



Ministry
of Justice

Prison Estate Expansion

Evaluation Strategy

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Contents

List of tables

1. Background	1
1.1 The Ministry of Justice	1
1.2 Prison Estate Expansion evaluation	1
1.3 Purpose of this document	4
2. Scoping and overarching principles	5
3. Theories of change	7
4. Aims, evaluation questions and approaches	8
4.1 Impact evaluation	8
4.2 Process evaluation	9
4.3 Economic evaluation	10
5. Evaluation design	12
5.1 General considerations	12
5.2 New Prisons	16
5.3 Accelerated Houseblocks Delivery	17
5.4 Category D Expansion	18
5.5 Refurbishments	20
5.6 Rapid Deployment Cells	21
5.7 Small Secure Houseblocks	22
5.8 Cross-Portfolio Evaluation, Research and Evidence Synthesis	24
6. Ethics and data protection	25
7. Governance and quality assurance	26
8. Dissemination and learning	27
9. Feedback and further research	28

List of tables

Table 1. Prison Estate Expansion evaluation approaches (all TBC)

3

Glossary

DPIA	Data protection impact assessment
GDPR	General Data Protection regulation
GSR	Government Social Research profession
HMP	His Majesty's Prison
HMPPS	His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
QED	Quasi-experimental design
RCT	Randomised controlled trial
TBC	To be confirmed
ToC	Theory of change

1. Background

1.1 The Ministry of Justice

1. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is a major ministerial government department at the heart of the justice system. It is supported by 34 agencies and public bodies, and it works together with other government departments and agencies to protect and advance the principles of justice. The MoJ is responsible for prisons, courts, probation services and attendance centres. Each year, millions of people use MoJ services across the UK to resolve their justice needs.
2. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is an executive agency of the MoJ, responsible for correctional services in England and Wales. This includes the running of prisons and, through the Probation Service, running probation delivery in England and Wales. HMPPS works with multiple organisations, agencies and partners, including courts, police, youth offending teams, local councils, independent inspectors, charities, social enterprises and other enforcement agencies to provide services.

1.2 Prison Estate Expansion evaluation

3. The Prison Estate Expansion¹ portfolio is a large prison build programme, although its objectives go beyond just expanding capacity. The aim is to transform the prison estate, modernise prison buildings and improve outcomes for prisoners and staff. The portfolio is large and complex, made up of separate programmes which connect and interact with each other in varying ways. The infrastructure and operational context of the portfolio is also complex, encompassing both publicly and privately managed prisons.

¹ The formal title of the Prison Estate Expansion is the Prison Capacity Sub-Portfolio. Throughout this document we have referred to the portfolio of work as the Prison Estate Expansion as this title is more explanatory for an external audience.

Prison Estate Expansion

Evaluation Strategy

4. Each programme within the portfolio will deliver a particular aspect of the additional capacity through the construction of new prisons, new houseblocks of varying sizes added to existing prison sites and refurbishments at a range of existing sites. Given the substantial investment and importance of this portfolio for the MoJ's strategic outcomes, it is critical that we evaluate these programmes to make sure that any benefits from prison estate expansion are captured and timely lessons are learnt about its implementation.
5. The MoJ will evaluate the Prison Estate Expansion programmes and gather wider evidence in key areas related to the prison estate. The timeframe for these evaluations will be confirmed in a future iteration of this strategy.
6. We intend to use a range of approaches to reviewing and evaluating the main programmes within the Prison Estate Expansion portfolio, working within available budgets and what methods are possible and appropriate for each programme.² The intended approaches are listed in Table 1. (Please see Sections 4 and 5 for definitions, details and rationales for these approaches.)

² As well as the programmes listed here, the Prison Estate Expansion includes some smaller build programmes that are not being formally evaluated due to their scale.

Prison Estate Expansion
Evaluation Strategy

Table 1. Prison Estate Expansion evaluation approaches (all TBC)

Programme title and brief description ³	Intended evaluation approaches		
	Impact	Process	Economic
New Prisons (newly built closed prisons using specific T60 ⁴ design and ancillaries)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Accelerated Houseblocks Delivery (new houseblocks with specific T60 design and ancillaries added to existing closed prisons)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Category D Expansion (new houseblocks with specific design and ancillaries added to existing open prisons)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Refurbishments (various expansions and refurbishments to existing closed prisons)	No	Yes	Yes
Rapid Deployment Cells (self-contained modular units added to existing open and closed prisons)	No	Yes	Yes
Small Secure Houseblocks (new, small houseblocks added to existing closed prisons)	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Cross-Portfolio Research, Evaluation and Synthesis</i>			

7. These evaluations will contribute to the ambitions set out in MoJ’s 2023 Evaluation and Prototyping Strategy,⁵ helping increase the coverage and quality of evaluation across the criminal justice system, creating evidence to inform decisions and improving justice outcomes. The evaluations will seek to enhance the impact of the MoJ and HMPPS by developing a better understanding of what works in relation to prison design (and why) and identifying the best use of public money with regard to the prison estate expansion.

