



Ministry
of Justice

The reform prisons pilot: research report on lessons learnt

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1. Summary

1.1 Background

Between July 2016 and December 2017, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) trialled greater autonomy for prison governors across six prisons. This was known as the reform prison pilot and allowed the prisons governors more control over key aspects of prison management and service delivery.

This included local prison budgets and contracts, staff recruitment and management and local partnerships. Further, each 'reform' prison received a one-off mobilisation budget of £1m and additional staff to fund and resource the delivery of the pilot. New governance structures were also created in the prisons. Executive governors and executive teams formed of senior staff were introduced to lead and deliver reform in the prisons and wider groups of local establishments, which grew in number during the pilot.

A qualitative process evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), which aimed to:

- describe the range of perceived impacts of the reform pilot in the six prisons;
- identify the factors that influenced the degree to which the new governance and performance management arrangements were achieving intended benefits; and
- map the effect of the reform pilot on the prisons' partners.

1.2 Methods

The process evaluation involved three separate strands of data collection to obtain a comprehensive overview of the reform pilot from a range of stakeholders. This included: senior national stakeholder interviews which were conducted towards the beginning and end of the study (in April 2017 and January 2018 respectively); case-study fieldwork with staff, partner organisations and offenders within each of the six prisons, which took place between June-November 2017; and a survey of prison governors which was carried out between July and August 2017 to explore views on the roll-out of empowerment across the wider estate. In total 134 qualitative in-depth interviews were completed with a wide range of key stakeholders, including governors, their executive teams, prison staff, prisoners and partner organisations.

1.3 Key findings

Changes delivered by the reform prisons

Each prison used their new powers differently, depending on contextual factors such as their prison population, category, and the stability of their regime. Changes were made across four main areas: budgets and contracts; human resources; the prison regime; and, buildings and facilities. Key changes made by the prisons are outlined below:

- **Budgetary flexibilities** enabled the prisons to maximise financial savings by improving access to funds and reducing the level of bureaucracy involved in procurement. For example, pilot prisons purchased goods and services more quickly in line with their needs and priorities when spending limits on government procurement cards (GPCs) were increased.
- **Contractual flexibilities** were used to review services. Reform prisons sought to renegotiate contracts using existing contractual terms and discuss underperformance, which led to improvements in specific areas of service delivery, for example, gardening and maintenance contracts.¹ There was also evidence of prisons commissioning new services, which were often with smaller, local partners.
- Reform was used to stabilise prison regimes through the development of targeted, local **human resource (HR) solutions** to speed up the process of recruitment and improve conditions for existing staff. A wider Government drive to increase staffing across the prison estate was also felt to have improved feelings of stability within the reform prisons.
- Some prisons had used the reform pilot to **expand or improve regimes** to benefit prisoners. In relation to work and education, this included more varied education programmes, new workshops and one-off events such as recruitment fairs.
- The prisons spent a proportion of their reform budgets on **estates projects** such as refurbishing wings and purchasing new furniture to improve the look and feel of their environments in a timely way. Changes were reported to enhance morale and improve the atmosphere and mood of the prisons.

¹ Whilst it was likely that the reform prisons utilised existing contractual flexibilities, it is clear that they perceived that the reform programme gave them increased control over the contracts they entered and managed, including re-negotiations.

Governance and management of the reform pilot

Executive teams were introduced by HMPPS to provide strategic direction and manage delivery at the reform prisons, including developing a long-term vision and engaging with external stakeholders. Executive teams brought new skills and expertise into the prisons and the importance of investing in key members of staff was emphasised.

Anticipated benefits of grouping prisons together² included economies of scale, greater opportunities to share learning across sites, improved continuity of care for prisoners and more opportunities to establish partnerships with local communities. However, the group structure had not been fully established at the time the research was carried out and there were some concerns about the efficacy of groups and ability of prisons to work together well.

Partnerships

Reform was felt to have increased the range of opportunities available for prisons and partners to work together at a local level, on a range of areas such as education, healthcare and maintenance work. Increased flexibility encouraged partners to work differently with the prisons and improve services offered to prisoners through the active management of contracts and better communication between parties.

Factors supporting the delivery of the reform pilot

A range of facilitators were perceived to be important in supporting the delivery of reform work across the prisons.

- The money given to reform prisons to set up and deliver the pilot was perceived to be vital. Furthermore, the ability to retain underspend and have flexibility over how to spend money was reported as important in helping reform prisons plan and make sustainable decisions about how to organise services.
- Executive staff leading the delivery of the pilot were perceived to have added value through the skills they brought (e.g. contract management and leadership expertise) and enthusiasm for delivering change. Executive teams also brought a tiered management capacity, enabling governing governors to focus on running the prisons while executive governors focused on wider strategy and stakeholder engagement.

² The new Group Structure was introduced from April 2017 for public sector prisons, with groups organised primarily on a geographical basis of 4-5 prisons, with a further functional set of groupings for those prisons sharing a common core function such as the Women's Estate, the Long Term High Security Estate and the Young Person's Estate. Prisons within groups have their strategic objectives aligned, share resource/capacity and learning as well as assurance and performance management.

- The reform prisons drew on support from central teams to deliver change. It was felt that the prisons would not have progressed as far in delivering change, such as with local recruitment projects, without help and expertise from HQ³. However, it was thought that working with HQ had been more effective when there was dedicated support available via the reform enabling team. This was scaled back when empowerment was rolled out across the prison estate in April 2017.
- The reform pilot enhanced the status of the prison in the eyes of both internal and external stakeholders. This provided a sense of momentum that supported the prisons to deliver on reform objectives.

Barriers to delivery

A range of barriers were perceived to have challenged the delivery of reform work across the prisons.

- Contextual challenges relating to a reduction in staff numbers, and increases in substance misuse, for example, were perceived to have limited the capacity of some prisons to effectively use reform powers in a timely way. It was thought to be important to stabilise operating environments as a priority before implementing new reform work.
- A range of communication challenges were perceived to have inhibited delivery and partnership working across reform projects and between staff and stakeholders at different levels. For example, some staff participants were unclear how reform differed from other things happening in the prisons and some prisoners had not heard about the pilot at all. Effective and consistent communication from senior teams within prison groups and HQ was thought to be important in sustaining engagement in the future.
- Some areas were perceived to be too big or risky to change using the new powers. For example, some prisons found that they were unable to exit larger national contracts as this would have been expensive and resource-intensive. To manage risk, some larger projects were delivered over a longer period than originally intended or in some cases halted to ensure the safe implementation of new policies and process across the reform prisons.

³ The use of HQ in this report refers to either MoJ or HMPPS and sometimes both.

Conclusion

Contextual challenges such as understaffing and increases in substance misuse were perceived to make it harder for prisons to deliver reform. However, there were examples of new services, projects and models of delivery and a sense across different areas of work that the reform prisons were making efforts to deliver personalised, local services embedded within their communities. While many changes were introduced across the reform prisons, the extent to which improvements were thought to be innovative and experimental was questioned.

Going forward, there was an acceptance that larger and more transformational projects would take more time to safely develop and deliver. It will be important that prison governors and directors are able to access key learning to continue to safely innovate at a local level using devolved powers.

2. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the independent process evaluation of the reform prison pilot, which aimed to give the governors of six establishments greater flexibility over key aspects of prison management. This chapter sets out the policy context, the evaluation aims and objectives and describes the evaluation methodology.

2.1 Background

In February 2016, the then Prime Minister David Cameron outlined the government's plans to make the prison system more modern and effective. This was to be accomplished through key principles of improved transparency and accountability, intervention and treatment for prisoners and greater autonomy for prison governors (Prime Minister's Office, 2016). The principle of providing greater autonomy to prison governors was further developed by the Justice Secretary at the time, Michael Gove, drawing upon the model of academy schools to give governors greater control over the way they manage their prison.

In May 2016 it was announced that six prisons – HMP Wandsworth, HMP Holme House, HMP Kirklevington Grange, HMP Coldingley, HMP High Down and HMP Ranby – would trial these principles and become 'reform prisons' (MoJ, 2016a). The reform prisons pilot was designed to test options for giving governors more discretion to prioritise what they thought would make their prisons safe, secure, and support the rehabilitation of prisoners. Some centralised national direction was retained in core areas of policy - such as combating the impact of drugs, self-harm and violence. Further information capturing the profile of the six prisons, key challenges and reform priorities is outlined at Appendix D.

Greater autonomy was given to the six prison governors and their senior teams for a trial period of two years. Reform prisons were free to develop their own strategies across a number of key areas, including:

- flexibility in the spending of budgets;
- ability to design strategies for staff recruitment and management;
- authority to decide which partnerships would benefit their prisons and local communities; and
- choice over where to purchase goods and services (MoJ, 2016b).

Reform prisons were encouraged to deliver services to best meet the needs of their prison populations, provided they were lawful and there was no clear evidence that they would be actively harmful or have a significant impact on statutory services delivered by other providers. Each received £1m and additional staff to fund and resource the delivery of the pilot. In addition, a central headquarters (HQ) enabling team was on hand to provide support and clarification as they embarked on the pilot.

New governance structures were also created within the reform prisons. Executive teams were formed of senior staff to lead and deliver reform in the prison, headed up by four executive governors who were recruited (or in one instance promoted from governing governor) to sit above the governing governor in each prison, to provide strategic oversight, support and assurance. Two of the executive governors oversaw two prisons each, and two oversaw one prison each.

Over the lifetime of the project the emphasis shifted to giving Governors greater decision-making authority but within the context of a national prison system. This affected how both the reform prisons and the rest of the estate were managed and run. A different model, known as 'empowerment', was rolled out to all public-sector prisons via the empowerment update in April 2017. 'Empowerment' had two main aims: to improve Governors ability to run a safe and decent prison, by increasing their ability to manage core prison functions (such as the core day and budget); and to improve their ability to influence outcomes for the prisoners in their care, by giving them a greater say in the provision of rehabilitative services.

Governors were given specific powers, known as 'freedoms', in key areas such as budgets, the core day and educational provision, but to ensure consistency and coherence across the national estate, a degree of central control was retained.

More detailed information on the changes and a timeline of key dates and events relating to the reform pilot is set out in Appendix A.

2.2 Research aims and objectives

The National Centre for Social research (NatCen) was commissioned by MoJ to carry out a process evaluation of the pilot prisons. The specific objectives of the research were to:

- describe the range of perceived impacts of the reform pilot in the six prisons;
- identify the factors that influenced the degree to which the new governance and performance management arrangements were achieving intended benefits; and
- explore the effect of the reform pilot on the prisons' partners.

To ensure that the research explored the full range of perspectives, it aimed to collect evidence from a wide range of key stakeholders, including governors, their executive teams, prison staff, prisoners and partner organisations. Early findings from the process evaluation supported the roll-out of empowerment, with NatCen feeding back via the evaluation steering group at regular intervals.

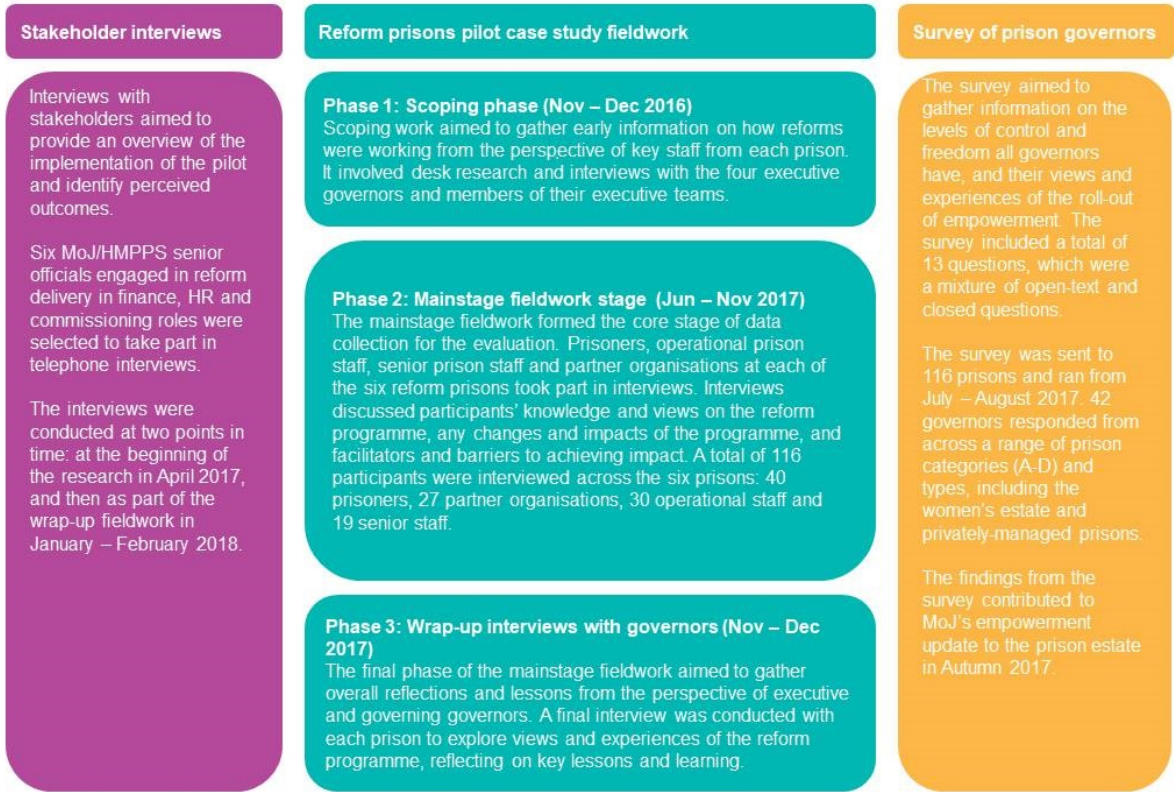
2.3 Methodology

The process evaluation involved three separate strands of data collection:

- stakeholder interviews with six MoJ/HMPPS senior officials at two points in time;
- case studies of the six reform prisons, which involved scoping interviews with executive governors and their teams, mainstage fieldwork with a range of participants living and working across the reform prisons, and wrap-up interviews with executive governors; and
- a survey of prison governors across the rest of the estate.

