



National Audit Office

Managing offenders on short custodial sentences

Detailed Methodology

MARCH 2010

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1 This document provides a detailed description of the methodology we used in our value for money study on *Managing offenders on short custodial sentences*.

2 Analysis of Departmental data. We analysed a wide range of data produced by the Department to build up a picture of short-sentenced prisoners. This included a number of datasets published as National Statistics, the data underpinning them, and other unpublished management information. The main sets were:

- a** Sentencing Statistics 2008, including data about criminal histories;
- b** Preliminary data for the Offender Management Caseload Statistics, 2009;
- c** Re-offending of Adults 2007;
- d** Prisoner suicide, self-harm and assaults data, 2006-08; and
- e** Unpublished data about inter-prison transfers, 2008-09.

3 Analysis of Departmental and NOMS surveys. We also made use of published information from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction survey (SPCR), currently being run by the Department, and analysed additional unpublished data from this survey and Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL), a survey run by NOMS Audit and Corporate Assurance. The characteristics of each survey are as follows:

- a** SPCR tracked a sample of 1,457 newly sentenced prisoners from 49 prisons in England and Wales, between November 2005 and November 2006. All interviews with prisoners were conducted by fully trained and briefed interviewers from Ipsos MORI, who were contracted to undertake the survey fieldwork. Sampling was undertaken using a census approach, drawing up-to-date information about the prisoner population from the Prison Service's Local Inmate Data System (LIDS). Only offenders aged 18 or older were eligible. Of the sample, 1,100 had sentences of less than 12 months.
- b** MQPL is undertaken on a rolling basis at all prisons in England and Wales, with some 100 prisoners in the sample at each prison. At our request, NOMS collated and analysed responses from the most recent survey at each prison, except two which had been re-rolled. All survey responses analysed – 13,301 cases in all – fell between 15 August 2005 and 16 March 2009. Only offenders aged 18 and over were included. Of the sample, 1,377 had short sentences. Since the same number of prisoners is interviewed at each prison, there is a systematic bias towards the views of prisoners at smaller establishments. Nonetheless, this represents the largest sample of short-sentenced prisoners ever to be studied in England and Wales.

4 Survey of prisons. We sent a survey to prison governors at 98 prisons in England and Wales, all of which routinely hold some short-sentenced prisoners. It asked about their work in the Reducing Re-Offending Pathways and other aspects of their management of short-sentenced prisoners. After piloting, the survey was conducted on our behalf by Carol Goldstone Associates. We received responses from 91 prisons (93 per cent of the sample). In June 2009, these prisons held 90 per cent of the short-sentenced prisoner population (6,843 out of 7,580).

5 Interviews with NOMS and Departmental staff. We carried out semi-structured interviews with people in relevant posts in both NOMS and the Department to understand the approach to managing short-sentenced prisoners, the quality of information about them, and planned changes, such as the new strategy. The main people and groups with whom we met are described in the box below.

In NOMS we held interviews with:

The Director-General
 Offender Assessment and Management Group
 Reducing Re-Offending Group
 Offender Employment, Skills and Services Group
 Interventions and Substance Misuse Group
 Women's Group
 Safer Custody Group
 Specification, Benchmarking and Costing Project
 Strategy and Effectiveness Group
 Finance
 Audit and Corporate Assurance
 Director of Offender Management, East of England
 Director of Offender Management, Yorkshire and Humberside
 Integrated Offender Management Pilot
 Layered Offender Management Pilot

In the Department we held interviews with:

The Head of Criminal Justice Group
 Offender Management Strategy Directorate
 Partnerships and Health Strategy Unit
 Women and Third Sector Strategy Unit
 Offender Management and Sentencing Analytical Services

We also held interviews with:

Offender Health, Department of Health
 Jobcentre Plus, Department of Work and Pensions
 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation

6 Fieldwork visits. We visited seven prisons and two Integrated Offender Management pilot areas, as described below. At each prison, we interviewed key staff, including the Governing Governor and those working in the Reducing Re-Offending Pathways, including staff employed by the Offender Learning and Skills Service and voluntary organisations. We conducted six focus groups and 20 in-depth interviews with short-sentenced prisoners to understand their perspective on the sentences they were serving.

Prisons

HMP Belmarsh
HMP Cardiff
HMP Doncaster (a privately-run prison)
HMP Hull
HMP Lincoln
HMP New Hall (a woman's prison)
Lancaster Farms Young Offender Institution

Integrated Offender Management Pilots

Southwark Diamond Districts Control Room, London
Leeds Integrated Offender Management Pilot

7 Costing. We conducted four types of cost analysis, as follows:

- a** An overall estimate of the cost of short-sentenced prisoners in 2008-09, using NOMS' calculation of the cost per prisoner for each prison and a model of the average number of short-sentenced prisoners in each establishment, which was derived from NOMS' Inmate Information System.
- b** Based on this, a comparison of the cost of short custodial and community sentences, which also used data from our previous value for money study on the *National Probation Service: The supervision of community orders in England and Wales*, HC 203, 2007-08.
- c** A detailed estimate of the cost of work in the Reducing Re-Offending Pathways at HMP Lincoln and HMP New Hall in 2008-09, based on a range of data sources, including:
 - the Operating Cost Statement;
 - directories of activities run in each prison;
 - staff profiling systems;
 - other estimates of staff time and cost; and
 - observation.

- d An estimate of the cost of re-offending by recently-released short-sentenced prisoners, based on Departmental estimates of the total cost of crime from 1999-2000 and adjusted for inflation (RPI) and the average fall in crime levels.

8 Prisoner activity analysis. At three prisons – HMP Belmarsh, HMP Doncaster and Lancaster Farms YOI – we analysed data from management information systems, which record the activities that prisoners do each day. At each prison, these systems were configured differently and the list of activities reported and the way in which time was recorded were also different. Some activities, such as induction and drug treatment tended not to be recorded. Nonetheless, the systems give a good indication of levels of purposeful activity. In all cases, the data we analysed referred to short-sentenced prisoners in custody in August and September 2009.

9 Document review. We examined a wide range of relevant documentation provided to us by NOMS and the Department. This included the new strategy, an internal review of prison housing services and papers describing Integrated Offender Management, Layered Offender Management and other initiatives. During the preliminary stage of the study, we engaged RAND Europe to carry out a brief literature review of the cost-effectiveness of short prison sentences. We also consulted recent reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation.

10 Meetings with stakeholders. We held meetings with stakeholders which work in prisons and campaign for prison reform to inform our understanding of the subject, as described in the box below.

The Howard League for Penal Reform

Make Justice Work

The National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders

The Prison Reform Trust

UNLOCK
