



Low visibility, low priority: Gambling and probation work in England and Wales

**Dr Liz Riley (Betknowmore UK) and Dr Julie Trebilcock
(Brunel University of London)**

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Note on terminology used in the report

Gambling: Gambling disorder in the fifth Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) is characterised by a 'persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behaviour leading to clinically significant impairment or distress' (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Many terms are used to describe gambling that has become problematic or harmful to someone, including: 'problem', 'compulsive', 'pathological', and 'disordered' gambling. There are concerns about these categorisations and labels because of the potential stigma that may be attached.

Affected others: Affected others, or 'concerned significant others' (Dowling et al., 2016), are 'those that have been negatively affected by a gambling problem of someone else' (Gunstone and Gosschalk, 2020:5). Affected others can include partners, children, parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, and work colleagues. As with the terminology used to describe people who gamble, there are potential problems with describing people as 'affected others'. While this term is used in the report for clarity and brevity, the research team recognises that a more neutral and person-centred term would be preferable.

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Executive summary

Background

Little is known about the gambling behaviour of people under probation supervision, or the gambling harms they experience. While the links between gambling, crime, and psychological wellbeing are complex, the evidence available suggests that people involved with probation services may be disproportionately affected by gambling harms. People who are gambling at harmful levels may present particular risk factors in terms of criminogenic behaviour and poor psychological wellbeing, which has obvious and important implications for probation work. The research presented in this report therefore aimed to explore the experiences of those involved with probation services in England and Wales, and also to capture the views and experiences of probation staff and other key stakeholders who work with probation-involved people with gambling harms.

To date we have limited knowledge of the prevalence of disordered gambling or gambling harms among those subject to probation supervision in the community (Wardle et al., 2016). Recent research suggests that many people under probation supervision, especially those in the community, may be gambling regularly (and potentially therefore at risk of harm). A survey of people on probation (PoP) in the community undertaken by Page (2025) indicates that 41% were regularly gambling, and 26% felt that their gambling was having a negative impact on them. While people in prison also reported gambling and that this had negative effects, Page's 2025 survey suggests that gambling harms are felt more acutely by those who are justice-involved in the community (no doubt, in part, because of the wider opportunities to gamble and the reduced restrictions on their lives). Although gambling support has begun to emerge across the criminal justice system (CJS) (see GamCare, 2021; Webster, 2022), research still identifies the need for greater awareness of gambling harms across the system, including among prison and probation staff (Smith, 2022). We have limited knowledge of how probation services supervise and support people who have committed crimes related to disordered gambling. Research suggests that while some probation officers do try to refer people with disordered gambling to appropriate services, knowledge and practice are variable (Page, 2021).

Research aims

This research aimed to develop the very limited evidence base about how gambling harms (related to crime or otherwise) manifest among PoP, how probation services currently respond to those harms, and how their practices could be improved. More specifically, the study aimed to:

- Explore how gambling and gambling harms may be experienced by those under probation supervision;
- Explore how gambling and gambling harms may be related to offending;
- Explore how gambling and gambling harms are understood, considered, and addressed as part of probation work (court, sentence planning, licence conditions, community supervision, policy and strategy);
- Understand what work is being done to address gambling and gambling harms within probation services and how this is experienced by a) people subject to probation supervision and b) probation staff and other key stakeholders working in this area.

Research methodology

We undertook an exploratory qualitative study with people under probation supervision, 'affected others', His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and probation staff, and other key stakeholders (most often those in related CJS services including Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRSs) or gambling support services). Following university and HMPPS approvals our research began in

three probation regions in England and Wales, although this was extended by HMPPS National Research Committee to cover all probation regions during the lifetime of the study.

The study was guided by our Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG), which was made up of seven men and women with experiences of gambling harms *and* the CJS. We met with them after first securing funding for the study and then at key points in the study when we began to recruit participants, as we were completing fieldwork, and then during our analysis phase. Our LEAG members were remunerated for their time using participant vouchers in line with funder, university, and ethics approvals.