In total, 134 interviews were completed across the scoping and main stage strands of the evaluation. The separate strands of data collection are outlined in more detail below and more information on the characteristics of each group sampled is included at Appendix B.

Figure 1: Overview of research methodology



Sampling and data collection

All the interviews conducted as part of the research were in-depth qualitative interviews. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals to participate. The approach seeks to achieve range and diversity of views and experiences rather than to build a statistically representative sample. The research team ensured that the views and experiences of a range of participant groups were included in the research, and that diversity was achieved across the participant groups using a clear sampling strategy and quotas agreed with the MoJ.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone, depending on the participant group - all interviews with offenders took place face-to-face. To ensure a consistent approach across encounters and between members of the research team, tailored topic guides were used in all interviews, with separate topic guides developed for the different participant groups. The topic guides were used in a flexible manner, with open and non-leading phrasing to allow researchers to respond appropriately.

Qualitative data analysis

With participants' permission, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Where permission was not given, notes were taken instead. Interview data were managed and analysed using the Framework approach developed by NatCen (Richie et al., 2013). This

matrix-based analytic method facilitates rigorous and transparent qualitative data management which is grounded in participants' accounts, views and experiences described in their own words. A thematic framework was used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories. Further details about the methodology, including sampling, recruitment, interviewing and analysis are provided in Appendix B.

Methodological challenges

A key aim of this qualitative process evaluation was to comprehensively represent the views of a broad range of individuals with experience of the pilot. The study was robust in the design of the sampling, data collection and analysis and this report provides an accurate account of the data collected. However, as with all research, the evaluation methodology had a number of limitations and it is a marker of high quality research to acknowledge them. Key limitations included:

- **Gaining access to prisons:** The four-month timeframe for completing fieldwork meant that most prisons could work around other planned events (such as inspections) and operational pressures. However, it was not possible to fully meet interview quotas at all six of the pilot prisons, which is reflected in the numbers of completed interviews per prison (see Appendix B for more detail). Due to the breadth of data collected throughout the evaluation, we are confident that this has not affected the quality of information gathered or findings in any significant way.
- **Recruitment of prisoners:** Prisoners were recruited through gatekeepers in the six prisons. As such, the research team was limited in terms of which prisoners they were given access to, which may have limited the diversity of the prisoner sample. The research team attempted to reduce the potential impact of this by over-sampling potential participants and discussing with gatekeepers about approaching a range of prisoners.
- **Limits to anonymity:** The number of prisons participating in the pilot is small, limiting the degree of anonymity that could be offered to individuals. This was made clear to participants in advance and participants were given the opportunity to opt out or review their contribution at the end of the interview. Care has been taken to maintain anonymity when reporting the findings.
- **Other projects being delivered in reform prisons:** This research sought to explore changes relating solely to the reform prisons pilot. However, there were a number of other changes taking place across the estate at the same time, including for example the roll-out of in-cell technology, which made it difficult for participants to always

accurately distinguish between reform and other projects. Where participants explicitly stated they were unsure about what drove change, it is noted in the report.

2.4 About this report

This report describes the range and diversity of views and experiences among participants, and verbatim quotations and examples from the research interviews are used throughout to illustrate themes and findings. Numbers of participants expressing specific views are not provided as any numerical inference is likely to be misleading or inaccurate.

The structure of the rest of the report is as follows:

- **Chapter 3** examines implementation and delivery, the successes and challenges involved, and prisoner experiences of the pilot
- **Chapter 4** explores the governance and management of the pilot prisons
- **Chapter 5** examines changes associated with the pilot on partnership working
- **Chapter 6** explores the attitudes of staff and prisoners to the pilot prisons
- **Chapter 7** discusses key learning

3. Implementation and delivery

Overview

This chapter describes the range of changes the reform prisons pilot made across four key areas, using their new areas of autonomy. Taken together, these four areas (budgets and contracts, human resources (HR), the prison regime and buildings and facilities) were thought to guide and govern prison life. However, each prison prioritised and used their powers in different ways, depending on factors such as their prison population and category. This chapter describes the ways in which the flexibilities were used, their perceived value, and the facilitators and barriers to delivering change. Key points outlined in this chapter include:

- The pilot helped prisons focus on areas to change and improve. It gave the prisons increased resources (funding and staff) and influence with a range of stakeholders to support the delivery of reform work.
- Support from the centre was viewed as crucial, helping the prisons to focus on key areas of work such as HR issues. Going forward, participants felt it would be important for the centre to continue to work with prisons to ensure they have access to timely information on how to best utilise flexibilities and manage risk.
- While there was evidence of changes and improvements, some participants questioned the extent to which there was opportunity to innovate and experiment. Some also felt it was hard to disentangle the difference reform had made in relation to other programmes of work such as re-roll⁴.

3.1 Budgetary flexibilities

It was intended that reform prisons would have greater autonomy to make decisions about what to spend money on and from which providers they would purchase goods and services. This was to enable them to maximise financial savings and ensure quality in procurement. Two important mechanisms were put in place to support prisons to manage budgets with greater autonomy:

⁴ When a prison changes its category, a key function or takes on a different kind of prisoner, this is called re-roll. Several of the reform prisons re-rolled to different types of prison during the period in which the pilot was delivered

- Reform prisons were offered the opportunity to retain underspend over consecutive financial years; and
- Protocols governing the use of some procurement systems (such as Government Procurement Cards (GPCs)) were relaxed to enable these prisons to spend money more flexibly and bypass slow central systems (such as shared services).

In addition, the prisons were given limited 'mobilisation budgets' of £1m each at the start of the pilot to support set up. This increased the prisons' capacity to spend across priority areas and was intended to help with start-up costs for new reform projects.

Budgetary flexibilities were perceived to be valuable to the reform prisons for two reasons. Firstly, prisons that utilised flexibilities around procurement systems were able to increase transaction limits and categories of spend on GPCs held by senior staff. This was thought to help prisons purchase goods and services more quickly in line with their needs and priorities. For example, one prison purchased beds for prisoners and another bought materials for a prison industry from a local supplier rather than using the standard national procurement channels.⁵ In these cases, participants thought that flexibilities could enable prisons to achieve better value for money and increase local partnership work with a wider range of suppliers.

Secondly, participants reported that it was helpful to have more control and flexibility over how and where they spent money, especially to support the purchasing or commissioning of new resources and services. 'Essential cash injections' to get projects launched or carry out maintenance or building work before projects started were highly valued.

However, some participants thought that autonomy in this area could have gone further. Two examples were given:

- It was thought that reform could have further devolved budgetary responsibilities to staff in junior positions, which may have enabled more timely and appropriate decisions to be made about how to spend small amounts of money on specific items, such as gym equipment.
- Greater flexibilities were welcomed by those that had applied for enhanced autonomy regarding the use of GPC cards. However, this did not happen automatically, and other

⁵ There is no evidence to suggest that use of these flexibilities by reform prisons to purchase goods and services using local rather than national arrangements was contrary to any relevant regulations.

prisons that had not applied were frustrated by the lack of procurement flexibilities available to them and limited choice over the suppliers they used.

3.2 Contracts

The ability to manage the delivery of contracts was intended to enable the six prisons to make timely and appropriate decisions about how services were commissioned and delivered. They intended to use flexibilities in this area to commission local providers to embed service provision within communities.

Participants expected that as pilot prisons, this flexibility would enable them to:

- review how contracts across the prison were working;
- discuss ways in which services might be improved or renegotiate contracts if they were not delivering the intended results; and
- terminate contracts and commission new services, if reasonable changes could not be agreed (though this did not appear to have happened at the time the research was carried out).⁶

When making decisions about existing contracts, strategic staff⁷ explained that they had to consider areas of underperformance and then assess how easy it would be to change them. Some recognised that it would be difficult to change some of the bigger, national contracts, such as national education and maintenance service contracts. These participants generally decided to leave these alone in the early stages of delivering the reform pilot, with the expectation of potentially managing them differently in the future.

Prisons that had used contractual flexibilities to improve services delivered by providers either attempted to renegotiate terms and conditions of existing contracts or commissioned new services. The processes and perceived benefits of taking these actions are outlined below.⁸

⁶ Whilst it was likely that the reform prisons utilised existing contractual flexibilities, it is clear that they perceived that the reform programme gave them increased control over the contracts they entered and managed, including re-negotiations.

⁷ Beyond the case study design, strategic staff across departments in MoJ/HMPPS participated in the evaluation to share their views on leading key programmes of work which related to and impacted on the delivery of the pilot. More information about participant groups can be found in Appendix B.

⁸ Ibid 6.

Renegotiating contracts

Reform prisons that were unsatisfied with existing services led discussions with providers about improving quality and value for money. Formal renegotiations were not always required, and some reported that just having the impetus to discuss service provision had led to positive change. Participants reflected that successful conversations gave them a new confidence and that they did not think this was something that they could or would have done prior to the pilot.

Examples of successful renegotiations included one prison achieving a lower price for an accommodation solution, while another prison purchased equipment for the prison gym more cheaply and quickly. Other prisons decided to focus on specific areas of larger contracts. For example, one prison had improved garden maintenance by focusing on this relatively small part of the overall maintenance contract.

Commissioning new services

Prisons also used contractual flexibilities to commission new services in addition to or alongside existing contracts. These were often relatively small contracts that prisons agreed with local suppliers. For example, family services to deliver rehabilitative work with prisoners; a communications specialist to support strategy development; and a handyman service to carry out day-to-day maintenance work. Participants reported that the flexibility to commission new services had helped to improve efficiency and quality across key areas of delivery.⁹

Facilitators and barriers

Facilitators felt to have supported contract improvement and commissioning were:

- **Specialist contract management skills and experience within executive teams.** Reform prisons that had access to specialist skills and experience seemed to have had greater success in negotiating terms and conditions and felt more confident to do so. Knowing how to interpret contracts was perceived to be important in achieving success.
- **Support from the centre.** Some of the six prisons utilised support from central teams to explore ways to improve services and found this useful in progressing larger programmes of work. For example, HR support was welcomed by one prison where they were attempting to move away from a national HMPPS occupational health contract. While participants at this prison reported that the process had been

⁹ There is no evidence to suggest that use of these flexibilities by reform prisons to purchase goods and services using local rather than national arrangements was contrary to any relevant regulations.

complicated, they did not feel they could have got as far as they had done without the expertise and support they received from central teams.

- **Reform prison status.** Sometimes participants felt that negotiations had been successful because prisons had a certain 'status' through their involvement with the pilot, which gave them confidence to have these discussions. Added to this, providers were worried that the prison might terminate the contract if they were unable to find a feasible solution (though it should be noted that prior to the reform programme, all existing contracts would have contained rights for the Authority to take action against poor performance and in most, if not all of those contracts, that would have included a right to terminate).

"With reform you could go and tell them that because you had the choice of pulling out of the contract. This kicked them to say, 'Right, OK, I've got to deliver.'
(Senior staff)

- **Prioritising and sequencing reform activities.** Some prisons decided to focus on areas where change was expected to be most achievable. Prioritising negotiations to improve elements of an existing contract or commission a new small contract alongside a larger national one was thought to be an effective way of improving service delivery incrementally.

Barriers felt to have inhibited contract improvement and commissioning were:

- **Size and nature of contracts.** Some participants were disappointed that they were not able to change or leave large contracts that were under-performing, particularly poorly performing maintenance providers. Participants explained that the work involved in exiting and tendering for new contracts of this nature and size was significant, and they felt limited in the extent to which they could do this.
- **A lack of support.** Some prisons felt unable to manage some of the larger, under-performing contracts effectively due to a lack of specialist knowledge combined with a lack of support from the centre. These participants described how they could have been given more detailed information from colleagues at HQ about the contracts that were held (including relevant clauses and financial information) and supported to

consider options available to them.¹⁰ Furthermore, some participants felt they had missed out on support from regional commissioning forums as a result of their reform prison status, which meant that they were sometimes not invited to important meetings where local decisions about service commissioning were made.

