from Durham HMP and will provide an important opportunity to improve the transition of offenders between custody and the community by reducing the barriers to information sharing and developing those essential links with wider community provision;
- (d) In light of the national changes to the prison service, it will be vital that the partnership ethos between the Safer Sunderland Partnership and HMP North East prisons is developed and maintained, and the transition from custody to the community continues to be a priority. This is particularly relevant in regard to HMP Northumberland when a private provider takes over the management of the prison in 2013.
- (e) Stable and secure accommodation is a basic human right, without which other complex needs cannot begin to be addressed. The Council is effectively utilising its Accommodation Worker to work proactively with offenders prior to and upon release to secure accommodation, however a lack of supported accommodation, social housing and difficulties securing PRS accommodation

for offenders is a concern. In the context of shortages of funding and likely further budget reductions for the Council and partners, future commissioning and new and innovative ways of working are crucial to improving the accommodation offer for offenders. Future commissioning in this regard must reflect the needs of offenders, but take particular account of women offenders if this significant concern is to be addressed. Furthermore, the Council's key policies and strategies to address housing need should give specific consideration to the accommodation needs of offenders.

- (f) The Sunderland Armed Forces Network (SAFN) is considered to be an important mechanism to facilitate information sharing and joint working between statutory and non statutory agencies to address the needs of offenders generally. It is therefore vital that the attendance of those partners on the Safer Sunderland Partnership is maintained and that the SSP works with ex-service charities and other agencies to improve services for veterans who offend.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 The Scrutiny Panel has taken evidence from a variety of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Committee's key recommendations to the Cabinet are as outlined below:-
 - (a) That the Council identifies ways in which existing housing related support can be better utilised, and that the intelligence currently being gathered through the Council's Gateway informs housing related support commissioning intentions in 2014, specifically taking account of accommodation issues for offenders and particularly women offender;
 - (b) That key policies in relation to housing, including the Housing Strategy, the Strategic Tenancy Policy and the Hostel Strategy have a specific focus on the accommodation needs of offenders informed by intelligence;
 - (c) That the Council works with the city's private landlords to meet the accommodation needs of offenders;
 - (d) That the Safer Sunderland Partnership develops the appropriate channels and mechanisms to strengthen and embed its influencing role with the:-
 - (i) Health and Wellbeing Board; and
 - (ii) Clinical Commissioning Group;
 - (e) That the Safer Sunderland Partnership improves the transition from custody to the community by:-
 - (i) Ensuring effective relationships with all prisons in the NE;
 - (ii) Utilising the IOM Prison Officer roles of Durham and HMP Northumberland, to improve information sharing and links with community provision; and
 - (iii) Improving accommodation outcomes for offenders through the 'Through the Gate' project;

- (f) That the Safer Sunderland Partnership and the Council seek to improve outcomes for women offenders, in particular accommodation and accommodation related support; and
- (g) That the Safer Sunderland Partnership and the Council ensures it fully understands the needs of current and future veteran offenders by engaging with relevant bodies and organisations.

13. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

13.1 The Scrutiny Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our review. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named:-

- Susan Kellie, NHS South of Tyne and Wear;
- Alan Caddick, Sunderland City Council;
- Peter J Smith, Sunderland City Council;
- Marnie Burden, Sunderland City Council;
- Alison Minniss, Sunderland City Council;
- Tyler Moore, Gentoo;
- Michelle Meldrum, Gentoo;
- Maureen Plunkett, Home Group;
- Maureen McKenna, Approved Premises - Northumbria Probation Trust;
- Andrea Kent, BASS – Stonham Housing;
- Tracy Guy, Shelter North East;
- Nikki Wheeler, Norcare;
- Helen Aitchison, ACE Project - Cyrenians;
- Lisa Boyzak WoW Project – Cyrenians;
- Mary Stratford and team, Integrated Offender Management (IOM);
- Colin and Paul, IOM Clients;
- Matt Spence, team and prisoners, HMP Northumberland;
- NEPACS, HMP Northumberland;
- Graham Hall, Sunderland Armed Forces Network;
- Maureen Gavin, Northumbria Probation Trust; and
- Phil Thompson, Norcare.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:

	Document	Location
A	Panel Agenda 5 July 2012	Available
B	Panel Agenda and Reports 19 July 2012	Available
C	Panel Agenda and Reports 10 September 2012	Available
D	Panel Agenda and Reports 20 September 2012	Available
E	Integrated Offender Management Unit Site Visit 24 October 2012	Available

