

Offenders

Headlines

Released prisoners tend to be one of the most socially excluded groups as they often have no links to local communities. Their imprisonment can often lead to the following:

- Breakdown in family relationships.
- Loss of tenancies and associated debt due to loss of housing benefit and accrued rent arrears while in prison.
- Loss of employment.
- Offenders are far more likely than the general population to have mental illness, learning disability, substance misuse, alcohol misuse, homelessness, poor educational achievement, unemployment.
- Improving the health of offenders reduces the chance of their re-offending, which in turn reduces the future impact on both victims and the families of offenders. Some of these links are very explicit, for example problematic drug and/or alcohol use, acquisitive or violent crime including domestic violence and the behavioural effects of some mental disorders.
- Women offenders have far higher levels of mental ill health, alcohol and drug problems than male offenders do. Locally 2 in 3 were experiencing or had experienced domestic violence.
- Children of offenders are three times more likely to experience mental health problems, and 2 in 3 boys with a convicted parent go on to offend and those with fathers in prison are three times more likely to end up in prison themselves.

Why is this group important?

Offending behaviour is damaging for not just offenders and their victims, but also their families and the wider community. It is closely linked with drugs and alcohol misuse, mental health, learning disability, accommodation and employment as well as affecting outcomes for families and children. Improving the health of offenders reduces the chance of their re-offending, which in turn reduces the future impact on both victims and the families of offenders^{1,2}.

Within Kirklees, the probation service supervises around 2,000 offenders. In February 2010, the total caseload was 2,021, of which 60% (1,217) were subject to a community sentence, 14% (279) were supervised on post release licence and 26% (525) were in custody. Overall 1 in 10 of the caseload were women, 1 in 3 (35%) were aged under 25 years, 1 in 3 (33%) were aged 26-35, and 1 in 3 (32%) were aged over 35 years.

In addition, at any one time there are least a further 350 offenders from Kirklees who are serving prison sentences of less than 12 months and are not subject to any form of statutory supervision on release³.

What significant factors are affecting this group?

Factors affecting offenders in the general population⁵

Characteristic	General	Prison
No qualifications	15%	52% of males, 71% of females
Numeracy below level 1 (age 11)	23%	65%
Unemployed before imprisonment	5%	67%
Homeless	0.9%	32%
Suffer from two or more mental disorders	5% males, 2% females	72% males, 70% females
Drug use in previous year	13% males, 8% females	66% males, 55% females
Hazardous drinking	38% males, 15% females	63% males, 39% females

Local data shows that offenders in Kirklees, not just those in prison, experience the following³:

- Mental illness – more than half (54%) offenders had issues in relation to emotional wellbeing.
- Substance misuse – 1 in 3 (36%) offenders had a drug related problem.
- Alcohol – 3 in 5 (61%) offenders had an alcohol related problem.
- Homelessness – more than half (55%) of offenders lived in accommodation that is deemed to be unsuitable or were homeless.
- Poor educational achievement and unemployment – 3 in 4 offenders either were unemployed or had specific training or educational needs in relation to improving their employability³. Nationally around 1 in 3 (20-30%) offenders had learning disabilities or mental health difficulties that interfered with their ability to cope with the criminal justice system¹. Locally, probation service records indicate that this figure is nearer 1 in 10 (8.7%) (173 offenders)³.

Nationally, the risk of death for men released from prison is 40 times higher in the first week of release than the general population – more than 9 in 10 have drug related causes. In Kirklees, between April 2009 and March 2010, there were 17 deaths of offenders on statutory supervision; seven of which were alcohol related and three were drug related³.

There are nine key factors that can influence re-offending⁶:

- Accommodation.
- Education and employment.
- Finance.
- Relationships.
- Lifestyle.
- Drug and alcohol misuse.
- Mental and physical health.
- Thinking and behaviour.
- Attitudes.

Unless these factors are speedily addressed, the risk is high of re-offending soon after release, with its resulting impact on the community. Ministry of Justice figures estimate the re-offending rate for released prisoners at 3 in 5 compared to less than 2 in 5 (37%) for a community sentence⁴.

Which specific groups are affected most?

Women offenders

Offenders come from every group of society but women are a particularly vulnerable group. Women offenders make up approximately 1 in 10 of the statutory caseload in Kirklees and their offence related needs are often very different to men's³. Of the female prison population, over half said they have suffered domestic violence and one third said they have experienced sexual abuse. In Kirklees³:

- 8 in 10 (83%) had an alcohol related need, compared to 6 in 10 men.
- 2 in 3 (67%) had issues in relation to emotional wellbeing, compared to half of men.
- Half had drug related needs, compared to 1 in 3 (35%) men.

Women Centre Kirklees works with some of our most vulnerable female offenders. Of these⁷:

- 2 in 3 (68%) had experienced, or were experiencing, domestic violence.
- More than half (55%) had mental health issues.
- 4 in 10 (41%) had alcohol misuse issues.
- 1 in 4 (24%) had substances misuse issues.

The significant physical and mental health needs of women in prison has been highlighted nationally and the need for diversion to appropriate women centred services in the community⁸. Women were also 36 times more likely than the general population to commit suicide on release from prison⁹.

Families

Prisoners' families often experience increased financial, housing, emotional and health problems during a sentence. Outcomes for the children of prisoners in terms of emotional wellbeing and educational attainment can be severely compromised, leading to a perpetuation of the generational cycle.

Children of prisoners are three times more at risk of mental health problems and risk of anti-social or delinquent behaviour compared to their peers. Of boys with a convicted parent 2 in 3 of boys go on to offend and those with fathers in prison are three times more likely than their peers to end up in prison themselves. In addition, children are adversely affected by parental behaviour such as drug use, alcohol misuse (with its link to domestic abuse), mental illness and learning disability, all of which can affect the care and attention they receive.

Where is this causing greatest concern?

Offending behaviour is an issue across Kirklees. Offenders as a group tend to live in the postal districts of greater deprivation, namely HD1, HD2, HD4 (which includes Huddersfield Town Centre, Fartown, Deighton, Bradley, Newsome, Crosland Moor and Paddock) and WF13 and WF17 (which includes Ravensthorpe, Dewsbury town centre and Batley)³.

Views of local people

While crime has reduced in Kirklees, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is still a real concern for local communities⁹. Young offenders felt that they suffered more than any other group from issues surrounding unemployment. The rejection they experienced from potential employers compounded their sense of marginalisation from mainstream society and led to isolation, depression, stress and unhealthy behaviours such as drugs and domestic violence. They felt that being unable to find work increased the risk of them re-offending. Some young offenders reported that they felt they lacked even the basic skills and qualifications to access certain training courses, such as plumbing¹⁰.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

Drug rehabilitation requirements and the drug intervention programme have been successful in reducing drug use among offenders in Kirklees.

Alcohol treatment requirements (ATR) are working in a similar way to reduce alcohol related crime¹¹. However, the service is at capacity and an extension to this service would allow more dependent drinkers who offend to benefit from enforced treatment. Gender specific services can have an impact on the engagement of women, which has benefits both for them, in terms of reduced re-offending, and outcomes for their children.

The national offender health strategy envisages closer partnership working between health, criminal justice and social care organisations, with improved outcomes,

particularly for the following groups of offenders²:

- Those with mental health problems.
- Those with learning disability.
- Women and children.

These include both those in the criminal justice system and the children of offenders, for whom long term outcomes are affected by parental behaviour such as substance misuse, domestic violence and imprisonment. This is being taken forward in Kirklees by the Offender Health Board, whose other priorities to those outlined above include approved premises, substance misuse and social care.

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