- **Lack of flexibility with existing procurement systems.** Participants reported that for example, existing IT systems used to order goods and services were thought to be slow and ineffective, hindering the prisons' ability to employ contractual flexibilities easily. The reliance on complicated procurement systems was felt to constrain autonomy and stifle innovation.

“It’s like reform with brakes on... the governor has been given autonomy and freedoms, yet still has to adhere to the clunky old system in a lot of ways, that seems to slow things down and create frustration.”

(Partner)

3.3 HR processes

Staff recruitment was perceived to have been particularly challenging in areas where the cost of local housing was felt to be high relative to prison salaries; where prison salaries were not competitive with comparable local jobs (such as the police), or where the scarcity of employment opportunities combined with the length of the vetting process meant that candidates dropped out before they could take up a job offer.

Changes were implemented across HR departments in the six prisons, where staffing issues were addressed in two key ways:

- **Attracting and recruiting new staff to the prison service.** This centred on developing local solutions to speed up the process of advertising for, selecting, appointing and training candidates. In addition, participants expressed a desire for bespoke solutions that gave them and potential candidates more direct exposure to each other, in order to ascertain early on if the appointment was likely to work.

¹⁰ While some participants perceived there to be a lack of support from the centre in relation to contract improvement it should be noted that dedicated commercial support was available from the Commercial Deputy Director who was able to advise the reform programme on contractual provisions. In addition a Contracts Register was subsequently published on the HMPPS intranet and made available to all HMPPS staff as part of the wider Governor Empowerment roll out.

- **Rewarding and upskilling existing staff.** Staff were considered a valuable asset to the reform prisons, especially during more challenging periods, and staff participants at all levels reported that feeling valued and respected helped them deliver their jobs well.

Successful approaches and barriers to attracting, recruiting, rewarding and upskilling staff described by the pilot are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Successful approaches and barriers to overcoming staffing issues

Successful approaches	Barriers
<i>Attracting and recruiting</i>	
<p>Decentralised recruitment campaign with local advertising → increased pool of suitable candidates.</p> <p>Keeping in touch with candidates throughout centralised vetting process, to encourage them to accept position rather than accepting another offer while waiting.</p> <p>Increased starting salaries for some roles and potential to offer staff accommodation in areas with high living costs.</p> <p>Fast-tracking new recruits through training where appropriate e.g. progression from Officer Support to Officer in one month rather than six.</p>	<p>Rushed recruitment processes → some new recruits left the service prematurely because of lack of preparation.</p> <p>Junior and inexperienced staff requiring additional support → short-term resourcing issues.</p>
<i>Rewarding and upskilling</i>	
<p>Long-term approaches to increasing pay and benefits e.g. a retention bonus, performance recognition scheme and travel allowance.</p> <p>Leadership programmes and mentoring schemes → prisons places of investment and progression</p> <p>One-off events to acknowledge hard work and contribution of staff, such as staff award events and parties.</p>	<p>Process of increasing salaries for existing officers (to bring in line with new recruits) difficult and protracted → experienced staff felt undervalued and underpaid.</p> <p>Operational staff not always benefitting from training opportunities → lack of engagement with reform more generally.</p>

The involvement of the centre underpinned both successes and barriers. For example, HR business partners were recruited to work with each prison group and were closely linked to the central team to help deliver on HR objectives. Participants across the pilot welcomed this integrated support and believed it helped them prioritise HR issues early on. This was highly valued given the immediate need of some of the prisons to find quick, simple solutions to long-standing staff shortages. However, some participants reported difficulties working with the centre, and spoke of a reliance on hierarchy and decision-making that may have limited the extent or scale of change.

3.4 Prison regimes

The prison regime refers to all day-to-day activities that take place within establishments. The regime provides structure and usually involves a schedule of mandatory and non-mandatory activities to sustain and enhance prisoners' lives and maintain order within the establishment.¹¹ Stable regimes that offer opportunities for prisoners to engage in meaningful rehabilitative activity are thought to help maintain calm environments and were welcomed by prisoners.

'A prison shouldn't be about punishment. It should be about enabling someone to go on and lead a successful life that doesn't involve offending.'
(Prisoner)

Prisons that had successfully increased staff numbers were perceived to have improved staff morale and reduced rates of absence and sickness. Staff and prisoners described how their prisons felt more settled and some reported that regimes had expanded or improved during the period in which the pilot was running. However, at the time fieldwork took place, 'reduced regimes' were being delivered in a number of the pilot prisons, which meant that work, education and other activities were either scaled back or not delivered. This caused frustration among staff and prisoners who were unable to take part in routine activities that they valued and enjoyed.

"People are not happy that they've not been getting the things they're entitled to. Like, you know, association time, things to do, whether education, work and so forth. They're not happy about spending a lot of time behind bars, locked up."
(Prisoner)

The reform prisons delivered slightly different regimes in line with their needs and requirements. An overview of activities reported by prisoners at each establishment is included at Appendix E. Key aspects of regime change, their successes and barriers are discussed in Table 2 below.

¹¹ Prison regimes differ according to prison type, category and population; lower category and open prisons tend to have fewer prescribed activities than higher category prisons. Activities which are generally considered to form the basis of prison regimes include work and education, targeted courses and programmes (such as behavioural programmes), family visits, ROTL, unlock times, free time and meal times.

Table 2: Regime change successes and challenges

Changes made	Perceived successes	Challenges
<i>Work and education</i>		
<p>Expansion of well-established activities e.g. more education programmes, new industry workshops and one-off events like recruitment fairs.</p> <p>More joined-up working with partners in the community.</p>	<p>Recruiting a commercial specialist to support activity in this area.</p>	<p>A lack of variation in education programmes for prisoners, particularly at higher and more technical levels.</p> <p>Difficulties recruiting specialist roles to support expansion activities.</p> <p>Difficulties securing work experience placements for prisoners.</p> <p>Resistance from the centre when implementing regime changes perceived to carry risk, such as Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) e.g. one prison had an agreement with a local business to take ROTL prisoners, but was unable to reach agreement with the centre to deliver the project securely.</p>
<i>Targeted activities and programmes</i>		
<p>Programmes aimed at prisoners with very specific needs (e.g. mental health or substance misuse) established or recommissioned.</p> <p>Implementation of new services e.g. mindfulness courses and family support work.</p> <p>Mentors and peer support provision extended to improve access to services.</p>	<p>Improvements in prisoners' attitudes and behaviour.</p> <p>Greater awareness of and engagement with programmes by prisoners, including those with specific needs. Mentors and peer supporters felt to facilitate this.</p>	<p>Concern over sustainability; funding should be available longer-term to minimise disruption to prisoners.</p>

3.5 Estates

Financial resources and flexibilities offered were thought to be particularly important in supporting prisons to upgrade and refurbish parts of their estate. Projects focused on improving buildings and facilities for staff, prisoners and visitors. Decisions about priorities were based on need as well as achieving balance across groups of beneficiaries.

Changes were delivered to help improve the overall look and feel of the prison environment in a timely way, and participants hoped that projects would improve how safe, clean and orderly the prisons felt. Projects included:

- refurbished wings and living spaces for prisoners;

- new beds and bedding in prisoners' cells;
- new or refurbished canteens and staff rooms;
- furniture and fittings for rooms and areas dedicated to specific services (e.g. family rooms) and more generally throughout the prison (e.g. carpets and flooring);
- new visitors' centre and canteen; and
- improving safety and security, for example CCTV and grilles on cell windows (to limit rubbish thrown from windows and prevent drones from gaining access).

Senior staff were particularly enthusiastic about these improvements. They wanted to send a clear message that senior management teams were invested in improving the prison environment and were making progress with longstanding maintenance issues. They hoped that this in turn would enhance morale.

Challenges

While the resources and financial flexibilities given to the reform prisons to make changes to the estate were perceived to be important, a number of challenges were raised.

- Some projects were not delivered as smoothly or efficiently as the prisons would have liked, due to complications with the providers used. For example, participants reported that contractors did not always deliver what had been agreed or that there were delays completing work. This highlights the importance of strong contract management expertise within senior prison teams to keep projects on track. In some cases, prisons reported that money was lost as a result.
- There were some projects that prisons would have liked to have delivered as part of the reform pilot but that were considered too expensive, such as addressing sanitation issues or the removal of perimeter fencing.
- Some prison buildings and facilities were considered too old and run down to be improved meaningfully through small renovation projects.
- The rationale for prioritising certain estates projects over others was unclear to some, especially operational staff and prisoners.

“There are problems with the sanitation systems and leaking roofs, but then they go and spend money on fixing chapel windows.”

(Operational staff)

- Some participants did not feel that the pilot was necessary to deliver change; rather the money was perceived to be the key enabler. There was also a lack of clarity about whether certain refurbishment projects and upgrades around the prisons were related to the pilot or not. For example, in-cell technology was widely believed by operational staff and prisoners to be linked. However, senior staff explained that it was part of a broader technology project being implemented across the whole estate.

3.6 Views on delivering reform objectives

The pilot sought to deliver improvements across budgets, contracts, HR, the prison regime, and buildings and facilities; focussing on things that they were able to change using flexibilities as well as other resources available to them.¹² They were broadly positive about what they had delivered and highlighted some of the bigger projects, such as new recruitment programmes, as key successes. They were also happy to be given the opportunity to test and try new things, even though some projects were less successful.

Prisons that faced greater challenges around safety and security prioritised using reform to stabilise their regimes by, for example, focusing on recruitment to bring more staff on board quickly. Focussing on immediate and urgent needs was felt to have made a significant difference to these prisons. However, while tackling longstanding issues was perceived to be important, the extent to which improvements were thought to have met reform objectives to innovate and experiment was questioned by some. These participants felt that key projects (such as infrastructure and building work) should have been funded regardless.

Reform as a driver for change

A question was raised about the extent to which reform was thought to be necessary in driving change across key areas. Across staff grades, participants found it hard to disentangle the various interconnected projects and services being delivered across complex and changing prison systems, and some suspected that other programmes of work may have had more influence in delivering positive change, such as re-roll as well as the national recruitment campaign to employ more prison officers. However, in other areas it was clear that the freedoms and flexibilities associated with the pilot had been essential. For example,

¹² Holme House, for example, also utilised the Drug Recovery Prison (DRP) funding and resources to bring about a range of changes and improvements across the prison.

it was felt that changes to how budgets and contracts were managed would not have been possible without reform.

Regardless of what participants thought drove change, in general the pilot seemed to have given the prisons a chance to review services and regime delivery and consider how to best tackle issues they faced. It was used as an opportunity to stabilise prison environments and explore where they could use new powers alongside other financial and policy levers to sustain and enhance services in key areas within their prison.

4. Governance and management

Overview

This chapter details participants' experiences of governance, including the perceived benefits and challenges of working with executive teams and grouping prisons together, delegation of new powers across staff grades, and support from central teams in HMPPS and MoJ. The key points outlined in this chapter include the following:

- Smaller group sizes, links between prisons to support prisoner flow and more closely-connected prison group directors were perceived to be benefits of the new group model trialled as part of the pilot.
- The composition of executive teams was thought to be important in bringing new skills and expertise into the prisons. Participants highlighted that effective leadership was dependent on appointing individuals with skills and enthusiasm and emphasised the importance of investing in key members of staff.
- More effective communication at all levels across prisons and with the centre could support momentum and buy-in to deliver effective reform work going forward.

4.1 Overview of governance structures

Purpose and composition of executive teams

Executive teams were introduced to develop strategy and manage delivery in the six prisons. Teams included senior leads to support other areas of the business (such as finance and HR) and were led by executive governors. Executive governors supported governing governors in their prison groups by providing oversight and direction and it was thought to be important that they possessed strong leadership skills and enthusiasm for the reform agenda.

“If I'd been interviewing people to be reform governors, I would have been looking for a very outward looking, very holistic innovative person, with strong leadership ability and who had a vision and was able to engage the staff and deliver that’.

(Strategic stakeholder)

Prisons embedded specialist expertise within their executive teams to focus on particular areas of relevance to each establishment. Drawing in specialist knowledge from outside the prison context was felt to be particularly valuable in informing the work of the executive team because it brought insight and experience not previously available from a range of areas,

including other public services and the private sector to provide fresh insight to prison management. In one prison, for example, a commercial expert helped review contracts whilst other prisons had hired education and rehabilitation leads from, respectively, school and probation contexts.

4.2 Benefits and challenges of the executive structure

Benefits of the executive structure

The executive team governance structure facilitated effective delivery of the pilot in five key ways:

Capacity: Introducing the additional resource of the executive teams, with the time and capacity to focus on strategic matters away from the pressure of day-to-day operational delivery, was felt to be important in ensuring the six prisons had the ability and drive to make use of the flexibilities allowed.