F	Panel Notes from Site Visit 5 November 2012	Available
G	Panel Agenda and Reports 12 November 2012	Available
H	Sunderland Strategy (2008-2025)	www.sunderland.gov.uk
I	Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders (Ministry of Justice 2010)	http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-040311
J	Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012	www.legislation.gov.uk
K	Improving Housing Outcomes for Offenders in the North East – Report for North East Reducing Re-offending Partnership Board (2011)	http://www.vonne.org.uk/policy/policy_article.php?id=1754
L	Housing Offenders in the North East: A Good Practice Guide (2011)	http://www.vonne.org.uk/policy/policy_article.php?id=1754
M	Safer Sunderland Partnership Single Delivery Plan – Reducing Re-offending Delivery Network Priorities 2012/13	Available
N	Shelter Private Rented Sector Toolkit	http://www.privaterentedsector.org.uk/publicity-and-promotion.asp
O	Regional Review of the Health Needs of the Ex-Service Community – Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee of North East Local Authorities (2011)	Available on CMIS
P	Specification for Through the Gate Service – Middlesbrough Council (2012)	Available
Q	BBC News: Prison Gates Mentor Plan for released Inmates	http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20399401
R	Health and Wellbeing Boards and Criminal Justice System Agencies: Building Effective Engagement (NHS Confederation, 2012)	http://www.nhsconfed.org/Publications/Documents/criminal-justice-system-agencies.pdf
S	Better Together: Preventing Reoffending and Homelessness (Homeless Link, 2011)	http://homeless.org.uk/criminal-justice-project
T	The Mandate: A mandate from the Government to the NHS Commissioning Board: April 2013 to March 2015 (Department of Health, 2012)	www.dh.gov.uk

Contact Officer: Helen Lancaster - Scrutiny Officer
Office of the Chief Executive – Scrutiny and Area Arrangements
Telephone: 0191 561 1233
Email: helen.lancaster@sunderland.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Attendance at a Roundtable Discussion held by the Panel, 20 September 2012

The following organisations were in attendance at the Panel Meeting:-

(1) Northumbria Probation Service – Approved Premises, Sunderland

Approved Premises provide structured, supervised, temporary accommodation for offenders who would in any case be living in the community. They provide an enhanced level of supervision that might not otherwise be possible. Staff work closely with probation officers and other agencies including the police, prison service and the community to rehabilitate and successfully resettle offenders in the community. Each resident is allocated a key worker who undertakes an initial assessment and induction, followed by an individually tailored, programme of work. This includes work to address offending behaviour, recognise the impact of offending on victims and members of the community, acquire basic skills to change lifestyles, boost employment opportunities and address accommodation needs.

The approved premises, located in the Pennywell area operate to stringent standards in accordance with Ministry of Justice requirements including enforced rules of residence which contribute to their smooth running and to protecting the public. Offenders who do not comply will receive a warning and can be returned to prison or court. Rules of residence include: a night time curfew (from 11pm) which is rigorously monitored; a total ban on alcohol and solvents, as well as illegal drugs; room searches - staff check offenders rooms weekly at random; behaviour contracts – individually tailored contracts for each offender; and payment of rent.

(2) Norcare

Norcare is a North East charity that works with and supports people aged 16 and over who are homeless and socially or economically excluded, including offenders. Norcare provide supported accommodation; help people to find the right kind of home; address any issues they may be facing; and develop the confidence and skills clients need to lead independent lives.

Norcare uses a framework of seven pathways to structure the support it provides, adopted from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). These are:-

- Living and accommodation
- Learning and work
- Health
- Substance misuse
- Managing money
- Relationships and communities
- Attitudes, behaviours and empowerment

In Sunderland Norcare operates two projects :-

- ***Toward Road Accommodation Project***

Toward Road is made up of seven self-contained flats within shared accommodation, and 11 one-bedroom properties in temporary accommodation. Properties are all situated within the Wearside area. It supports clients aged 16 and over who are ex-offenders or at risk of offending. Referrals are accepted from all statutory and voluntary agencies particularly the Probation Service, as well as directly from individual applicants. It works with all clients to develop a support programme lasting between six and 24 months - providing personalised support and advice and helping the client access education, health and wellbeing support, and counselling services.

- ***Wearside Tenancy Support Project***

This scheme covers the Wearside area and helps up to 26 people aged 16 years and over who have a history of offending or are at risk of offending. Support is provided to enable individuals to gain and/or maintain their own tenancy. Referrals are received from the Probation Service, the Council, housing providers and directly from individual applicants. Clients are given a support programme lasting between six and 24 months - providing personalised support and advice and helping the client access education, health and wellbeing support, and counselling services.