Participants who expressed an interest in the study were invited to take part in either an online or face-to-face interview and/or focus group. While participants were offered the opportunity to meet in person, in practice most interviews and focus groups were undertaken online using Microsoft Teams. However, some participants were interviewed in person at probation offices or their place of work (according to their preference or in line with local approvals). In total, we collected data from 85 participants through 62 interviews and six focus groups (ranging from 2–13 participants).

Thematic analysis of the rich data collected was undertaken by the research team and with the assistance of the LEAG to gather feedback and aid reflection. Following this iterative process, the research team then revisited the data to agree the coding of key themes. This process enabled discrepancies to be identified and consensus reached regarding the interpretation and application of the coding framework. Any data that did not fit the coding framework led to the generation of new themes and revision of the framework.

Structure of the report

The report opens with a brief introduction to the research and then Chapter 2 goes on to provide an overview of relevant academic literature relating to this research. This is followed by a methodology chapter, before three substantive findings chapters are presented. The first (Chapter 4) explores our findings in relation to probation work in the criminal courts. The next (Chapter 5) examines issues relating to gambling within the prison system and this is followed by Chapter 6 that explores gambling, gambling harms, and probation supervision in the community (where most probation work occurs). Across these different areas of probation work and the CJS, many themes repeatedly emerge, and it is for this reason that Chapter 7 explores the overarching and cross-cutting themes that are evident in our analysis. Readers who are short of time are advised to consult this chapter first. Finally, Chapter 8 sets out several recommendations based on our findings. A full list of abbreviations and references are provided at the end of the report.

Key findings

The findings from thematic analysis include PoP receiving a lack of support for gambling harms from probation in court, custodial, and community settings, with gambling behaviours and harms rarely discussed. Data on gambling harms is not systematically collected and so the scale of those harms among PoP remains unknown. Gambling harms and their relationship to crime are generally poorly understood by probation practitioners, but with pockets of expertise and good practice in evidence. There is also inconsistency in practice between regions, between individual members of staff, and between the experiences of PoP. In general gambling harms are given low priority by probation services that are under considerable strain, with PoP experiencing those harms feeling like they were seen as atypical (compliant and capable) among probation's caseload. The consequences for PoP and their families of probation's failure to address gambling harms include gambling relapse, poor mental health, including suicidal ideation, relationship breakdown, and reoffending. What is striking is the lack of support that is provided to both those under probation supervision, their wider families, and the probation staff tasked with supervising and supporting them. PoP with gambling harms are largely expected to resolve their gambling addiction themselves, leaving them to often feel quite invisible and of low priority to probation services. Their recovery and desistance work is often supported by intimate

partners (most often women, in our sample at least, but also more generally) who report that they receive almost no support from probation (or other services).

1. Introduction and background to the research

Little is known about the gambling behaviour of people under probation supervision, or the gambling harms they experience. While the links between gambling, crime, and psychological wellbeing are complex, the evidence available suggests that people involved with probation services may be disproportionately affected by gambling harms. People who are gambling at harmful levels may present particular risk factors in terms of criminogenic behaviour and poor psychological wellbeing, which has obvious and important implications for probation work. The research presented in this report therefore aimed to explore the experiences of those involved with probation services in England and Wales, and also to capture the views and experiences of probation staff and other key stakeholders who work with probation-involved people with gambling harms.

1.1 Gambling harms, crime, and criminal justice services

As understandings of the severity and range of gambling harms have improved, gambling has increasingly been recognised as a public health issue (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities and Public Health England, 2023). Increasing recognition has also been given to the wide range of people who may be disproportionately affected by gambling, as well as those who may be affected by the gambling of others. Approximately 54% of adults in England report that they gamble, with 0.5% thought to reach the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) threshold for ‘problem gambling’ and a further 3.8% classified as gambling at elevated risks (ibid). It is estimated that approximately 1.6 million people in England may benefit from some support for their harmful gambling (Roberts et al., 2025). For every person with disordered gambling, another 6–10 people are thought to be affected (Citizens Advice, 2018).