³ Please see more information in Section 5.

⁴ The new T60 design consists of mostly single-cell houseblocks with natural light, ventilation, controlled acoustics and, in most cases, in-cell technology beyond what was possible in previous designs. Smaller community sizes are also at the heart of this design.

⁵ [MoJ Evaluation and Prototyping Strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114222/Moj-Evaluation-and-Prototyping-Strategy-2023.pdf)

1.3 Purpose of this document

8. This document is the first version of the Prison Estate Expansion Evaluation Strategy. Although some details of this new suite of evaluations are yet to be confirmed, we are publishing our preliminary plans in the interest of **transparency** and **shared understanding** with our key stakeholders, **accountability** for the funding invested in these programmes, and to facilitate **communication** with the wider research and evaluation communities (see Section 9).
9. This document outlines our current intentions with regard to evaluating this complex and evolving set of programmes using the most robust methods available. Final evaluation designs will depend on programme implementation across the Prison Estate Expansion, the practical feasibility of using the intended approaches and methods to produce the most credible and reliable evidence, availability and quality of data required for these methods, and data collection visits in participating prisons.
10. In addition to the six programme evaluations, a programme of cross-portfolio evaluation, research and evidence synthesis is currently being scoped and developed (see Section 5.8).
11. As such, this is a preliminary overview of our overall Evaluation Strategy, and it will be updated periodically as more specific details become available.

2. Scoping and overarching principles

12. As part of its evaluation scoping activities, MoJ commissioned an independent feasibility study to examine the suitability of different evaluation options and make informed recommendations. This ensured external validation, independence and accountability, increasing the likelihood that the most suitable approaches would be selected.
13. The feasibility study produced detailed theories of change⁶ (see next section) and proposed evaluation options for each programme within the Prison Estate Expansion. These set out proposed methods, scope, duration and resources required to run a robust, comprehensive and proportionate evaluation of the different programmes within the Prison Estate Expansion.
14. These recommendations informed the development of a research and evaluation programme led by the MoJ with the following overarching principles:
 - **Close collaboration with policy and operational leads** to ensure we fully understand their needs, priorities and constraints, and deliver evidence that is relevant, useful and fit for purpose
 - **Focus on HMPPS strategic priorities** by focusing on the modernisation and safety of the prison estate, and other policy-relevant topics
 - **The most robust evidence available at the earliest opportunity** to support timely learning, evidence-based decision making and preparations for fiscal events (e.g., Spending Review)
 - **Bespoke evaluations** that take account of the specifics of each programme while facilitating **cross-portfolio learning and synthesis**
 - **Ethical research** that is sensitive to the needs of each participant group, prioritises participants' right to informed participation and full confidentiality

⁶ Diagrams depicting the causal mechanisms through which interventions are assumed to achieve their desired outcomes and impacts (e.g., **how** we expect a specific prison design will lead to improved safety, wellbeing or offender rehabilitation).

Prison Estate Expansion

Evaluation Strategy

- **Robust methodologies** that produce credible, trustworthy and defensible evidence
- **Useful outputs**, including lessons learnt and practical, actionable recommendations that are accessible to a wide variety of stakeholders, with or without analytical backgrounds

3. Theories of change

15. Our Evaluation Strategy is grounded in comprehensive theories of change (ToCs) prepared during the feasibility study for the overall portfolio and each individual programme. They depict our understanding of how Prison Estate Expansion programmes are expected to achieve their desired outcomes and impacts, as well as key contextual factors and assumptions that are expected to influence these outcomes and, ultimately, the success of the programmes. They were developed through reviews of existing evidence, stakeholder interviews and workshops. They are consistent in structure and, where relevant, content. Causal mechanisms were identified in each ToC and linked across all programmes in the Prison Estate Expansion where relevant.
16. These initial ToCs have guided the planned evaluation designs and may be updated following further familiarisation with the programmes by internal and external evaluation teams. They will then inform the final evaluation questions, outcome measures and analysis approaches for each programme.
17. Where relevant and feasible, an updated, evidence-based ToC will be included in the final evaluation report specifying what components, assumptions and causal mechanisms were tested in the evaluation, what evidence was found to support these (or otherwise) and what the strength of that evidence was.