(3) Stonham Housing (part of Home Group) – Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS)

BASS provides accommodation and support services to people who would normally be living in the community on bail or Home Detention Curfew (HDC) but do not otherwise have a suitable address. They have been bailed by the courts or released from prison, initially on an electronic tag, having served a prison sentence. The overall aim of the service is to reduce unnecessary loss of liberty and its negative impacts on family life, employment and housing, and to deter people from re-offending.

Stonham provides accommodation for the period of a person's bail or HDC license. The number of properties nationally is small with around 200 across England and Wales and there is currently only one property in the Sunderland area. The houses are furnished and typically are for two to three sharing. Each person has their own bedroom and shares the communal space, and has normal household responsibilities whilst residing there. Some properties are for single occupancy and others for a parent who can be united with dependent children. All occupants are liable for rent and charges under the terms of their Accommodation License Agreement.

Support Officers visit regularly to effectively manage each property, provide support to each individual and monitor adherence to their bail conditions or HDC licence. Failure to comply with these conditions is acted upon. The support officer will also help each individual to find more stable accommodation to move on to. BASS does not provide accommodation to anyone who has a conviction, caution, a current allegation of or are under police bail for any sexual offences.

(4) The Cyrenians – Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) Project

Funded through the Homeless Transition Fund, a Department for Communities and Local Government programme administered by Homeless Link, this project develops a personalised approach to help rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping into sustainable accommodation. The Cyrenians received approximately £250k, for a two year project.

The project employs individuals who have direct experience of rough sleeping to provide peer support to homeless people to access services, typically accompanying them to appointments to ensure this happens. Three case workers typically have a caseload of six to eight clients at any one time. The group of clients ACE targets differ in age, gender, ethnicity and background but have a multitude of needs in common in addition to homelessness. These can include offending, substance addictions and physical and mental health problems.

Assertive outreach workers locate and engage with homeless individuals at street level, within complimentary day services and supported accommodation throughout the city.

(5) Bernicia - Ashkirk Homeless Household Project

This project aims to support clients to develop skills and confidence that will help them secure and maintain long term accommodation. Ashkirk is an accommodation based support service providing practical housing related supported and advice to families who are homeless. Each household is provided with a tailored support package and action plan that specifically addresses the needs of the family. New clients may move into one of the core properties and may, subject to progress, move on to a satellite unit as a stepping stone to achieve independent living.

The project is open to families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and who have housing related support needs. The service is in demand, and so a waiting list is operated and places are allocated in order of priority need.

Referrals to the project are received by a variety of agencies including Children's Services, the police, Probation or health services. Referrals are processed through the Council's Supported Accommodation Gateway.

(6) Shelter

Shelter is a charity that works to alleviate the distress caused by homelessness and poor quality housing. It provides advice, information and advocacy to people in housing need, and campaigns for change to improve housing issues.

It works within HMP Durham, HMP Holme House, HMP/YOI Low Newton, HMP Northumberland and HMYOI Deerbolt. Within each prison staff are based on site delivering housing and debt advice to prisoners. This would typically be about homelessness, tenancy sustainment and tenancy termination, prisoners would be seen face to face and offered legal advice and advocacy to resolve their issues and where homeless work with the prisoner to try to secure accommodation upon

release. Debt advice is split into priority debt where a person can receive a custodial sentence and non priority debt.

Shelter also works with probation clients within the Northumbria Probation Trust area to provide housing advice and secure accommodation for offenders with low level support. It currently operates within four Approved Premises (two in Newcastle, one Gateshead, one Sunderland) and three Integrated Offender Management Teams (Sunderland, South Tyneside and Gateshead). Both contracts involve extensive partnership working with probation and prison staff, local authority's and other statutory and voluntary organisations to reach the best possible outcome for the client.

(7) Gentoo

Gentoo deliver a number of specialist services in relation to supported accommodation, community safety and safeguarding. Some of these services include:-

- ***Allocations' System***

Gentoo's current allocations system includes a direct allocation element which can be used to re-house customers in exceptional circumstances. Gentoo are leading a pilot scheme whereby ex-offenders who are deemed by all key partners to be ready to successfully manage a tenancy, are considered for direct allocation. Other partners involved in the scheme are the City Council, Probation and Youth Offending Service.

- ***Positive Engagement Service***

This service supports perpetrators of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in an attempt to address the root cause of the ASB and prevent re-offending.

- ***Safeguarding Service***

Gentoo have a specialist safeguarding team to ensure all referrals from staff relating to vulnerable children, young people and adults are dealt with in the most appropriate way.