Gambling-related harm is defined by Langham et al. (2016:4) as: ‘any initial or exacerbated adverse consequence due to an engagement with gambling that leads to a decrement to the health or wellbeing of an individual, family unit, community or population’. Helpfully, Langham et al.’s (ibid) model reveals the wide range of harms that may follow from gambling including those relating to finances, relationships, psychological wellbeing, physical health, employment, education, and criminal activity. Importantly, these harms can be experienced by the individual person gambling, as well as many others, including their families, friends, and wider communities (Browne et al., 2016). Gambling is also recognised as generating many community harms, including additional costs relating to health, welfare, employment, housing, and the criminal justice system (CJS). It is estimated that the costs of gambling harms relating to criminal activity alone, are approximately £167.3 million each year (Public Health England, 2023).

While there has been increasing interest in the gambling of justice-involved people and the gambling harms that they experience, we continue to know very little about the prevalence or nature of gambling harms in these populations. Reliable prevalence data relating to gambling and justice involved people is particularly difficult to obtain due to the limited screening in place and challenges relating to disclosure and information recording. This means that little is known about the scale and nature of gambling among justice-involved populations and the proportion of which are experiencing gambling harms. However, the evidence that is available suggests that people who are justice-involved are disproportionately exposed to higher levels of gambling harms. This is often undetected or untreated while people are involved with the CJS, which may serve to undermine recovery and increase the likelihood of further offending.

In June 2019, the Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms was launched by the Howard League for Penal Reform to advance understanding of issues relating to gambling, crime, and criminal justice in England and Wales. This work has made a significant contribution to developing the evidence base on the links between gambling and crime in England and Wales and the experiences of those who become justice-involved following a gambling-related offence. Sadly, these research reports commonly

identified that in England and Wales, there are limited screening tools in place, that people with gambling harms are often unable to access support through the CJS, and that criminal justice staff have limited understanding of gambling harms (Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms, 2023).

In recent years, growing attention has been directed towards gambling harms in terms of policy and practice across the CJS. Staff across HMPPS have been working towards the development of a national gambling agenda and operating framework, while also supporting research to try to more clearly understand the prevalence of gambling and gambling harms among justice-involved people (see Page, 2025). Webster (2022) also reports that there are plans to include gambling in the next iteration of the National Liaison and Diversion specification.¹ However, while there are small pockets of good work in relation to gambling harms across the CJS, a more consistent and coherent strategy and approach to gambling harms for justice-involved people in England and Wales is required.

1.2 Probation services in England and Wales

Across England and Wales, probation services are currently delivered across 12 regions. Probation staff are most often based in the community, where they oversee people serving Community Orders, suspended prison sentences, or those on licence following release from prison. The probation caseload is approximately three times the number of people held in prison, with 240,362 people recorded as being under probation supervision in England in December 2024 (Ministry of Justice and HMPPS, 2025). Some probation staff hold specialist roles within the criminal courts, within prisons, and/or within specialist teams (at either a local or HMPPS level). Probation staff also work closely with Commissioned Rehabilitation Services (CRSs), which are delivered by organisations who hold contracts across the different probation regions to deliver interventions to those under probation supervision. The services provided usually address key areas relating to reoffending, including accommodation, employment, finances, benefit and debt, dependency and recovery, and emotional wellbeing.²

While CRSs provide support in critical areas, concerns surround their effectiveness. A recent review observed that: ‘some providers have criticised the current CRS contracts for being “highly process driven” and focussing too much on inputs, such as whether a prison leaver has been offered an appointment, instead of good quality outcomes’ (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2023:6). The most recent HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025) annual report also notes the referral rates in some Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) are too low and this means that some people on probation (PoP) are missing opportunities for support. The same report also highlights that both probation staff and CRS staff find information sharing through the CRS Refer and Monitor (RAM) system to be problematic, that some referrals are not picked up quickly enough by CRS providers, and that CRS providers are sometimes not responsive enough to poor engagement among PoP (ibid).