Expertise: Executive teams were described as having added value to prison governance by introducing valuable skills and expertise the prisons did not previously have. Examples included:

- the appointment of senior staff with specific expertise to focus on areas of need – such as assurance, project management, and education; and
- implementation of ‘insights boards’ comprised of external experts to inform the executive team on specific issues through quarterly meetings.

Support and assurance: The executive teams were seen as more closely engaged within the prison than in previous governance models (such as the Deputy Director of Custody (DDC) structure), working proactively and in collaboration with governing governors. Executive teams were described as playing a key role in offering support and constructive challenge to a prison’s senior management that was felt to be useful in driving performance.

“[the] DDC [...] used to mark the homework but [the] executive governor, he actually helps you to understand and complete the homework.”

(Senior staff)

Furthermore, in visiting the prisons much more frequently than DDCs previously had, executive governors could explore and report on issues directly themselves, which streamlined the process and reduced the requirement for excess administration and paperwork. However, participants perceived that with the roll-out of empowerment there were reduced opportunities for executive teams to undertake assurance activities and expected the centre to take back some monitoring and assurance responsibility in the future.

Reducing bureaucracy: Finally, some participants regarded the immediate local decision-making power that this governance model introduced as reducing bureaucracy and supporting momentum.

“you didn't have to go outside the prison to get an answer on something; the executive governor could make a decision.”

(Operational staff)

Challenges of the executive structure

A number of challenges related to the governance model were also highlighted by participants and centred on the potentially divisive nature of the model, as outlined below:

- There was some confusion relating to the split of roles and responsibilities between executive and senior operational staff (e.g. the governing governor). This was perceived to have limited the ability of the executive teams to gain traction within the strongly hierarchical culture.
- Some participants felt that the relevant skill base already existed within prisons, and as such the introduction of the executive team resulted in a sense of displacement or disempowerment. Executive staff were therefore sometimes perceived as interfering rather than adding value over and above what already existed.
- The creation of distinct strategic and operational teams ran the risk of inspiring a ‘them and us’ attitude. In some instances it was felt that strategic decisions were made without appropriate consultation and engagement with operational teams. Among operational staff particularly, there was a clear sense of separation from the work and mechanisms of the pilot.

“There's not much engagement... They have their own budget, the executive team can do what they like, but we still have to do everything the way we used to.”

(Operational staff)

4.3 Devolving responsibility to staff across the prisons

As part of the pilot, there was an intention to support staff at different levels to make informed decisions about specific areas of work in order to enable the delivery of effective and tailored service provision. Across the six prisons, there was a sense that devolving power through the staff grades could improve efficiency and enhance morale, by drawing usefully on expertise and increasing individuals' sense of ownership over their work and the environment. Having a stable regime and fully-staffed workforce was perceived to be important to devolving power effectively.

“When you're working on a process you can see what the flaws are, where improvements can be made, so consequently people at different levels can have an impact, if they are allowed to come forward with their ideas to improve things. If people are looking to improve things, that's going to be for the benefit of all.”

(Operational staff)

Greater autonomy for staff at lower grades was felt to have the potential to be valuable for two key reasons:

- supporting staff development and progression by providing opportunities to gain decision-making experience; and
- enhancing officers' credibility with prisoners by reducing the requirement for certain decisions to be referred upwards to custodial managers.

However, the extent to which staff at lower grades were given greater control to make decisions was perceived to be limited at this stage. This related to four key barriers.

- **Operational challenges:** in the context of limited staff numbers, operational demands were seen as the priority and there was a belief that accountability could not be safely transferred without risking the prison's ability to deliver their core regime. Pressured workloads for operational staff limited their ability to proactively seek or engage with opportunities themselves.
- **Hierarchical culture:** prison culture was seen as strongly hierarchical and as a result staff were accustomed to passing responsibility up the ranks. This presented a challenge to engaging staff with opportunities to work more autonomously.

“Things have been so tightly controlled for such a long-time people had either lost the will or forgotten how to do things for themselves.”

(Senior staff)

- **Commissioning arrangements:** arrangements with partner organisations were regarded by some participants as limiting the opportunities available to prison staff to take on enhanced autonomy. Some roles or activities were effectively ring-fenced as they were undertaken by these providers. This included drug intervention work, where officers had previously been part of drug and alcohol recovery teams within the prison, but the provision had since been contracted out to a partner organisation.

- **Siloed working:** there were examples where attempts to take responsibility for implementing change had been thwarted by a lack of coordination. In one prison, for example, plans to install kettles in cells were explored without reference to existing information on the electrical capacity of the establishment, which was known to be insufficient to support such additional load.

Engaging with decision-making

While the extent to which staff were experiencing a greater say in decision making was felt to be limited so far, some participants reported that there were opportunities to influence decisions. The increased receptiveness to ideas from staff was welcomed, particularly where they could see that their suggestions had been taken up. Examples included officers leading painting and decorating teams made up of prisoners to improve the prison environment, and a change in staff uniforms allowing officers to wear t-shirts. However, for others, staff consultation made little difference, either because they perceived it to be an extension of the status quo (as suggestions had always been welcomed), or because they felt that senior leadership teams continued to hold ultimate control. The degree to which staff in prisons felt that they experienced increased autonomy and freedom was particularly undermined where there was a lack of transparency around the decision-making process.

“Unfortunately, being an officer [...] I put the ideas forward, but I don't get to see where the decisions are made or when they're made, so I'm a bit out of the loop on that.”

(Operational staff)

In some cases, the lack of transparency reflected an erosion of processes that had been put in place at the start of the pilot but which prisons struggled to maintain. In one prison, for example, a direct response from the executive governor had originally been guaranteed; in another, a log of all suggestions was updated and regularly circulated. In both instances, however, the approach was in place only in the early stages of the pilot as it proved difficult to maintain in the context of demanding workloads and the changing policy context.

4.4 Grouping prisons

Overview of prison grouping structure and aims

A key element of the pilot was grouping clusters of prisons to be overseen and given strategic direction by the executive teams. The anticipated benefits of grouping the prisons included economies of scale, greater opportunities to share learning across sites, improved continuity of care for prisoners as they move through the system, and more opportunities to establish connections with partnerships and communities.

From April 2018, all public prisons moved into smaller geographical areas called ‘groups’ which reflect the approach adopted by some of the Reform Prisons. The new ‘groups’ were based on the prison groupings, as the early evidence on the Reform Prisons suggested that bringing multiple prisons together under an Executive Governor worked better, in part because it allowed greater external engagement without distracting the Governor from the day to day running of their establishment.

Perceived benefits of grouping prisons structure

Organising prisons in groups was generally regarded as offering five key benefits, which are outlined in the table below.

Table 3: Benefits of grouping prisons

Benefits of grouping prisons
<p>Value for money – grouping prisons was perceived to achieve economies of scale by commissioning services across the group.</p> <p>Attracting partners – a group structure was seen as a powerful lever in securing the interest of partner organisations, wanting to work across multiple settings.</p> <p>Strategic deployment of resources – executive staff and funding was successfully deployed across prisons. The potential to share services that were not required at single sites full-time (such as search teams) was viewed positively.</p> <p>Coordinated prisoner pathways – more opportunities were thought to be available to facilitate the progression of prisoners through establishments that were grouped together and join up service provision.</p> <p>Staff support – grouping prisons offered potential opportunities for peers to share learning and best practice. Mechanisms in place to support this included meetings between governing governors and knowledge exchange days.</p>

Limitations and barriers to group working

Effective group working was not evident across all the reform prisons, and there were a number of concerns around limitations of the prison group model in practice. The efficacy of grouping prisons together and the ability of prisons to work together well was dependent on factors such as geographic proximity and population type, and it was felt by some that a significant cultural shift was required before sharing best practice would become embedded. There was a feeling that connections between prisons were largely limited to specific, more strategic staff. To mitigate this, one suggestion was that staff at officer level might benefit from exchange days into other prisons to see how things are done differently, enhancing versatility and dynamism.

Work across prisons that were grouped together was also seen to be limited in practical terms. For example, the pressure on prison numbers restricted prisons’ ability to move

prisoners between institutions. Similarly, external contractors were commissioned to provide services for sets of prisons that did not always match the prisons within the group, meaning partner organisations were not consistently providing services within prison groupings.

It was also felt that best practice should continue to be shared across the whole prison service, rather than solely within prison groups. There was a sense that a concentration on local coordination could come at the expense of engagement with the wider prison network, risking a loss of insight and learning opportunities more widely. As such, it was felt to be important that links to prisons outside of the group be maintained.

4.5 Support from HMPPS/MoJ

Senior staff in reform prisons described a number of mechanisms through which they worked with colleagues in HQ. These included the reform enabling team¹³ and direct liaison with individual leads to support work on areas such as finance and commissioning.

Prisons' relationship to the centre was felt to support an impetus to deliver reform. The prisons drew on support from central teams particularly to progress larger or more complex programmes of work. Key examples included support to explore ways of moving away from national contracts, and support for HR business partners within the executive teams. The availability of known individual contacts at the centre to further specific work streams was felt to offer particular benefit to the executive teams.

However, a number of challenges relating to the prisons' relationship with HQ were noted:

- First, there was a sense that some colleagues within central teams tasked with supporting the reform prisons regarded innovation as a deviation from normal rules which impacted on the ease and speed of implementing new reform projects. This had, however, lessened with the roll-out of empowerment to the wider estate.
- Second, there were tensions between central team oversight to minimise risk and the attempt to find innovative solutions. For example, participants reported that in some cases commercial decisions that had been made by reform prisons to improve services or make savings were reversed by the centre due to risks around contractual liability.

¹³ The enabling team was in place for the setup of the pilot until early 2017.

- Finally, among senior HQ stakeholders, there was a sense that supporting the reform prisons pilot had a disproportionate impact on resources available at the centre to support the rest of the estate, especially at the beginning.

Some participants described a reduction in support from the central team over the life of the pilot. A key reason for this was that the central reform enabling team had disbanded. However, despite this, changes in some participants' roles resulted in increased connection with the centre. For example, one executive governor now spent a significant proportion of their time working with HMPPS senior management, contributing to national strategies and working with their line manager on wider assurance and management issues. The impact of this was felt to be mixed. While it reduced the amount of time they had available to carry out local work, it increased assurance and the immediate sense of support from the centre.

4.6 Key lessons for governance and management

A number of key lessons were identified from early experiences in the six reform prisons.

Table 4: Key lessons for governance and management

Key lessons for governance and management
Smaller group sizes, logical connections between prisons that could support prisoner flow and coordination, and more closely-connected prison group directors were particular benefits of the prison group model in comparison to the previous DDC structure.
Executive teams helped the reform prisons engage effectively with a range of external stakeholders and local business communities. Effective leadership was perceived to be dependent on appointing people with the right balance of skills and experience and investing in and training of these staff members was thought to be essential.
Commissioning expertise was thought to be integral to procuring effective services and value for money across the prisons. Participants felt that a number of roles – such as finance and commercial leads – could be provided from the centre in a robust and effective way that supported local delivery.
Clear and effective communication with colleagues at the centre was thought to be important. Going forward participants hoped more central support could be made available to prisons via dedicated strategic leads (whilst acknowledging there should not be negative effects on other centralised processes).
In order for coordination between operational and executive teams to be effective, there needed to be greater clarity regarding roles, responsibilities and lines of management. Work to secure operational buy-in to the aims and activities of the reform agenda needed to begin early and to continue through the life of the project. This should include managing the expectations of prisons being brought into groups and supporting staff at all levels to take more responsibility for leading strands of work within their remit.
Communication of the overall purpose, activity and outcomes from reform was limited, and was seen to have dropped off over time. Dissemination of information through prisons would support momentum and buy-in from a broader range of staff.

5. Partnership working

Overview

This chapter explores the experiences of partner organisations in working with the prisons to deliver reform work. It includes a discussion around expectations for partnership work, how partners were engaged and supported, and enablers and barriers to effective work. Key points outlined in this chapter include the following:

- Reform was felt to have increased the range of opportunities available for prisons and partners to work together, especially at a local level. Increased flexibility in the way prisons operated encouraged partners to work differently with the prisons and improve services offered to prisoners.
- Prisons' attractiveness and capacity to engage with partners was perceived to have been enhanced by the pilot. It also facilitated more active management of contracts and better communication.
- While additional funding streams and flexibility were viewed as enabling partnership work, some short-term funding streams available via the pilot led to uncertainty. The ability to spend across financial years was therefore thought to be important to the ongoing sustainability of provision.

5.1 Aims and expectations of partnership work

A broad range of provision was in place to enhance the prison regime and support prisoners, both with immediate needs and towards resettlement. Partnerships were also formed to support staff development, and collaborate with local networks and others within the Criminal Justice System (CJS). There was an expectation among staff and partners that reform would offer opportunities to enhance service delivery and offer the potential for a more holistic, joined-up approach to addressing needs within the prisons.