4. Aims, evaluation questions and approaches

18. An overview of the intended approaches, aims and possible evaluation questions we will seek to answer across the portfolio can be found below, with intended evaluation designs for each programme in the next section. As the specifics of each evaluation are yet to be confirmed, the evaluation questions listed below are provisional and would not necessarily apply to each evaluation within the portfolio.
19. These will all be confirmed when each specific evaluation design has been finalised and the final set of evaluation questions has been adapted and specified for each programme.

4.1 Impact evaluation

Broad definition: an evaluation approach that examines whether and to what extent a programme has directly caused any change to an outcome of interest, typically through an experimental, quasi-experimental or theory-based evaluation design, or a combination of these. (Please see Section 5.1 for explanations and a discussion of these approaches within the Prison Estate Expansion.)⁷

Overarching aims:

- Understand the impact that the programme has on staff, prisoners and wider outcomes
- Examine whether and to what extent this impact differs from relevant outcomes in other comparable prisons
- Investigate whether the intended benefits for prisoners, staff and the wider prison estate are realised

⁷ For more information, please see [The Magenta Book](#) (government's guidance on evaluation).

Potential evaluation questions (TBC for each programme, where relevant):

- What, if any, impact⁸ does working/residing in a relevant prison have on staff and/or prisoners, compared to relevant comparator prisons?
- To what extent, if at all, are there improved prisoner-prisoner and prisoner-staff relationships in participating prisons, compared to relevant comparator prisons?
- What, if any, impact does residing in a participating prison have on prisoners' access to services and facilities, compared to similar outcomes in relevant comparator prisons?
- To what extent, if at all, is there improved safety and order in participating prisons, compared to relevant comparator prisons?

4.2 Process evaluation

Broad definition: an evaluation approach that examines how a programme has been implemented, what has gone well or not so well (and why), whether it had any unintended consequences (positive or negative) and any lessons that can be learnt for further development of the respective programme or similar ones.⁹

Overarching aims:

- Understand how elements of the prison facilities are used in practice, what works well and less well, and the reasons why
- Explore the actual use of space from multiple perspectives, including staff, prisoners and visitors
- Gain an in-depth understanding of life in relevant prisons and explore causal mechanisms, risks, barriers and facilitators set out in the theory of change
- Capture good practice and generate better understanding that can be shared with other prisons

⁸ Specific outcome measures TBC for each programme.

⁹ For more information, please see [The Magenta Book](#) (government's guidance on evaluation).

Potential evaluation questions (TBC for each programme):

- To what extent, and how, do staff and prisoners use relevant parts of the estate in their day-to-day activities?
- To what extent, if at all, do ancillaries and services in relevant prisons meet staff and prisoner needs (including mobility and other access needs)?
- To what extent, and how, do visitors use relevant facilities?
- What are staff, prisoner and visitor perceptions of the relevant facilities?
- What are the key factors that appear to influence how and to what extent different user groups use relevant facilities and services?

4.3 Economic evaluation

Broad definition: an evaluation approach that examines whether a programme represents good use of resources relative to its outcomes, typically by assessing whether any quantified benefits outweigh the costs and estimating wider potential benefits that may not always be easy to quantify or monetise.¹⁰ It should be noted that it is unlikely that all outcomes can be quantified and monetised, so while value for money will be determined partially by comparing monetised costs and benefits, this will be supplemented with qualitative evidence and judgement.

Economic evaluation encompasses both short and long-term costs and benefits over the lifetime of an intervention. For the large-scale building projects in the Prison Estate Expansion, some benefits are likely to be realised early in the process, others later. Where possible, the economic evaluation will measure costs and benefits in the short-term (e.g. violence, re-offending one year post-release, staff absence) and make projections for the long-term (60 years).

¹⁰ For more information, please see [The Magenta Book](#) (government's guidance on evaluation) and [The Green Book](#) (government's guidance on appraisal and evaluation).