In recent years, probation services in England and Wales have also undergone many major, and often controversial, restructures, which is thought to have had a significant impact on the day-to-day operation of probation services. Much has been written about the significant and often devastating impact of privatising probation services under the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms of the 2010 coalition government (Annison, 2019; Beard, 2021; Burke and Collett, 2015; Robinson, 2016), Covid-19 (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020), and the later reunification of probation services in 2021 (Goodman, 2023; HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024; Institute for Government, 2022; Millings et al.,

¹ See <https://www.gamcare.org.uk/news-and-blog/blog/helping-people-on-probation-with-gambling-related-harms/>

² HMPPS has recently advised that they will be recommissioning these services in 2027. However, a current list of providers can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/200-million-investment-in-rehab-services-to-cut-crime>

2023; Tidmarsh, 2023). While there were hopes things would improve with the renationalisation of probation services, writing in 2024, the Chief Inspector of Probation reported that the ‘performance of the service against our quality standards has if anything got worse not better since it came back together in 2021’ (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024:4). A key reason behind this has been ‘chronic under-staffing’ (ibid:17) and the knock-on effect on caseloads and supervision arrangements. Wider challenges with criminal justice funding and prison overcrowding have served to make the delivery of probation services even more difficult in recent years (although these issues have long generated challenges for probation work). Probation services also continue to navigate their long-standing struggle with ‘the problem of trying to reconcile its duties of welfare (originally ‘to advise, assist and befriend’) with its responsibility to enforce the orders of the court. (Canton, 2024:217–8). In the last three decades, many would agree that probation services have been pushed further away from their roots in welfare, towards concerns for risk and punishment.

1.3 Overview of the report

The chapter that follows provides a brief overview of relevant academic literature relating to this research. This is followed by a methodology chapter, before three substantive findings chapters are presented. The first (Chapter 4) explores our findings in relation to probation work in the criminal courts. The next (Chapter 5) examines issues relating to gambling within the prison system and this is followed by Chapter 6 that explores issues relating to gambling and probation supervision in the community (where most probation work occurs). Across these different areas of probation work and the CJS, many themes repeatedly emerge, and it is for this reason that Chapter 7 explores the over-arching and cross-cutting themes that are evident in our analysis. Readers who are short of time are advised to consult this chapter first. Finally, Chapter 8 sets out several recommendations based on our findings. A full list of abbreviations and references are provided at the end of the report.

2. Gambling, crime, and the criminal justice system

2.1 Gambling, crime, and psychological wellbeing

Increasing attention has been directed towards the links between gambling and crime, and being either a perpetrator or victim of crime has been recognised as a specific type of gambling harm (Langham et al., 2016). As opportunities to gamble have increased and diversified, there is evidence that gambling-related crime may also have increased (Banks, 2017). The relationship between gambling and crime is complex and the two can be linked in many different ways (Banks and Waugh, 2019). The link between gambling and crime can be ‘coincidental’ with no direct link between gambling and crime, ‘co-symptomatic’ where crime and gambling are symptomatic of other wider factors, and ‘instrumental’ where there is a causal link between gambling and crime (Banks and Waugh, 2019).³ The nature of gambling-related crime can also vary considerably across different jurisdictions (ibid).

Notwithstanding these complexities, gambling is commonly associated with financial crime. This can include (but is not limited to): theft and crime related to property (Lind et al., 2024), drug dealing (Blażczynski, 1994), drug trafficking (Binde et al., 2022), armed robbery (Abbott et al., 2005), money laundering (Levi, 2009), tax and benefit offences (Binde et al., 2022), and counterfeiting and forgery (Pastwa-Wojciechowska, 2011). While some of these crimes are associated with organised crime (Ferentzy and Turner, 2009), many gambling-related crimes take place within the home or workplace settings (Lind et al., 2021). Indeed, research suggests that many gambling-related financial offences are committed by people who are employed in ‘positions of trust’ with access to company finances (Dougherty et al., 2021). Research suggests that close family members and friends (often described as affected others) can also sometimes be victims of these financial crimes (Dowling et al., 2021), although these may often go unreported (Lind et al., 2021).

Aside from links to financial crimes, there is growing evidence that disordered gambling can be linked to other types of offending including domestic abuse, child abuse, other forms of violence, and criminal damage (Afifi et al., 2010; Banks and Waters, 2022; Banks and Waugh, 2019; Churcher, 2022; Dowling et al., 2016, 2018; GamCare, 2019; Lane et al., 2016; Suomi et al., 2013, 2019). Gambling can increase arguments in domestic settings, with violence involving family members as both perpetrators and victims (Dowling et al., 2016; Kalischuk et al., 2006; Suomi et al., 2013, 2019). However, the relationship between violent crime and gambling is not well understood, in part because of underreporting but also because when violence is reported, services may not infer a link with gambling (Banks and Waugh, 2019).