For partners in place before reform, however, there was concern that the pilot made their position less secure. They described feeling pressure to demonstrate their effectiveness with the new executive teams as they felt increased local control over contracts meant existing arrangements could be terminated more easily.

“We had to really prove ourselves, and that was challenging on a daily basis.”
(Partner)

5.2 Nature of partnerships

The reform prisons were engaged in a broad range of partnerships. These included a number of longstanding strategic relationships with CJS stakeholders, such as community rehabilitation companies, the National Probation Service, police, Police and Crime Commissioners, and Independent Monitoring Boards. Other longstanding relationships included those with local partners and voluntary sector organisations delivering services such as healthcare, facilities management, resettlement and family support and education and employment support.

In addition, a number of new partnerships had been established as part of reform, with a focus on supporting prisoner wellbeing and rehabilitation. These partnerships varied in frequency and format of delivery across the prisons, and included:

- **prisoner involvement:** establishing prisoner councils to formally engage prisoners in service improvement;
- **conflict resolution:** mediation between staff and prisoners as well as one-to-one interventions;
- **wellbeing activities:** thinking skills, mindfulness, and physical health courses;
- **one-to-one rehabilitation support;** and
- **education, training and employment:** horticultural projects, construction and building trades, arts, peer advice and guidance and business skills.

The prisons also developed a smaller number of partnerships focussing on staff, strategic work, and the prison environment. Staff provision included a mediation service and leadership training. Prison-centred partnerships included one to develop a new visitors' centre.

New partnerships included a mix of long- and short-term provision, with some partners engaged to deliver short courses or one-off events. Shorter-term partnerships offered the opportunity to trial new ways of working or were designed to appeal to hard-to-reach prisoners and acted as a means of encouraging participation in other rehabilitative activities. Examples included day-long events where competing teams of prisoners nearing the end of their sentences were supported by business professionals to pitch business ideas and short non-accredited physical fitness programmes, delivered by ex-offenders.

5.3 Partner engagement

Identifying and engaging new partners

Reform was felt to offer the opportunity for prisons to actively seek out partnerships rather than waiting for specific provision to be offered. Examples included prisons conducting localised scoping exercises to identify potential partners, hosting recruitment days, and joining local business networks in order to attract and engage new partners, including those that may not have previously have approached the prison or have been identified by scoping carried out regionally or centrally.

Reform prisons also directly contacted providers already known to them from previous work or other settings. For example, a provider delivering the peer advice component of a resettlement service contract was invited to expand the prison's peer advice model to support more of the prisoner journey. Reform was also seen to have encouraged prospective partners to seek opportunities to work with the prisons, who reported anticipating a greater open-mindedness to novel approaches at reform prisons.

Engaging existing partners differently

Views on the extent to which the reform prisons pilot had instigated a shift in the way prisons and existing partners worked together were mixed. Some participants felt that little had changed and that close working relationships and openness to ideas could not be ascribed to reform.

Other participants, however, perceived that the pilot instilled a more collaborative approach and that with increased flexibility around ways of working, partners were embracing the opportunity to work differently to engage prisoners. This was attributed to the autonomy prisons had under reform to work more flexibly with procurement rules and processes put in place by central commissioning teams. Moving away from a centralised model helped prisons and partners better tailor provision and have a greater level of input over how services were delivered. This included, for example, deciding how teams were structured, when they would deliver services, the format of provision and ability to subcontract where appropriate. One example was given by an education provider who reported that reform had helped them respond more proactively to prisoner needs by delivering entry-level courses that were not linked to qualifications.¹⁴

¹⁴ The reform programme gave prisons more flexibility. However, prisons were still accountable and were required to comply with all relevant regulations. Since the reform programme, the flexibilities that remain still have to be exercised in compliance with all relevant regulations.

“Since reform we can be a bit more off the wall in terms of getting other provision in, you know self-contracting which we weren’t able to do before because we were held to account... most of the provision is still certificate based, but we can also do bits and pieces that aren’t and that’s brilliant.”

(Partner)

Another key focus was closer involvement of partners in terms of strategic thinking. Some reported they were directly consulted during the development of prison strategy which was seen as supporting sustainable planning for future provision.

“We've met at a local level a lot more and meet with their senior team regularly. They also come and meet with the executive team... there's been a lot more engagement at a strategic level, so that they know what our strategic aims look like for the next three years and so that they can build that into the package that they want to be able to deliver.”

(Strategic staff)

5.4 Enablers to effective partnership working

As well as providing essential funding for partnership provision, the reform prisons pilot enabled effective partnership working by energising both sides of the relationship, increasing both prisons’ capacity to engage and their attractiveness to partners. It also facilitated more active management of contracts and better communication. Each of these aspects of the pilot is described in detail below.

Capacity and impetus: While participants generally felt that building partnerships would have been possible without reform, some felt that prisons might not otherwise have spoken to smaller voluntary sector organisations or local business networks. This was because these kinds of organisations would not have been captured by national frameworks or local stakeholder scoping, and because governors would not have had the time or resource to engage with them. Additionally, specialist expertise within executive teams was felt to have enhanced stakeholder analysis and ensured appropriate partners were commissioned to deliver targeted services at the right time.

Increased appeal for partners: Reform was described as having changed how external partners viewed the prison, building excitement and hope around the opportunity to do things differently. New partners felt able to approach the prisons, which were seen as more accessible and able to commission on a quicker, smaller scale than they had done previously. The profile of the pilot was also felt to have given executive governors ‘pulling power’ to access

senior people in potential partner organisations that they may have struggled to engage in the past, and their ability to speak as director of a group of prisons further enhanced appeal because there was potential for partners to work across settings in the group.

Ability to manage contracts differently: Local management of contracts and procurement flexibility acted as a powerful lever and reform prisons were able to influence improvements in existing partnerships:¹⁵ partners worked harder to impress prisons as a result and were motivated to improve services or consider new ways of working.

“Because they recognise we hold our own contracts, I think that they've worked really hard in trying to make sure they please us, essentially. Because we're going to be the ones awarding their contracts, rather than it being awarded centrally, they've worked very hard to meet our specific requests.”
(Senior staff)

Communication and support: New approaches to communicating with external audiences were described as having improved local perceptions of the prisons and brought opportunities to potential partners' attention. Reform prisons tried to engage with their communities in different, more effective ways; examples included the use of Twitter and via involvement in the local Chamber of Commerce.

“Reform opened the mind a bit, didn't it, so we're tweeting... it's in the press: we're a reform prison, we're one of the six. So it makes people go, “Oh, there's an opportunity to work with them and they want to do things differently, they had the press around it.”
(Senior staff)

Reform was also seen as providing capacity that did not previously exist for leadership teams to explore sustainable solutions to issues affecting partnership working. Examples of these included introducing a community liaison role to coordinate partnerships in some prisons, and the introduction of a dedicated healthcare liaison role to work with a healthcare provider and prison.

¹⁵ Contracts are awarded in the name of the Authority rather than the individual prison. However, it is clear that some reform prisons perceived the reform programme gave them increased control over the contracts they entered and managed, and felt this ability to award contracts at prison level, in the name of the Authority, gave them a closer connection with suppliers.

5.5 Barriers to effective partnership working

Key barriers identified by participants included the commissioning and funding approach taken by prisons, regime and resources available, facilities, and communication. These are detailed below.

Funding approach: While additional funding streams and flexibility around procurement were identified as enablers of new or enhanced partnerships, some short-term funding streams available via the pilot led to uncertainty about the sustainability of provision at prisons and made planning for the future difficult for both partners and prisons. Some participants felt that short-term funding resulted in a less strategic approach to partnerships and limited the type and variety of partnerships that reform prisons could develop. Participants suggested that the ability to spend across financial years would enable more sensible operational decisions and targeting of partnerships.

Regime and resource: Regime restrictions and staff shortages were key barriers to effective partnership working which is reliant on the existence of a regular regime. Restrictions limited partners' ability to deliver contracted services – for example, a healthcare provider was unable to offer the range of clinics they would have preferred due to inconsistent prisoner attendance.

For both prisons and partners, the resource required to manage partnerships was identified as being of key importance. At some of the prisons, a community liaison/partnership coordinator role was established, which was felt to work well. Where these were not in place, partnership working ran less smoothly, with the lack of staff available to support unlocking and movement of prisoners presenting a barrier. Partners expressed concern about the impact on effective partnership working of what they described as increasing workloads of prison staff they work with as a result of ongoing struggles with understaffing

Availability of facilities: Limited accessibility and appropriateness of facilities presented barriers to engaging partners and to providing services effectively. Partners also noted that inappropriate facilities put partners off because they presented risks – such as infection control issues for healthcare providers.

Communication challenges: Day-to-day, partners were reliant on coordination and liaison with their direct contacts for key information, as they did not have direct access to prison information and communication systems to, for example, identify high risk prisoners or receive information about regime restrictions at short notice. Related to this was the need to engage prison staff at all levels to secure their support for partnership work. In some settings, a perception that partners were encroaching on existing internal roles presented a significant

barrier to engagement. Partners suggested that more direct communication involving staff at all levels was an important consideration to secure support and buy-in for the reform prisons pilot as a whole.

6. Attitudes to the pilot

Overview

This chapter sets out how attitudes towards the pilot changed over time. It describes the enthusiasm for it when it was introduced and how this developed as the project was rolled out. Key points outlined in this chapter include:

- Reform prisons were largely viewed as an opportunity to deliver services differently and enable changes to be made across key areas.
- Communication strategies were perceived to be vital to getting buy-in from staff across the prisons. Opportunities for staff to feed into decision-making made them feel valued and some prisons had utilised specialists to inform ongoing messaging about the pilot, which worked well.
- The process of delivering change was thought to have taken longer and was more complex than initially anticipated. There was some disappointment that greater autonomy had not been given to the reform prisons. There was a general perception that risks across the organisation were being managed to ensure that increased freedoms continued to be rolled out effectively and safely.

6.1 Initial attitudes to the reform prisons pilot

When the pilot was first introduced, the executive governors and their teams were positive about its potential for supporting improvements and innovation across key areas of service delivery. They welcomed the opportunity to trial new ways of working at a local level, outside of central control, facilitated by greater autonomy over key areas such as budgets, contracts, HR and partnerships. It was considered exciting because it was high profile, far-reaching and offered the opportunity to work in highly skilled multi-disciplinary teams.

“I felt there was a real buzz about empowerment, the opportunity to go away and do something different ...you were a part of this special six who were trailblazing. I think the feeling was, "this has never been done and we're doing it now and this is an amazing opportunity", so I think there was a real thirst for that and enjoyment for that, for a lot of people who worked here, not just the senior team.”

(Senior Staff)

Some operational staff shared executive teams' enthusiasm for the innovation that the reform prisons pilot offered. They felt it was an opportunity to approach and deliver services differently and break away from some of the existing guidelines and Prison Service Instructions (PSIs) that were seen as the 'shackles' of the centre. They also felt the pilot would allow long-needed changes to be made across key areas of the service, including, for example, on buildings and infrastructure projects.

Reform was also viewed positively by some prisoners who thought that, in theory, increased autonomy meant that governors would have more say about how regimes and services were structured and delivered, with the potential to improve opportunities and day-to-day life.

'I have heard of this reform thing. It's like, the way I see it is that certain prisons were given autonomy to, sort of be fairly self-sufficient. Like, you know, to deal with their things in-house... They still have to abide by the rules, obviously. But things like budget, they're not told what to spend the budget on. They can spend the budget themselves in areas that they would see fit to spend it which seems good to me.'

(Prisoner)

In contrast, other prisoners were somewhat concerned about the implications of prison governors having complete autonomy to run the prison how they chose, and were worried that their needs and priorities might get overlooked. There was also a belief among prisoners that reforms should be more focussed on rehabilitation, and some scepticism about how much impact the reforms would have in reality, given challenges faced across the system.

Concerns about how reform would work in practice were also raised by some operational staff. Across the prisons, some participants who had been working in the service for a number of years could be cynical about the use of what they described as 'buzzwords', such as 'reform' and 'positive change'. Their scepticism reflected their view that previous programmes and pilots had used similar language and had not (from their perspective) led to meaningful or sustained change.

6.2 Communication strategies

Executive teams and other senior leaders within the prisons used a variety of strategies to engage staff in the pilot. Where it had worked well operational staff felt there were multiple opportunities to feed in to implementation and that their suggestions and ideas were listened to and valued. These opportunities included meetings with governors and executive teams and focus groups with staff.

“There was a lot asked of staff for ideas and how to take things forward, what we could change and how to improve things. There was a lot of engagement with staff which was good.”