Prison Estate Expansion

Evaluation Strategy

Overarching aims:

- Understand what additional costs are involved in operating relevant prisons relative to comparator prisons
- Investigate if there are any economic and wider benefits, efficiencies and/or cost savings generated by improved prisoner and staff outcomes at relevant prisons when compared to comparator prisons
- Understand how any additional costs compare to the benefits, and whether relevant prisons represent good value for money

Potential evaluation questions (TBC for each programme):

- What are the measurable economic outcomes of the relevant prison design and/or facilities, compared to relevant comparator prisons? For example, can any of the effects identified in an impact evaluation be monetised?
- What are the measurable or otherwise documented wider benefits of operating the relevant prisons, compared to relevant comparator prisons?
- Do relevant prison designs and/or facilities represent good value for money, compared to relevant comparator prisons?

5. Evaluation design

5.1 General considerations

20. When considering what evaluation design (approach and methods) would be suitable for each programme, we have balanced carefully the following key factors:
- **Research rigour:** What are the most rigorous designs and the most robust methods we can use, given the nature and constraints of each programme?
 - **Data quality:** How likely is it we will have the data needed for specific designs, in terms of quality (validity, reliability) and access?
 - **Theory of change:** Given the scope and scale of a particular programme, how realistic is it to expect it to have a measurable impact on outcomes of interest?
 - **Learning:** What approaches and methods would elicit the most useful, timely learning for the future?
 - **Proportionality:** What mix of approaches and methods would provide the maximum value in proportion to the overall programme aims, scope and scale?
21. While all designs are to be confirmed, following the above considerations, we have concluded that: a) impact evaluation is only likely to be feasible for four of the six programmes, b) process evaluation would benefit all six programmes in terms of maximising timely learning and identifying critical success factors, and c) economic evaluation would also be beneficial and (to varying degrees) feasible for all six programmes. Please see **Rationale** highlight boxes in each programme section below for an explanation of why a specific evaluation design is being proposed.
22. With regard to robust impact evaluation, three broad approaches are generally available: experimental (e.g., randomised controlled trials), quasi-experimental, and theory based. We have concluded that randomised controlled trials are not feasible for any of these programmes, quasi-experiments are feasible for two

(TBC) and theory-based evaluations are feasible for the remaining two programmes suitable for impact evaluation. We explain this in more detail below, before moving on to describe the intended evaluation design and rationale for each programme.

Randomised Controlled Trials (not feasible for Prison Estate Expansion programmes)

23. A randomised controlled trial (RCT) is an experimental evaluation design that is regarded by many experts as the ‘gold standard’ in impact evaluation, as it can provide the most robust evidence of *impact* and *attribution*. That is, it can provide a robust statistical estimate of the effect that an intervention had on the outcome(s) of interest, as well as credible evidence that the specific effect was caused by that specific intervention and not other interventions that might have run in parallel, or other contextual factors (e.g., policy changes). It does this by comparing outcomes of interest in the intervention group to a control group (which acts as a *counterfactual*, estimating what might have happened if the intervention had not taken place).
24. In order for an RCT to provide such robust evidence, it needs to meet two basic conditions: it must be correctly *randomised* and carefully *controlled*. Correct randomisation means both the intervention and the control groups are selected at random, by a computer, from a pool of eligible entities (e.g., prisons, prisoners), all of whom have an equal chance of being selected. The intervention delivery or implementation model must also be carefully controlled, in the sense that the exact same intervention must be delivered to all prisons/prisoners in the intervention group, with variations in implementation carefully monitored and controlled for in the analysis. A carefully selected control group would also need to follow a consistent programme over the evaluation period, which would often be ‘business as usual’. In the most robust RCT designs (double-blind placebo-controlled), neither the participants nor the immediate research team would even know whether a participant (e.g., prison, prisoner) is in the intervention or in the control group.

25. None of these restrictions would be feasible options for the Prison Estate Expansion programmes. We cannot decide at random where a new prison is built or where a different type of expansion is implemented, nor which prisoners out of the entire prison population are selected to reside in these types of accommodation. Likewise, we cannot control what happens in any of the intervention or comparator prisons so that we obtain the type of data we would need for RCTs. All Prison Estate Expansion programmes are very complex real-life interventions with innumerable contextual differences both between sites and from one day to the next within the same site. For these reasons, an experimental RCT design is not a feasible option for any of these evaluations. Instead, where we are able to conduct impact evaluation, we intend to use robust quasi-experimental or theory-based designs, which can also provide strong evidence of impact in the right circumstances.