Research also identifies links between harmful gambling and poor psychological health, substance misuse, and family breakdown (Adolphe et al., 2018; Afifi et al., 2016; Barry et al., 2011; Dannon et al., 2006; Dowling et al., 2015; Folino and Abait, 2009; Hodgins and el-Guebaly, 2010; Hofmarcher et al., 2020; Kausch, 2003; Shaffer and Korn, 2002; Tackett et al., 2017). People with histories of harmful gambling have also been found to have an elevated suicide risk (Andreeva et al., 2022; Armoon et al., 2023), with one Swedish study observing that people with disordered gambling have a 15-fold increase in suicide mortality when compared to the general population (Karlsson and Håkansson, 2018).

2.2 The prevalence of gambling harms among justice-involved people

Estimating the prevalence of harmful gambling among justice-involved people is particularly challenging as there is limited reliable data. In practice, this means that very little is known about the gambling or gambling harms of justice-involved people, especially those subject to probation supervision in the community (Wardle et al., 2016). However, criminal justice staff report that they feel they are seeing an increasing number of people who have experienced gambling harms (Smith, 2022). GamCare (2019)

³ For a taxonomy of gambling-related crime and a discussion of different international contexts, see Banks and Waugh (2019).

also reports that the number of service users disclosing linked criminal behaviour is increasing, and that they are receiving increasing requests from the CJS to provide training and interventions. They estimate that approximately 30% of people they work with have committed a crime related to their gambling (ibid).

Public Health England (2023) reported that 3,744 people in prison in England have committed a gambling-related offence. However, this tells us very little about the prevalence of harmful gambling or about people's experiences of gambling harms. Many people in prison (or on probation in the community) may have committed offences that are indirectly linked to their gambling. Others may have committed offences that appear to have no relationship to gambling. Irrespective of the relationship between gambling and offence histories in individual cases, it is highly likely that there are many people in prison may benefit from more tailored support for their gambling. Indeed, people in prison are more likely to have histories of disordered gambling than those in the community (Banks et al., 2019). One study estimates that people who gamble problematically are 4.4 times more likely to be in prison than the wider population (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2016). In a systematic review, Banks et al. (2019) found that the rates of gambling disorder among people in prison were highly variable across studies, ranging from 5.9–73% of men and women who were surveyed. Such variation reveals the considerable problems involved with gambling screening tools and the prevalence data that is available. A more recent systematic review and meta-analysis by Tørdal et al. (2024) estimates that 30.8% of people in prison have experienced or are experiencing problems with their gambling.

In England, May-Chahal et al. (2012) estimate that 8% of people in prison meet the criteria for 'problem gambling', with a significant proportion also indicating that their offence had been linked to gambling. Notably the authors report that 46% of men in prison and 37% of women in prison believed that gambling had caused harm to other people they knew in prison. This suggests that the scale of gambling and gambling harms in justice-involved populations may be far higher than the available data suggests (see 2.6 for further discussion). Taken together, it seems that people in prison or involved with probation services disproportionately experience gambling harms. Justice-involved people are therefore likely to benefit from greater support in relation to gambling.

2.3 Screening for gambling harms in the criminal justice system

The challenges involved with establishing prevalence reveal that screening for gambling harms is very limited across the CJS. Research also suggests that criminal justice staff often have a limited understanding of gambling harms and are unaware of suitable services to signpost people to. Indeed, limitations with prevalence data in large part follow from the very inadequate screening of gambling within the CJS. There is currently no routine screening for gambling in prisons, and more needs to be done to identify needs, provide tailored support, and help reduce reoffending after release (Banks et al., 2019; Smith, 2022). In England and Wales, justice-involved people are screened for a range of criminogenic risks and needs using the Offender Assessment System (OASys). However, this does not adequately assess gambling or how people may be affected by the gambling of people close to them (Page et al., 2025). Internationally, there have been calls for increased screening for gambling and better signposting to support, on the basis that this could serve to increase staff awareness and also help to reduce recidivism (Jindani et al., 2021; Lind et al., 2024; Williams et al., 2005;). However, even if the CJS had better screening tools, it is important to remember that people may be unwilling to disclose gambling behaviour (Page, 2025).