(Operational staff)

In the early stages of the pilot, some of the prisons had utilised external communication specialists to help develop strategies and think about how best to communicate them. Coupled with the requirement for senior teams to take time to reflect on strategy together, harnessing the skills of these external specialists in thinking through communication plans helped the teams to consider the breadth of their plans and how they connected across different areas.

While there were examples of communication working well, there were also cases where there was confusion over the reform prisons pilot and how it related to other prison developments (including re-roll¹⁶). In one prison, staff and prisoners said that this confusion was compounded by numerous re-branding activities related to the changing leadership of the prison group. In addition, some participants felt that they had not received information about reform in a timely or complete way and therefore felt less involved.

“You look around even now and you’re still finding leaflets on reform, but there was never anybody that really stood up and came out into this prison and said ‘This is what we’re trying to set up, this is how you’re going to benefit and this is why we’re doing it’. It was almost like there was a separate body that was doing something behind the scenes, but we didn’t really know what they were doing.”

(Operational staff)

6.3 Changes to autonomy

The policy determining the range and extent of powers given to the reform prisons through the pilot changed during the life of the project, which had an effect on staff and prisoner attitudes towards it¹⁷. Initially, there was excitement about the prospect of the reform prisons operating under a model of complete autonomy, especially among senior leaders who were recruited to innovate and transform structures and services within the establishments. Some

¹⁶ When a prison changes its category, a key function or takes on a different kind of prisoner, this is called re-roll. Several of the reform prisons re-rolled to different types of prison during the period in which the pilot was delivered.

¹⁷ More information on the policy changes which affected the reform prisons, including a detailed timetable can be found at appendix A.

in this group expressed disappointment that the reform prisons had not gone as far as they had hoped.

However, others expressed concerns that this model could have given prisons and individual governors too much freedom with very little ability for the centre to properly manage risk across the service. Furthermore, some participants felt that this model would present practical challenges in the management of resources across separately functioning sites, including centrally-delivered HR and legal services, which would need to be devolved at a local level to enable the model to function effectively. Equally, managing system issues such as population or staffing levels would be more challenging if operating as individual establishments without the coordination from the centre.

“I don’t think we could have...a situation where the empowerment is purely down to the local management team because then you could have, sort of, instability in other areas because of what you’re doing there. It’s a fine balance I think.”

(Operational staff)

When empowerment was rolled out across the estate in April 2017, some senior staff felt reform prison autonomy was undermined. In fact, some participants thought that the autonomy given to the six reform prisons had been scaled back during the period in which the pilot had been delivered, rather than increased as they had hoped. These participants expressed disappointment at some of the flexibilities they felt they had lost, including flexibilities with Government Procurement Cards (GPCs).¹⁸

“It has gone back to being pretty much identical to what it was pre-autonomy... completely scaled back to what it was before that exercise started... because it’s obviously going to be rolled out nationally it is now going to take a couple of years, I would imagine, before we sort of get to anywhere close to where I’d have wanted to have been by now.”

(Senior staff)

Among operational staff who had initially been positive about the reform prisons, there was also disappointment that it neither delivered the autonomy they had anticipated nor led to the sort of changes and improvements they had been hoping for. There was a perception that

¹⁸ For context, mainstage interviews were carried out between June and November 2017. At this time participants noted that changes to GPC cards had been made. Interviews will not reflect any changes which may have been made since this time.

there had been a loss of momentum after the initial enthusiasm and commitment at the start of the pilot. An example of this included a situation in one prison where a wing was refurbished but the project was discontinued before other wings had been completed. In another case, plans for a new health care service were halted because the prison did not have the necessary infrastructure (such as rooms on wings) to safely deliver the service. Participants described how, as a result, they realised increasingly that the process of delivering change would take longer and was more complex than anticipated, especially as levels of autonomy were brought back into line with the rest of the estate. The length of time it took to deliver change through the pilot was also highlighted by prisoners, some of whom were frustrated about the apparent lack of progress.

'It [the prison's reform strategy] all read beautifully, it read like a dream; but putting it into action in a prison is completely different, it's not easy. You've got a whole theory which is about change, and you're putting it into a system that doesn't like change, you've got a big old wall in between the two.'

(Prisoner)

7. Key learning

This research was commissioned to explore the setup, delivery and perceived impacts of the pilot. The findings have important implications for policymakers as well as strategic and operational staff involved in supporting reform and empowerment across the prison estate. This chapter distils findings on facilitators and barriers perceived to have supported or hindered the delivery of reform objectives. It also explores the implications and key learning arising from this research to support future policy development.

7.1 Facilitators and barriers to delivering change with reform

Factors thought to have either supported or limited the extent of change implemented via the pilot were perceived to be interdependent and subject to change over time. For example, staff participants linked the fact that resources and money given to the reform prisons helped to recruit more staff, which in turn enabled the prisons to deliver enhanced or different services. Facilitators and barriers are summarised below according to whether they were perceived to have supported or hindered delivery.

Table 5: Facilitators and barriers to delivering the reform prisons pilot

Facilitators to delivering the pilot	Barriers to delivering the pilot
£1m given to prisons → perceived as vital to setting up services and programmes and helped prisons plan for future.	Contextual challenges (such as staffing issues and substance misuse) → perceived to limit prisons' capacity to use reform powers in a timely way.
Executive teams → gave prisons additional senior support, valuable skills and enthusiasm to draw on.	Communication difficulties → sometimes inhibited effective partnership work and delivery of reform projects at different levels.
Support from the centre → enabled prisons to deliver complex projects. This was perceived to be more effective when the enabling team existed.	Loss of momentum around the reform agenda → hindered progress of some reform work. Senior stakeholders linked this to policy changes and the roll-out of empowerment across the estate.
Status of reform prisons → helped staff and stakeholders feel empowered and confident to successfully deliver change, including in relation to improving service delivery. The pilot also made the prisons more attractive to partners.	Managing risk → some areas perceived to be too risky to change using the new powers (e.g. breaking out of big national contracts). Larger projects were therefore delivered over longer time periods than originally envisaged.
Commitment of staff → enabled the prisons to consider more systemic and long-term change. Buy-in of staff thought to be vital to transforming rehabilitative culture in the prisons.	

7.2 The future of empowerment

Across participant groups, there was excitement about the investment into the reform prisons. Participants thought reform had helped prisons become more autonomous and operate more flexibly and were hopeful that the pilot and the wider empowerment agenda would continue to impact positively on those working across the criminal justice sector.

However, reflecting on the fact that some of their reform projects were in very early stages, or had perhaps not even begun, participants acknowledged that it was difficult to confidently discuss some of the longer-term impacts they hoped the pilot would achieve, such as reductions in reoffending outcomes. In addition, participants acknowledged that innovative projects had been delivered by prisons outside of the pilot. There was therefore appetite to ensure that learning across the prison service is captured and made accessible in order to support service improvement and innovation in the future. It was also suggested that reform resources may sometimes have been focused on the six prisons to the detriment of other establishments. While this was deemed necessary to support the project in its pilot phase, stakeholders felt that it was important to ensure that resources supporting the roll-out of empowerment were more fairly distributed in the future.

Participants anticipated that freedoms and flexibilities would be devolved to governors over time to deliver tailored and joined-up services safely and effectively. It is vital that the centre continues to learn how best to support this complex process of devolution, providing guidance on the key areas touched on in this report. This includes for example HR and financial flexibilities and the composition of senior and executive teams. The research also highlighted the importance of considering how best to:

- build on key successes where change has been delivered safely and fairly; and
- promote an enabling culture supporting prison leaders to make local decisions for their establishments within parameters defined by the centre.

7.3 Learning points

Drawing on findings from themes discussed in this report, we have identified seven learning points which should be used to inform work across the prison estate.

1. Having additional funding and resources enabled senior teams to make decisions about how to spend money effectively across budgets. However, it was felt that more could have been done to support prisons to channel this funding towards innovative reform projects rather than subsidising 'business as usual' work. Furthermore, it was

hoped that flexibilities (such as the use of GPC cards) would continue to be rolled out, to enable prisons to immediately and sensibly direct funding to areas of need.

2. The composition of senior and executive teams should be given careful consideration to ensure they bring the capacity and the ability to engage effectively with external stakeholders in order to drive meaningful change across the group structure. Training programmes for senior leaders within the organisation should enable individuals to develop the essential business and leadership skills required to commission services locally. Thought should also be given to the most effective ways of incentivising and supporting leaders from other sectors to join the service at higher levels.
3. Devolving power to staff across the prisons was viewed positively in theory, but barriers to doing this effectively were identified (e.g. existing and long-standing workforce hierarchies). Consideration should be given to how best to support prisons to develop staff at different levels to take more responsibility for specific areas of work.
4. The prison group composition was regarded as sensible and enabling, for a range of reasons outlined in chapter 5. As the group structure continues to be rolled out, consideration should be given to how best to organise resources: at a local level by individual prisons, a regional level within groups and a national level via the centre. For example, the research highlighted that key strategic roles and functions, (such as safer custody leads, search teams and intelligence analysis) could sensibly be provided at a group level to ensure these important services are joined-up and delivered as efficiently as possible.
5. Ongoing support from the centre in the form of guidance documents and training should be provided to help prisons continue to innovate effectively, within organisation-wide rules and processes. Prisons wanted more direction about how to use new powers with examples of what they could and could not do. Work was already underway to develop guidelines to support specific areas of work, (such as recruitment) which prisons were looking forward to receiving.
6. Strong messaging and consistent communication were thought to be important. A number of good examples of communicating effectively were highlighted in Chapter 4, and included inclusive forums such as prisoner councils and staff focus groups. Going forward, HQ should support clear messaging across prisons on the nature and value of empowerment, and continue to share learning as it arises through the empowerment updates and other accessible channels. This is important to keep staff

at all levels engaged and actively contributing to key programmes of work and could help prisons use resources more effectively.

7. Reform prisons greatly valued the ability to engage more strategically and flexibly with smaller, local partners. Having increased choice was seen as more beneficial than using only national providers to deliver standardised services. In the short term, prisons should focus on building strong relationships with local partners, using reform to contract local services on a small scale to fill gaps in provision and add value. In the longer term, it was hoped that prisons would be supported to safely and effectively contract independently on a larger scale to better meet local needs and deliver value for money across a range of services.

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Appendix A

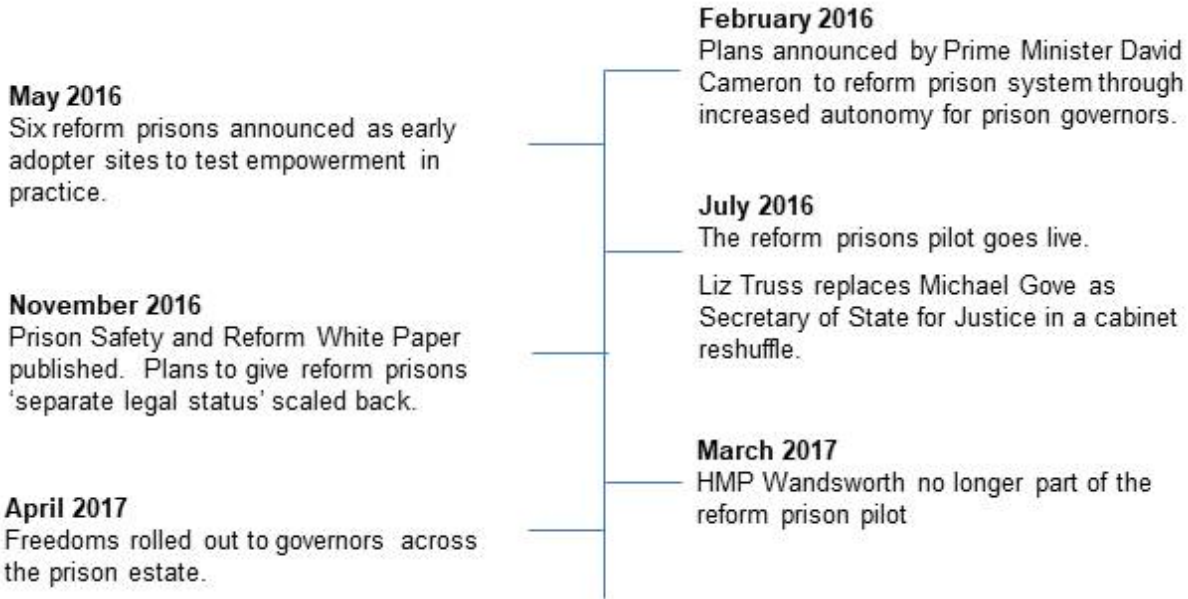
Policy changes affecting the reform prisons pilot

Soon after the pilot was launched, there was a change in Justice Secretary, which led to some revisions to how further roll-out of empowerment was envisaged. For example, the six reform prisons were not given separate legal status as was originally envisaged, but were free to make decisions about how services were managed and run. In April 2017, reform was rolled out to the rest of the prison estate, drawing on early learning from the reform prisons. Among other things, this shift has enabled prison governors across the estate to make decisions about regime and resource management and workforce strategies (MoJ, 2017).