Quasi-Experimental Designs (feasible for New Prisons and Category D Expansion programmes)

26. Quasi-experimental designs (QEDs) can also estimate the impact of a programme by comparing outcomes for the intervention group (the group receiving the ‘treatment’) to a carefully selected comparison group (the group not receiving any ‘treatment’). The comparison group can be formed from existing administrative data, for example by ‘matching’ each prisoner or prison in the intervention group with a very similar equivalent in the comparison group, and observing if/ how their outcomes differ over time. In this case, the matching and analysis are done entirely with data, without the need for participants in either group to do anything different from their normal activities. This comparison can act as a counterfactual – that is, an indication of what might have happened in the absence of the intervention. As randomisation or controlled implementation are not required, a QED is much more suitable than an RCT for complex interventions where it is possible to measure or observe outcomes without seeking to influence how or where the intervention is delivered. This design will likely be feasible for at least one of the Prison Estate Expansion programmes, possibly two (TBC).

27. One limitation of QED designs is that the analysis cannot account for differences between intervention and comparisons groups which we did not measure, and which may have influenced the outcomes in ways we cannot explain. We will address this limitation by complementing the QED evaluations with process evaluations, with rich data collected over the duration of the evaluations providing context and nuance to the statistical findings. Drawing on these different evaluation strands, plus economic evaluation, will enable us to reach credible conclusions about the impact and overall value of these interventions, as well as lessons learnt about critical success factors that can be used to strengthen these and other relevant programmes going forward.

Theory-Based Evaluations (feasible for Accelerated Houseblock Delivery and Small Secure Houseblocks programmes)

28. QED impact evaluations require intervention outcomes to be assessed through robust comparison with, for instance, similar prisons or individual prisoners who did not take part in the intervention. This requirement is not feasible for multiple different types of prison expansion being added to existing prisons. It would not be possible to isolate the specific impact of each expansion type from the impact of the wider existing establishment *and* find suitable comparator prisons (or prisoners) for which a similar combination of expansions would apply. This rules out the feasibility of counterfactual evaluation (which, as noted above, would give an indication of what might have happened in the absence of the intervention).
29. A viable alternative is a theory-based design, which can provide robust evidence of impact without requiring a statistical comparison. This design would instead focus on areas such as understanding in detail what difference the intervention appears to have made, whether this was different for different user or stakeholder groups, or what the ‘critical ingredients’ were for the intervention to be successful and for the theory of change to be validated (confirmed) or otherwise. This is typically done using a mixed-method approach combining statistical and qualitative methods, and drawing on multiple data sources to seek a more in-depth understanding than counterfactual methods can typically provide on their own. This is a feasible design for two of the Prison Estate Expansion programmes.

30. In line with these considerations, we intend to use the following approaches and methods to evaluate the six programmes included in the Prison Estate Expansion. As noted, these plans are dependent on the relevant evaluation designs being finalised with the respective evaluation teams, as well as the feasibility of obtaining the required data, and the quality and validity of the data available. These details will be specified further in future updates.

5.2 New Prisons

Brief programme description

31. Newly built prisons using T60 houseblocks and supporting ancillaries throughout: The new T60 design consists of mostly single-cell houseblocks with natural light, ventilation, controlled acoustics and, in most cases, in-cell technology beyond what was possible in previous designs. Smaller community sizes are also at the heart of this design. Key ancillaries include the visits hall, gyms, workshops, education and training rooms, multi-faith areas, laundry, kitchens, dining and cooking facilities, healthcare services, staff facilities, and spaces for one-to-one conversations.

Intended evaluation design (externally commissioned)

- **Impact evaluation:** quasi-experiment comparing a primary outcome of interest for prisoners in intervention prisons versus matched comparisons (e.g., purposeful activity – TBC) with additional secondary outcomes for prisoners and staff (e.g., employment following release, safety, workforce health – TBC). Potential feasible methods: propensity score matching, difference-in-differences
- **Process evaluation:** mix of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, ad-hoc conversations, observations and administrative data analysis (TBC)
- **Economic evaluation:** cost/benefit analysis with monetisation or quantification of wider benefits wherever feasible for intervention and comparator prisons; overall value-for-money assessment

Rationale

As outlined in the introduction to this section, an experimental evaluation design is not feasible. We will therefore use a quasi-experiment to examine whether the programme had a measurable effect on the outcome(s) of interest in participating new prisons, compared to rigorously selected comparator prisons. We will complement this with a process evaluation to provide in-depth insight about the implementation of the programme, facilitators and barriers to successful delivery, any unintended consequences and lessons learnt that can inform policy and/or operational decisions at the earliest opportunities. Drawing on findings from the impact evaluation, process evaluation and other relevant data, we will also complete an economic evaluation to estimate the overall value of the programme to key stakeholders and the taxpayer, thus helping inform decisions about capacity expansion initiatives.