2.4 Gambling and the criminal justice system

Research commissioned by the Howard League (Brown et al., 2023; Churcher, 2022; Page et al., 2022; Penal Reform Solutions, 2023; Ramanauskas, 2020; Smith, 2022; Trebilcock, 2023) has made a significant contribution to the evidence base about gambling and the CJS in England and Wales. Ramanauskas (2020) identified many gaps in understanding, particularly in relation to how gambling is related to crime, the pathways into gambling, and the availability, take-up, and benefits of gambling

treatment across the CJS. The Commission then commissioned specific projects to better understand the issues relating to gambling and policing (Churcher, 2022), the criminal courts (Page et al., 2022), the prison system (Penal Reform Solutions, 2023), and with specific groups of justice-involved people, including men (Smith, 2022),⁴ women (Trebilcock, 2023), and minoritised communities (Brown et al., 2023).

Although some provision of gambling support has begun to emerge across the CJS (see GamCare, 2021; Webster, 2022), this has often been developed locally, with justice-involved people most commonly indicating that they have not been able to access gambling support in the CJS (Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms, 2023). Evidence submitted to the Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms (2021:1) revealed a ‘lack of knowledge or targeted activity within the criminal justice system’ about gambling and crime, and also that most criminal justice agencies are ‘not aware of or actively developing specific gambling-focused work’. Recent research also suggests that where people are signposted to services, this follows from proactive practitioners rather than because of any consistent strategic approach to addressing gambling harms across criminal justice caseloads (Page et al., 2025).

Research also suggests that the availability of training related to gambling is limited across the CJS. Page et al. (2025) have recently called for specific training on gambling harms to be offered across the CJS, as well as trying to embed more information about gambling harms within other training opportunities relating to safeguarding, domestic violence, and debt management.

2.5 Gambling, courts, and sentencing

Page et al. (2022) have identified that approximately 50% of the sentencers they spoke with recalled cases where gambling had been flagged or thought to be relevant, but that they believed their exposure to gambling-related cases occurred less frequently than other ‘types’ of case. Sentencers expressed the view that better screening for gambling harms should be in place at the court stage, and that Pre-Sentence Reports (PSR) should do more to explore how gambling may be relevant to a defendant. However, concerns were also expressed that defendants may be unlikely to disclose gambling harms because of a lack of clarity about whether gambling would be seen as a mitigating or aggravating factor. Other research in England and Wales suggests that gambling is rarely seen as a mitigating factor, even if judges are aware that harmful gambling is present (Brooks and Blaszczyński, 2011).

Page (2021) asserts that given the potential barriers to disclosure, it is important for people to be asked about gambling at numerous points of their CJS journey, so any potential harms relating to gambling are not missed. CJS staff would also benefit from training on gambling and gambling harms (ibid). Page (ibid) also calls for greater consideration to be given to the use of fines and compensation orders by the courts, which could potentially increase the likelihood of reoffending as defendants try to secure money to pay court-related costs. Research in other jurisdictions has called for the wider use of dedicated gambling courts, as exist in some parts of the US (see Laux, 2019).

2.5.1 Gambling, Community Sentence Treatment Requirements, and Rehabilitation Activity Requirements

Under the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) 2003, a unified ‘Community Order’ was enacted under law, with a number of requirements available to sentencers. Requirements are designed to address different sentencing purposes, including punishment and rehabilitation. These include Community Sentence Treatment Requirements (CSTRs) to address the health needs of people on a community sentence to

⁴ Smith’s sample did include women, however the majority of participants identified as male, which led the Howard League to commission a further study to better understand the experience of women.

reduce likely reoffending, namely: Alcohol Treatment Requirements (ATRs), Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRRs), and Mental Health Treatment Requirements (MHTRs).⁵ However, the take up of CSTRs has been stubbornly low. Notably, each is very specific and there is no formal treatment requirement available to the court in relation to gambling. The limited sentencing options in relation to gambling-related offences led Page (2021) to assert that the courts require bespoke gambling treatment pathways.