- ***Drug and Alcohol Support***

Gentoo employ a support officer to work with customers who specifically have drug and/or alcohol problems.

- ***Supported Accommodation***

Holmewood

Based in the City Centre, Holmewood provides supported accommodation to clients aged between 16 and 21 who are homeless. Primary referrals are made by SCC Gateway. The service is staffed 24 hours per day, 365 day per year and accommodates 6 female and 6 male clients at any one time. Between January

2012 and August 2012, 15 referrals were made, of which 6 had a history of offending. All referrals were accepted by the team.

STEPS

'STEPS' is Gentoo's floating support service to young people between the ages of 16-25 who require support to sustain their tenancies. There are 29 self contained flats owned by Gentoo (Core Properties) and 90 supported tenancies (cross tenure). Between January 2012 and August 2012 a total of 80 referrals were made into the service of which 10 had a history of offending. Again, all referrals were accepted into the service.

Managing Agents

Gentoo provide 169 units to a range of support agencies to use as temporary accommodation for their service users which include ex-offenders.

(8) Home Group

Home Group is a social enterprise, providing affordable rented homes and supported housing for people in the UK. Home manages 55,000 homes and provides support and services to more than 120,000 people every year. Home has 1468 properties in the city, with around 900 in Plains Farm. It also has properties in Grindon, Ryhope, Hylton Lane, Ford and the Coalfields area.

Home operates within the local communities in which it has properties in Sunderland. As well as an office based in the area, with staff on hand and available for tenants, it also has an anti-social behaviour team which works closely with the Police, the Probation Service and other agencies to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and to assess prospective clients' suitability for a tenancy within that community.

Home faces a number of challenges and opportunities in light of the recession and current and future policy and legislation changes, including welfare reform. It is therefore focusing on the needs and desires of customers and clients with choice and 'personalised' services being paramount.

Appendix 2 – Local Accommodation Barriers and Gaps

Issue	Accommodation Barriers/Gaps
Prison Leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prisoners rely on Hostel/Supported Accommodation as Private Landlord tenancies cannot be secured in time; • Hostels do not like to pre-book bed spaces, so a vacancy can not be guaranteed until day before release; and • Private landlords are reluctant to accept anyone coming straight out of prison and asking for background checks and disclosures.
Housing Benefit Changes & Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared Room Rate for under 35's makes it very difficult to access suitable accommodation; and • Some offenders have little or no savings to secure a tenancy and do not hit the criteria for a Paper Bond.
Registered Provider (Housing Associations) and Shared accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often shared accommodation available is unsuitable due to other residents and the area; and • Some adult offenders (age under 35) refuse to reside in shared accommodation; however their offence history usually triggers an automatic ban when trying to access Registered Provider properties.
Hostel provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently there is only one suitable Adult Supported Accommodation in Sunderland (Salvation Army). If a person is refused a vacancy there, they have to rely on Private Hostels to provide accommodation.
Supported Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews for Supported Accommodation (out of area) take months to obtain; • There is a lack of specialised Supported Accommodation for adult females; • Supported Housing Providers are often particularly strict about allowing a person to apply again-not taking into account progress they have made (hopefully the Gateway will improve this problem); and • The Offender may refuse to consider out-of-area hostel placements when all options have been exhausted in Sunderland.
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding accommodation for people with significant mental health needs can be challenging; • Landlords may not be tolerant of particular behaviours relating to their mental health, and may consider them to be too high risk despite extensive support being offered.
Offenders with 'high risk' offences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is real difficulty finding accommodation for people with high risk offences i.e.; Arson, Sex Offences, Violent offences etc; and • There is often a lack of suitable intensive support out in the community for those who may get housed and remain chaotic.

Landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landlords research potential applicants via internet sites, resulting in immediate exclusions
Issue	Personal Barrier
Substance Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning to drug/alcohol use immediately on release from prison; and • Not addressing drug use within the prison and being released on high levels of methadone.
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not budgeting prison discharge grant well, and spending it immediately upon release; • 'Starting from scratch'-being released with very few belongings. Having to start again and save for furniture, clothing etc; • Benefits taking a long time to come through-lack of income leads to re-offending; • Leaving numerous addresses with rent arrears; and • Failing to address arrears which prevents them from being able to reapply for housing.
Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour within Supported Accommodation. Poor behaviour leads to a cycle of evictions from various establishments; • 'Sofa Surfing' between friends as exhausted all other accommodation options available to them; and • Immediate return to known associates/peers.