5.3 Accelerated Houseblocks Delivery

Brief programme description

32. Existing prisons are expanded by the addition of T60 houseblocks with supporting ancillaries.

Intended evaluation design (externally commissioned)

- **Impact evaluation:** theory-based approach likely using contribution analysis or qualitative comparative analysis exploring outcomes of interest similar to those used in other Prison Estate Expansion evaluations (e.g., potentially, engagement in purposeful activities, employment following release, safety, workforce health, staff and prisoner wellbeing – TBC)
- **Process evaluation:** mix of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, ad-hoc conversations and observations and administrative data analysis (TBC)
- **Economic evaluation:** cost/benefit analysis with monetisation or quantification of wider benefits wherever feasible

Rationale

As outlined in the introduction to this section, an experimental evaluation design is not feasible. It is also unfeasible to access a comparison group for a quasi-experimental evaluation, given that these expansions would be added to existing prisons with other prison designs present. It would thus not be possible to reliably quantify and isolate the specific impact that this programme might have on prisoner and/or staff outcomes within relevant prisons. We will therefore use a theory-based impact evaluation design, which does not require a comparison group but can still provide robust evidence of impact. This will focus more broadly on whether, how and why the programme ‘works’, identifying key elements of the programme (theory of change) that appear to be critical to its success and whether different user groups are impacted by the programme differently.

We will complement this with a process evaluation to provide in-depth insight about the implementation of the programme, facilitators and barriers to successful delivery, any unintended consequences and lessons learnt that can inform policy and/or operational decisions at the earliest opportunities. Drawing on findings from the impact evaluation, process evaluation and other relevant data, we will also complete an economic evaluation to estimate the overall value of the programme to key stakeholders and the taxpayer, thus helping inform decisions about capacity expansion initiatives.

5.4 Category D Expansion

Brief programme description

33. New houseblocks are added to existing Category D prisons that use a new design specifically for Category D sites, in addition to association rooms, kitchens and laundry rooms.

Intended evaluation design (in-house)

- **Impact evaluation (TBC):** if feasible, quasi-experiment comparing a primary outcome of interest for prisoners in intervention prisons versus matched comparisons (e.g., purposeful activity – TBC) with additional secondary

Prison Estate Expansion

Evaluation Strategy

outcomes for prisoners and staff (e.g., employment following release, safety, workforce health – TBC). Potential feasible methods: propensity score matching, difference-in-differences

- **Process evaluation:** mix of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, surveys, ad-hoc conversations, observations and administrative data analysis (TBC)
- **Economic evaluation:** cost/benefit analysis with monetisation or quantification of wider benefits wherever feasible

Rationale

As outlined in the introduction to this section, an experimental evaluation design is not feasible. We will therefore aim to use a quasi-experiment to examine whether the programme had a measurable effect on the outcome(s) of interest in participating expansions, compared to a rigorously selected comparison group. Whether this is ultimately feasible will depend on the availability and quality of the data required (critically, whether it will be possible to avoid data ‘contamination’ between Category D expansions and the rest of the estates hosting them).

We will complement this with a process evaluation to provide in-depth insight about the implementation of the programme, facilitators and barriers to successful delivery, any unintended consequences and lessons learnt that can inform policy and/or operational decisions at the earliest opportunities. Drawing on findings from the impact evaluation, process evaluation and other relevant data, we will also complete an economic evaluation to estimate the overall value of the programme to key stakeholders and the taxpayer, thus helping inform decisions about capacity expansion initiatives.

5.5 Refurbishments

Brief programme description

34. Existing prisons in the Category B and C estate are expanded or refurbished in a range of ways. This programme includes houseblocks, refurbishments of galleried landing blocks that have fallen out of use, addition of extra blocks and ancillaries, and addition of a new workshop.

Intended evaluation design (partly externally commissioned, partly in house)

- **Process evaluation:** mix of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, ad-hoc conversations, observations and administrative data analysis (TBC)
- **Economic evaluation:** primarily qualitative analysis of the key costs and benefits of the refurbishments

Rationale

As outlined in the introduction to this section, an experimental evaluation design is not feasible. It is also unfeasible to access a comparison group for a quasi-experimental evaluation, given that these expansions would be added to existing prisons with other prison designs present. It would thus not be possible to reliably isolate and quantify the specific impact that this programme might have on prisoner and/or staff outcomes within relevant prisons. Moreover, these expansions will be limited in scope and scale, and cannot therefore be expected to have a statistically measurable impact on prisoner or staff outcomes. For these reasons, we have concluded that an impact evaluation would not be feasible and would not produce any meaningful results for this programme.