The timeline at Figure 1 highlights key dates relevant to the evolving reform and empowerment agenda, which are further explained in the following bullets:

- The reform prisons were given a £1m budget to support reform work and additional staff to resource the delivery of the pilot. In addition, a central headquarters (HQ) enabling team was on hand to provide support and clarification to reform prisons as they embarked on the pilot.
- When the reform prisons pilot was first announced, it was intended that reform prisons would be given separate legal status. This model of full autonomy would have allowed governors to deliver a wide range of changes across the reform prisons and to be held accountable for all aspects of service delivery.
- Instead, a different model, known as empowerment, was introduced across the estate in April 2017. This brought all other prisons broadly in line with each other in terms of the level of autonomy they had, though only the six reform prisons received the mobilisation fund and executive team support allocated to the pilot.

Figure 2: Timeline of key dates relevant to reform and empowerment agenda



A further change that took place since the start of the reform prisons trial was the departure of the Executive Governor of HMP Wandsworth who left the prison in March 2017. This affected the delivery of early and ongoing reform plans as the prison lost its official reform status. Following consultation with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), it was decided that HMP Wandsworth’s views and experiences should still be included in the evaluation due to its involvement in the set up and early delivery of the pilot.

Appendix B

Methodology

B.1 Recruitment approach

The recruitment approach for the mainstage fieldwork in the six reform prisons involved three separate stages, outlined below.

Initial contact with prisons

Initial contact with the six prisons was established as part of the scoping phase of the research. The contact was facilitated by a research officer from MOJ, who sent out an initial introductory email to the Assurance Leads at each of the prisons. The NatCen research team followed up and had a discussion with the leads at the prisons about what the evaluation involves and how they could support the research team to ensure that data collection is as unobtrusive as possible and takes into account the prisons' other commitments.

Staff and partner organisation recruitment

The Assurance Leads with whom the NatCen research team already made contact at the initial research stage facilitated the recruitment of prison staff and partner organisations and were given a debriefing on the process for recruiting participants by the NatCen research team. After the debriefing, the leads in each of the six prisons identified appropriate prison and partner organisation staff to take part in the research and emailed or handed them an information sheet developed by NatCen. If staff were available to participate, the Assurance Leads asked for verbal consent to pass on the names, nature of their roles and professional contact details of the staff to NatCen using a secure method of transfer. Members of the NatCen research team then contacted the prison and partner organisation staff directly to follow up and book in times for interviews.

Prisoner recruitment

The same Assurance Leads also facilitated the recruitment of prisoners. They identified relevant prisoners, spoke to them about the research and passed on an information leaflet developed by NatCen that provided further details. If an individual was happy to take part in an interview in principle, they filled out a consent form; care was taken to communicate that expressing interest in taking part does not guarantee an interview. The Assurance Leads then securely passed on an anonymised list of prisoners who consented to participate in the research by providing only the following information: age, ethnicity, nature of offence, whether first custodial sentence and details of any activities that individual was involved in at the prison. The research team selected individuals to invite to take part in interviews based

on the anonymised information to ensure diversity amongst the prisoners interviewed and then informed the Assurance Leads of the selections. The team then liaised with the leads to set up suitable dates and times for when members of the research team could conduct the interviews at the establishments.

B.2 Sampling and data collection

Qualitative research provides insight into the range of experiences, views and recommendations, and wider inferences can be drawn on these bases. Purposive sampling seeks to achieve range and diversity of views and experiences rather than to build a statistically representative sample, and qualitative data collection is designed to explore issues in depth within individual contexts rather than to generate data that can be analysed numerically. The research team ensured that the views and experiences of a range of participant groups were included in the research, and that diversity was achieved across the participant groups.

Range of participant groups interviewed

Mainstage fieldwork involved interviews with prisoners, prison operational staff, prison senior staff and partner organisations. More information is provided below.

- **Prisoners:** the prisoner participant group provided insight into how the pilot was working ‘on the ground’ and any changes that had a distinguishable impact on their day-to-day experiences in the prisons. Interviews with prisoners who had transferred from a prison that was not one of the six reform prisons also provided insight into differences between reform prisons and other prisons.
- **Operational staff:** the operational staff participant group included individuals working on the ground as prison officers, senior prison officers, staff in more specific roles such as custodial managers, and administrative staff who had been involved in supporting reform work. Interviews provided insight into the practical implementation of the pilot inside prisons and the implications of changes for the rehabilitative environment of prisons.
- **Senior staff:** the senior staff participant group included individuals that had been involved in decision-making, such as heads of services (e.g. head of reducing reoffending), prisons’ executive teams, governing governors and deputy governors. Interviews provided insight into the process of identifying, financing and implementing changes, the drivers for introducing particular initiatives and the factors influencing success.

- **Partner organisations:** The partner organisation participant group included staff from a wide range of providers, such as those working in family support, healthcare, and education or work provision. Interviews provided insight into the wider experiences of reform prisons and how they interact with the criminal justice system more broadly.

A total of 116 interviews were conducted as part of the mainstage fieldwork. A breakdown of the number of achieved interviews with each of the participant groups in the six reform prisons is provided in the table below.

Table 6: Number of achieved interviews in mainstage fieldwork

Prison	Prisoners	Partner Organisations	Operational Staff	Senior staff	Total per prison
HMP Ranby	7	5	5	4	21
HMP High Down	7	5	5	4	21
HMP Coldingley	7	1	5	1	14
HMP Kirklevington Grange	7	5	5	3	20
HMP Holme House	6	5	5	4	20
HMP Wandsworth	6	6	5	3	20
Total per participant group	40	27	30	19	116

As can be seen from the table, a lower number of interviews were achieved in HMP Coldingley. HMP Coldingley was experiencing operational difficulties that meant that the research team was unable to engage with the prison in accordance with the same timescales as the other five prisons. A more flexible approach was taken and the research team worked with the MoJ to identify the appropriate people to participate, with interviews being booked in towards the end of the fieldwork period. Although a smaller number of participants were interviewed in HMP Coldingley, this does not have a significant impact on the findings of the evaluation due to the depth of the interviews that were completed and the detailed data collected from other prisons.

B.3 Participant characteristics

This section describes the characteristics of prisoners and prison staff who took part in the evaluation.

Prisoners

In total, 40 interviews were conducted with prisoners across the six reform prisons. Key demographic information is detailed in the following bullets:

- Ages of prisoner participants ranged from 20-60+, with the majority aged between 40 and 59. The majority of prisoner participants were of a white ethnic background.
- Around half of prisoner participants were serving their first custodial sentence at the time fieldwork took place. The other half had spent previous time in prison. Some of these participants recounted how they had been in and out of prison many times, describing their offending behaviour as a way of life. This group often discussed time spent in other prisons, as part of either their current or previous sentences, which gave a useful point of comparison for the purpose of this research.
- Sentences being served by participants ranged from two to 15 years. A small number of participants were serving indeterminate sentences, and a similar proportion was being held in custody on remand. The length of time remaining in custody for these individuals was unclear.
- Prisoners had committed a range of index offences, including violent crimes such as murder and sexual assault; acquisitive crimes such as burglary; damage to property; fraud; and crimes related to drugs.
- Across the reform prisons, prisoners were involved in a range of activities, including work, education and other enrichment activities and specific programmes. Prisoners' levels of engagement in these activities varied widely, with some only taking part in mandatory work while others participated in a number of non-mandatory activities.

Table 7: Prisoner characteristics

Demographic	Number of prisoners
Age	
20-29	7
30-39	8
40-49	11
50-59	11
60+	1
Unknown	2
Ethnicity	
White British	30
White Irish	1
Asian British	1
Black British	3
British Muslim	1
British Bangladeshi	1
Bangladeshi	1
Unknown	2
Index Offence	
Violence against the person	8
Theft/Burglary/Robbery	10
Drug offences	6
Possession of weapons	1
Sexual offences	2
Arson and criminal damage	3
Miscellaneous crimes against society	4
Remand	2
Unknown	4
Custodial sentence	
First custodial sentence	18
Not first custodial sentence	22
Sentence lengths	
<1 year	2
1-3 years	9
4-6 years	9
7-10 years	11
11-15 years	2
Life	3
Indeterminate	2
Remand	2
Direct involvement in reform prisons pilot	
Yes	5
No	15
Unknown	20
TOTAL	40

Prison staff

Staff were selected to capture a range of roles and service provision. Staff who participated in the evaluation came from two groups, discussed below.

- **Operational staff:** Operational staff from each of the six reform prisons were included in the evaluation to give their views and experiences of delivering services during the period in which the reform prisons pilot was implemented. Diversity across officer grades and length of service was achieved to ensure a range of views were captured. Roles included officer and senior officer grades as well as staff with more specific roles including, for example, physical education roles, and custodial managers. Administrative staff were also interviewed in some prisons in cases where supporting reform work or teams formed part of their responsibilities.
- **Senior staff:** senior staff interviews were carried out at each reform prison with individuals who had been involved in decision-making, especially in relation to the pilot. They included members of the prisons' executive teams, heads of services (e.g. Head of Reducing Reoffending), governing governors and deputy governors.

Strategic staff

Beyond the case study design, strategic staff across departments in MoJ/HMPPS participated in the evaluation to share their views on leading key programmes of work which related to and impacted on the delivery of the pilot. These participants led on, for example, HR, finance and commissioning. In addition, executive governors were interviewed at two points throughout the evaluation; first during the scoping phase and again during the main stage fieldwork to give an overview perspective on key areas of reform activity and learning.

Partner organisations

In order to understand the changes reform had on prison partnerships, the evaluation included interviews with staff from a range of organisations working with the six reform prisons. These included:

- strategic partners, including rehabilitation services, Independent Monitoring Boards, and PCCs;
- healthcare and wellbeing providers, including primary healthcare and substance misuse rehabilitation services;
- family support services – providing activities and information for prisoners and families including 1:1 support, reconnection and resettlement programmes, and visitor centres;

- employment, education and training providers;
- organisations providing employment support, developing employability skills and qualifications;
- organisations providing wellbeing activities, including thinking skills, mindfulness, and physical health courses; and
- facilities management and maintenance of the prison estate.

Partner organisation participants ranged from senior managers to operational-level staff working directly with prisoners, helping to achieve a full sense of how partnerships were organised, managed and delivered. A number of the partnerships had existed prior to the introduction of the reform prisons pilot, some of which remained the same and others which changed or were extended. Other partnerships had been brought in as a direct result of reform, either through additional funding or new relationships fostered through the prisons' engagement with their local communities. The full spectrum of partners included in the evaluation is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

B.4 Methodological challenges

As with any research, this evaluation involved challenges and it is an indication of high quality research to acknowledge and be transparent about the challenges experienced. The challenges faced in this evaluation are outlined below.

- **Gaining access to prisons:** Gaining approval to access prisons is a time-consuming process, especially when prisons face challenges including low staffing levels. At times this led to difficulty conducting fieldwork in accordance with planned timetables. The four-month timeframe for completing fieldwork meant that most prisons could participate fully and actively in the evaluation, working around other planned events (such as inspections) and operational pressures. However, it was not possible to fully meet interview quotas at all six of the reform prisons, which is reflected in the numbers of completed interviews per prison. Due to the breadth of data collected throughout the evaluation, we are confident that this has not affected the quality of information gathered or findings in any significant way.
- **Changes to policy:** As outlined in this chapter, the policy surrounding the pilot changed during this evaluation and slight adjustments to the methodology were required. This included, for example, carrying out a case study of the Drug Recovery Prison pilot at Holme House. Working in partnership with MoJ, decisions were taken

about how best to use resources and focus the research on key areas of learning to ensure the evaluation was relevant and forward-looking.

- **Recruitment of prisoners:** Prisoners were recruited through gatekeepers in the reform prisons. As such, the research team was limited in terms of which prisoners they were given access to, which may limit the diversity of the prisoner sample. The research team attempted to reduce the potential impact of this by over-sampling potential participants and discussing with gatekeepers about approaching a range of prisoners to ensure diversity.
- **Limits to anonymity:** The number of prisons participating in the pilot is small, limiting the degree of anonymity that could be offered to participants. This was made clear to participants before their participation and participants were given the opportunity to opt out or review their contribution at the end of the interview. Care has been taken to maintain anonymity when reporting the findings.

B.5 Qualitative analysis

With participants' permission, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Where permission was not given, notes were taken instead. Interview data were managed and analysed using the Framework approach developed by NatCen (Richie et al., 2013). This matrix-based analytic method facilitates rigorous and transparent qualitative data management, with a thematic framework used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories. Separate frameworks were developed for interviews with prisoners, staff and partner organisations. For each of these strands, an analytical framework was developed by identifying key topics emerging from the interviews from their transcripts and/or notes. Matrices relating to each thematic issue were then set up, with columns in each matrix representing key topics and rows representing individual participants. Prior to beginning data management, the research team were given a comprehensive briefing about the analytical framework and a thorough description of what should be included in each sub-theme.