We will instead conduct a process evaluation to provide in-depth insight about the implementation of the programme, facilitators and barriers to successful delivery, perceived benefits, any unintended consequences and lessons learnt. These can inform policy and/or operational decisions at the earliest opportunity. Wherever possible, we will complement this with descriptive comparisons against standard prison comparator groups on metrics of interest. Drawing on findings from the process evaluation and other relevant data, we will also complete an economic review which summarises the costs and perceived benefits of the programme to key stakeholders and the taxpayer, thus helping inform decisions about capacity expansion initiatives.

5.6 Rapid Deployment Cells

Brief programme description

35. Existing prisons across Categories C and D are expanded by the addition of modular, single or multi-story, self-contained units placed within existing prison grounds. Rapid deployment cells are a temporary capacity solution and have an approximate lifespan of 15 years.

Intended evaluation design (in-house)

- **Process evaluation:** mix of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, ad-hoc conversations, observations and administrative data analysis (TBC)
- **Economic evaluation:** primarily qualitative analysis of the key costs and benefits of the refurbishments

Rationale

As above, an experimental evaluation design is not feasible. It is also unfeasible to access a comparison group for a quasi-experimental evaluation, given that these expansions would be added to existing prisons with other prison designs present. It would thus not be possible to reliably quantify and isolate the specific impact that this programme might have on prisoner and/or staff outcomes within relevant prisons. Moreover, these expansions will be limited in scope and scale, and cannot therefore be expected to have a statistically measurable impact on prisoner or staff outcomes. For these reasons, we have concluded that an impact evaluation would not be feasible and would not produce any meaningful results for this programme.

We will instead conduct a process evaluation to provide in-depth insight about the implementation of the programme, facilitators and barriers to successful delivery, perceived benefits, any unintended consequences and lessons learnt. These can inform policy and/or operational decisions at the earliest opportunity. Wherever possible, we will complement this with descriptive comparisons against standard prison comparator group on metrics of interest. Drawing on findings from the process evaluation and other relevant data, we will also complete an economic review which summarises the value of the programme to key stakeholders and the taxpayer, thus helping inform decisions about capacity expansion initiatives.

5.7 Small Secure Houseblocks

Brief programme description

36. Existing prisons are expanded by the addition of small, secure, single-floor or two-storey houseblocks designed to be built on land too small for full (T60) houseblocks.

Intended evaluation design (externally commissioned)

- **Impact evaluation:** theory-based approach likely using contribution analysis or qualitative comparative analysis, to explore outcomes of interest similar to those used in other Prison Estate Expansion evaluations (e.g., potentially, engagement in purposeful activities, employment following release, safety, workforce health, staff and prisoner wellbeing – TBC)
- **Process evaluation:** mix of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, ad-hoc conversations, observations and administrative data analysis (TBC)
- **Economic evaluation:** cost/benefit analysis with monetisation or quantification of wider benefits wherever feasible

Rationale

Once again, an experimental evaluation design would not be feasible. It is also unfeasible to access a comparison group for a quasi-experimental evaluation, given that these expansions would be added to existing prisons with other prison designs present. It would thus not be possible to reliably quantify and isolate the specific impact that this programme might have on prisoner and/or staff outcomes within relevant prisons. We will therefore use a theory-based impact evaluation design, which does not require a comparison group but can still provide robust evidence of impact. This will focus more broadly on whether, how and why the programme ‘works’, identifying key elements of the programme (theory of change) that appear to be critical to its success and whether different user groups are impacted by the programme differently.

We will complement this with a process evaluation to provide in-depth insight about the implementation of the programme, facilitators and barriers to successful delivery, any unintended consequences and lessons learnt that can inform policy and/or operational decisions at the earliest opportunities. Drawing on findings from the impact evaluation, process evaluation and other relevant data, we will also complete an economic evaluation to estimate the overall value of the programme to key stakeholders and the taxpayer, thus helping inform decisions about capacity expansion initiatives.