The Framework approach is embedded in NVivo software version 10, which was used for data management in this research. Using NVivo enabled linking the summarised data to the verbatim transcript. This meant that each part of a transcript that was relevant to a particular theme was noted, categorised and made easily accessible for analysis.

The final analytic stage involved working through the charted data to draw out experiences and views, identify similarities and differences and seek to explain emergent patterns and

findings. Verbatim interview quotations are provided in this report to highlight themes and findings where appropriate.

The quantitative data from the survey with governors across the rest of the estate was analysed using SPSS.

Appendix C

Topic guides

Tailored topic guides were used to ensure a consistent approach across all the interviews and between members of the research team. The guides were used flexibly to allow researchers to respond to the nature and content of each discussion, so the topics covered and their order varied between interviews. Researchers used open, non-leading questions, and answers were fully probed to elicit greater depth and detail where necessary.

The main headings and subheadings from the topic guide used for interviews with prison staff are provided below as an example. Slightly different versions of these guides were used for the interviews with prisoners, partner organisations and stakeholders to ensure that topic guides reflected the nature of participants' role and/or involvement.

1. Introduction

- Introduce self and NatCen
- Introduce research, aims of study and interview
- Brief overview of topics to be covered in interview
- Length (about 60 minutes)
- Voluntary participation
- Confidentiality, anonymity and potential caveats
- Audio recording (including encryption, data storage and destruction)
- Questions
- Verbal consent recorded on tape

2. Participant background and context to reform

- Current role and responsibilities
- Role and responsibilities in relation to the reform prisons pilot
- Opportunities and challenges facing prison currently
- Any significant planned changes to prison (other than pilot-related)

3. Views of reform prisons and empowerment

- What it means to be a reform prison
- Understanding of freedoms (pre April 17 roll-out of empowerment)
- Understanding of freedoms (post April 17 roll-out of empowerment)
- Views on different models of empowerment (positives and negatives of different models)
- Attitudes to reform prisons

4. Reform planning and project management

- Knowledge of prison strategy around reform
- Role of strategy documents
- Clarify plans for delivering reform (current and longer term)

5. Delivery of reform

- Clarify key changes/reform that prison has or is intending to make

1) Budget and contracts

Then go into detail with the following:

- Nature of current and planned changes
- Rationale/why changes are required
- Perceived value/importance of this freedom (to what extent was this a priority)
- Intended outcomes
- Timescales for making changes and views on achievability
- Whether changes could be made without new freedoms and reasons for this
- What is working well/less well
- Enablers and barriers to using budget/contract freedoms effectively
- Lessons/considerations

2) HR (then go into details as above)

3) Regime (then go into details as above)

4) Prison industries (then go into details as above)

5) Estates (then go into details as above)

6. Perceived impacts, facilitators and barriers

- Extent to which participant perceived changes delivered through the pilot have had an impact on the following (for each explore barriers and facilitators, positive and negative impacts and what it is specifically about the change that has had an impact):
 - Prisoners
 - Staff, including themselves
 - Partner organisations
 - Wider CJS
 - Other
- Extent to which participants perceived changes delivered through the reform prisons have had an impact on the following (for each explore barriers and facilitators, positive and negative impacts and what it is specifically about the change that has had an impact)

- The look of the prison
- Functionality of the prison
- Regime and day to day running of the prisons
- Services delivered by the prison
- Mood/general atmosphere
- Other
- Unintended consequences of the pilot
- Future impacts
- Overall facilitators and barriers to achieving impacts (*explore the extent to which each of the following are perceived to have made a difference*)
 - Additional money
 - Executive Governor and Executive Team
 - Support from HQ
 - Momentum of prison being involved in the pilot

7. Governance and management

- Changes of governance structure and impact of changes
- Factors enabling or inhibiting effective management of reform prisons
- Distribution of empowerment throughout the prison
- Views and experiences of prison groups
- Explore views on role of Executive Governor and team
- Lessons learned/considerations in relation to governance

8. Partnership working

- Explore whether and how prison is working with partner organisations to deliver reform
- Explore nature of relationships between reform prisons
- Explore nature of relationships between prison and MOJ/HMPPS
- Explore overall impact of partnership working on day-to-day running of prison

9. Reflections

- Views on what is working well/less well to date
- Key lessons and suggestions for improvement
- Any closing comments
- Stop recording and check whether participant is comfortable with content of discussion in light of the limits to anonymity

Appendix D

Prison profile table

	Prison profile ¹⁹	Key challenges	Reform priorities
HMP High Down	Large Category B adult male local prison in Surrey. Opened in 1992. Operational capacity of 1163. <i>In prison group with HMP Coldingley.</i>	Substance misuse issues Staffing issues	Review contracts and commission new services (e.g. family provision and education) Utilise procurement flexibilities Staff recruitment and retention
HMP Coldingley	Medium-sized Category C male training prison in Surrey. Opened in 1969. Operational capacity of 513. <i>In prison group with HMP High Down.</i>	Staffing issues Buildings and infrastructure problems	Staff recruitment and retention Enhancing regime (e.g. through new courses) General refurbishment of the estate
HMP Kirklevington Grange	Small Category D adult male open prison in Stockton-on-Tees. Operational capacity of 283. <i>In prison group with HMP Holme House.</i>	Buildings and infrastructure problems	Commission new services (e.g. education contract) Staff retention and progression ROTL and IEP General refurbishment of the estate
HMP Holme House	Large local Category C adult male (over 18 yrs) prison in Stockton-on-Tees. Opened in 1992. Operational capacity of 1210 <i>In prison group with HMP Kirklevington Grange.</i>	Substance misuse issues Staffing issues Re-roll to Category C during delivery of the pilot	Review contracts (e.g. maintenance) Staff recruitment and retention Refurbishment of the estate (linked to re-roll)

¹⁹ All data presented in this column is taken from the specific prison pages located through the HMPPS prison finder tool. Accessed here: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/contacts/prison-finder>

	Prison profile¹⁹	Key challenges	Reform priorities
HMP Ranby	Large Category C adult male working prison in Nottingham. Opened in 1972. Operational capacity of 1038.	Staffing issues	Review contracts (e.g. maintenance) and commission new services Staff recruitment and retention Increase work and education opportunities General refurbishment of the estate
HMP Wandsworth	Large Category B male local prison in South-West London. Opened in 1851. Operational capacity of 1628.	Buildings and infrastructure problems Staffing issues Substance misuse issues Re-roll to Reception prison during delivery of the pilot	Staff recruitment and retention General refurbishment of the estate Enhancing regime (e.g. through education and employment opportunities)

Appendix E

Prison regime and activities table

Overview of routine	Work opportunities	Volunteering and other leisure activities	Courses and education	Family visits & ROTL
Coldingley				
<p>Unlocked at around 8am until 7pm (week) and 5pm (weekend). Thought to be important that prisoners unlocked during the day because timings resemble normal life.</p> <p>Staff shortages perceived to have impacted on the day-to-day regime including time spent out of cells.</p>	<p>Work includes packing, engineering, working in print shop, recycling and waste management.</p> <p>Thought to be more opportunities to work since reform.</p> <p>Participants reported that they liked work and got job satisfaction from some roles. Work perceived to be important because prisoners can earn money.</p>	<p>Other activities include gym, church, 'association', music club, speaking with family and friends on the phone.</p> <p>Opportunities to volunteer (e.g. mental health champions, listeners, and mentors) perceived to be important and rewarding roles.</p>	<p>Participants had access to a range of courses.</p> <p>Education and courses linked to qualifications or opportunities perceived to be more valuable and have greater uptake.</p> <p>Courses were well publicised and well attended.</p>	<p>On average, prisoners get 1hr.45mins for visits.</p>
High Down				
<p>Unlocked at around 8am until 5pm.</p> <p>Perceived uncertainty with the regime – occasions where reduced regime running and prisons could not go to work/ volunteer.</p>	<p>Mixture of prisoners who worked/ did not.</p> <p>Jobs include working in the call centre, staff mess, for social care team, in the servery and cleaning.</p> <p>Spending time out of cell perceived to be an incentive to work.</p> <p>Prisoners valued work for the variety it gave their day-to-day lives and the money earned.</p>	<p>Other activities include gym, sports clubs and access to the library.</p> <p>Participants enjoyed voluntary roles, (e.g. offering peer support) and thought they were important fabric of the prison.</p>	<p>Range of education available but sometimes limited due to regime changes.</p> <p>Some reported they would like more opportunities to develop skills and education.</p>	<p>Some participants had regular visits. Process and facilities for visits thought to be satisfactory.</p>

Overview of routine	Work opportunities	Volunteering and other leisure activities	Courses and education	Family visits & ROTL
Holme House				
<p>Time spent in and out of cells varied between participants – those with work/ education unlocked for longer.</p> <p>Prison in process of changing from Category B to Category C.</p> <p>Most participants felt that they were kept in their cells for longer periods than before reform which meant that they were not able to access work and education activities as often as usual– linked to pressures on staff.</p>	<p>Jobs include working as prison information workers, cleaning and various mentoring roles.</p> <p>Those who worked liked their jobs – felt it gave them purpose.</p> <p>The prison was trying to increase the number of people in work by introducing part-time work. Some concern among participants that this may reduce work opportunities for those with full time jobs.</p>	<p>Other activities include going to the gym, church, football and association.</p> <p>Prisoners hopeful that they would get night-time association in the future.</p>	<p>The prison has a range of education opportunities and a higher education mentor helping people access Open University courses.</p>	<p>Some participants had regular visits once a week.</p> <p>Visits supposed to last 1 hr 45 mins, but sometimes shorter.</p> <p>Family visits only for prisoners with ‘enhanced status’ and highly valued by participants who had been granted them.</p>
Kirklevington Grange				
<p>Unlocked from around 8am until early evening.</p> <p>Lunch eaten in a communal canteen, not in prison cells. Some participants had opportunities to cook food as it is an open prison.</p>	<p>Work includes gardening, recycling, woodwork, kitchen work, working as a gym orderly and in a restaurant in the community.</p>	<p>Other activities include access to the library, church, sports activities, gym, cooking, calling friends and family and volunteering.</p> <p>Ability to engage in activities on the weekend perceived to be more limited.</p>	<p>Range of courses/employment available but perceived by some to have limited relevance to work or learning in the community. Appetite for wider range of education at higher levels.</p>	<p>Some participants had regular visits from family. Normal visits lasted for two hours.</p> <p>Most participants did not have ROTL (though KLG is an open prison). The length of time that prisoners needed to wait to be granted ROTL perceived by prisoners to be too long – limiting ability to engage with activities in the community to reintegrate.</p>

Overview of routine	Work opportunities	Volunteering and other leisure activities	Courses and education	Family visits & ROTL
Ranby				
<p>Unlocked from about 8am until 7pm, with some brief time in cells in between for lunch and roll call.</p> <p>Less time out of cells during the weekends.</p>	<p>Work includes working in the sewing workshop, plastic workshop, as a peer mentor, in laundry, the servery, and gardening.</p> <p>Some participants enjoyed their jobs- felt they gave value and kept them busy.</p> <p>However, some thought the work was boring and did not prepare prisoners for the job environment outside of prison.</p>	<p>Other activities include gym, access to the library, association, calling friends and family, playing snooker and ping pong.</p> <p>Gym time restricted and access perceived to be fairly limited given the number of prisoners.</p>	<p>Access to a range of courses, some linked to employment opportunities in the community (e.g. waste management course, laundry qualification, Railtrack course).</p> <p>However, not everyone had the opportunity to get involved in courses they wanted. Potential barriers included tests that prisoners had to do to get onto specific education programmes like Railtrack.</p>	<p>Some participants got visits from friends and family.</p> <p>Enhanced prisoners able to get family visits which lasted six hours. These visits are more relaxed and allow prisoners to play with their children and have food with the visitors.</p>
Wandsworth				
<p>Unlocked from about 8am until 6-7pm, with some brief time in cells in between for lunch and roll call.</p> <p>Weekends thought to go by slower – some emphasised the need to increase the amount of time out of cells during the weekend.</p>	<p>Job opportunities include working in recycling, catering, as a kitchen orderly, in the tool shed and mentoring other prisoners.</p> <p>Due to a lack of jobs, not all participants worked. To provide more jobs for prisoners, the prison has introduced part-time roles.</p>	<p>Other activities include calling family and friends, church and spending time in the exercise yard.</p> <p>Some participants involved in mentoring and peer support – these were voluntary roles that people thought were important and enjoyed.</p>	<p>Mixed feelings on the range and level of education available.</p> <p>Some participants expressed difficulty accessing the courses they wanted to.</p>	<p>Some participants had regular visits.</p> <p>The prison recently introduced a new system to speed up visitor process and allows more time to spend with friends and family.</p> <p>Feeling that visits could be more relaxed, given the prison is a category C.</p>