5.8 Cross-Portfolio Evaluation, Research and Evidence Synthesis

37. In addition to the six programme evaluations, we are in the early stages of developing a comprehensive Cross-Portfolio Evaluation, Research and Evidence Synthesis programme. This will include in-house, co-funded and externally commissioned research and evaluation projects to supplement the above evaluations by filling in remaining evidence gaps regarding prison estate and capacity.
38. This work stream will also integrate and, wherever possible, synthesise the findings from the six programme evaluations above. It will seek to establish overall conclusions about what works best in prison estate expansion programmes, what critical ingredients are required for ensuring the success of these programmes and what lessons can be learnt for the continued development of these and other relevant interventions.

6. Ethics and data protection

39. All evaluation activities will be conducted in line with the Government Social Research professional code¹¹ and guidance on ethical assurance for social and behavioural research.¹² They will also be fully compliant with UK GDPR/ Data Protection Act 2018,¹³ the MoJ Personal Information Charter¹⁴ and relevant associated policies.
40. Ethics checklists outlining any ethical risks and sensitivities, along with planned mitigations, will be completed by evaluation leads in the Prison Estate Evaluation and Evidence Programme and submitted for review to the MoJ Ethics Advisory Group. In addition, external collaborators will follow their own ethical review processes, where relevant. Ethical risks will be kept under ongoing observation and checklists will be reviewed periodically with input from external suppliers, where relevant.
41. We will also complete full data protection impact assessments (DPIAs) for all relevant research and evaluation projects prior to the start of any personal data processing. As with ethics checklists, information security will be monitored on an ongoing basis, with DPIAs reviewed periodically with input from external suppliers, where relevant.

¹¹ [Government Social Research Code - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

¹² [GSR Ethical Assurance for Social and Behavioural Research - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

¹³ [Data Protection Act 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](http://legislation.gov.uk)

¹⁴ [Personal Information Charter - Ministry of Justice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

7. Governance and quality assurance

42. This programme of work will be overseen on an ongoing basis by the appropriate internal governance Boards, in addition to MoJ analytical quality assurance mechanisms.
43. We will seek expert evaluation advice and critical review for all key outputs related to these projects, including the Evaluation Strategy, as well as interim and final reports. Input will be sought from independent academic peer reviewers, MoJ Evaluation and Prototyping Hub and the government's Evaluation Task Force.
44. We are also inviting colleagues from the wider research and evaluation communities – within and outside government – to get in touch with any feedback they may have regarding our evaluation plans and methods (see Section 9).

8. Dissemination and learning

45. We will work closely with senior HMPPS and MoJ stakeholders to ensure we prepare outputs that will provide them with the most robust evidence available at the earliest opportunity possible. Doing so will provide timely support for critical policy and operational decisions, as well as facilitate rigorous preparations for fiscal events (e.g., Spending Reviews). Dissemination will include periodic interim reports, briefings and presentations in addition to the final reports.
46. Where relevant, these outputs will include lessons learnt to date and practical actionable recommendations for different types of stakeholders to maximise timely learning and to support the successful implementation of these and other relevant programmes.
47. Wherever feasible, we will work with HMPPS to circulate brief research updates to participating prisons and respondents after each wave of primary data collection. This will ensure we give something back for their participation as soon as possible, maintain their interest in our evaluations and provide useful actionable insights wherever possible.
48. A quality-assured, externally peer-reviewed Government Social Research (GSR) report will be published for each evaluation in the Portfolio. These reports will follow the GSR Publications Protocol.¹⁵ For all published reports, we will work with external and internal evaluation teams to ensure these follow current accessibility requirements.¹⁶

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-social-research-publication-protocols>

¹⁶ [Accessibility Legislation: What You Need to Know – Government Analysis Function \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

9. Feedback and further research

49. As we continue to develop this new research and evaluation programme, we will be seeking to fill key evidence gaps related to prison estate and capacity. We will provide additional details in future updates to this Evaluation Strategy.

We would welcome any feedback from colleagues across the research and evaluation communities, both within and outside government, and from anyone with an interest in relevant evidence.

Please get in touch with any feedback at:

PrisonEstateEvaluationandEvidenceProgramme@justice.gov.uk

50. More generally, the MoJ is keen for partners in both academia and external research organisations to support the department in filling evidence gaps to expand the current knowledge base.

Specific topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- any influences that specific prison design features can have on mental health and/or trauma.
- any impact on reoffending of holding prisoners closer to their homes.
- whether prison work programmes help to reduce reoffending or increase employment after release.

For more information and the latest Areas of Research Interest, please see Research at MoJ.¹⁷

¹⁷ [Ministry of Justice: areas of research interest 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/research-interest-areas)