Another requirement the courts can add to a Community Order is a Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) in order to address wider emotional and mental health needs that do not meet the criteria for a CSTR. RARs involve a lower level of need and are designed for those who may need less intensive supervision (Bhakta et al., 2025). A recent process evaluation suggests that sentencers have confidence in RARs and will often include them as part of a Community Order when recommended by probation in a defendant's PSR (ibid). However, probation staff report concerns about the quality of toolkits and commissioned services that are available as part of RARs (ibid). Probation staff have also highlighted concerns that some activities relating to mental health cannot be recorded as 'RAR days' (ibid). The process evaluation of RARs recommends that thought should be given to enabling probation practitioners to use professional judgement as to what counts as a RAR day, so that they can be tailored to individual need (ibid). While Page (2021) argues that bespoke treatment pathways relating to gambling could be achieved through the use of RAR days, she suggested that problem-solving courts could offer a clearer solution to help support the recovery and desistance of those in court for a gambling-related offence.

2.6 Gambling and the prison system

In prisons, research has indicated that people are rarely screened for gambling harms, and also unlikely to be signposted to appropriate treatment and support (Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harm, 2023). Research also suggests that there is a need for greater awareness of gambling harms across the CJS, including among prison and probation staff (Smith, 2022). This is particularly concerning given the wider gambling cultures that may exist across the prison system. Smith (2022:11) found that 30% of men in one English prison reported that gambling was a 'normal part of prison life'. A survey conducted with people in prison by The Forward Trust (2020) found that 22% of respondents reported having spent money, or bet something they own, to gamble in the last 12 months of their imprisonment. Moreover, Penal Reform Solutions (2023) identified a range of practices and cultures relating to gambling (and wider issues relating to debt) within prisons. This research has been important for documenting gambling practices within prisons and illustrating that there is more gambling (and related harm) than has previously been acknowledged. Gambling was often driven by boredom, and on occasions was directly related to violence between people in prison due to gambling-related debts (ibid). Indeed, the 'role of gambling generated a sense of meaning and stimulation, acting as a form of escapism from boredom and was perceived as a tool to aid survival' (ibid:7). Gambling was also positioned by people in prison as important for 'survival' and its ability to secure goods of value, thereby reducing the need to call on their families for support. People in prison indicated that much of the gambling that occurs within prisons is hidden from staff, while prison staff indicated that they considered gambling to be 'low level', 'harmless', and not particularly problematic (ibid). Penal Reform Solutions (2023:8) assert that inconsistent responses to gambling within prisons have also served to create a 'confusing and enabling culture'. They also found that people who had been in prison considered gambling in prison to have negatively impacted on their rehabilitation, and ultimately, the prison environment was considered to be one that may serve to encourage gambling behaviour (ibid).

At the same time, research has expressed concerns about the limited provision of gambling-related treatment in custody (Smith, 2022). Research with lived experience communities indicates that justice-

⁵ See <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e83dadf8082e9740881b7f/cstr-proven-reoffending-report.pdf>

involved people are very rarely in receipt of support for gambling, and that where they have been offered support, they do not always find it that useful (Brown et al., 2023; Smith, 2022; Trebilcock, 2023). This is of particular concern given that undetected and untreated harmful gambling has been shown to increase the risk of recidivism (Lind et al., 2024). In Canada, Lloyd et al. (2014) found that gambling problems prospectively predicted post-release criminal recidivism, and in the US, April and Weinstock (2018) found gambling severity to be a significant predictor of increased risk of recidivism. Williams (2010) also found that problematic gambling complicates re-entry into the community due to its associations with substance abuse, further criminal activity, lack of treatment resources, and problems rebuilding financial and social support. These findings therefore have important implications for those in prison, as well as for those under probation supervision in the community.

2.7 Gambling and probation work

Little is known about how probation services may supervise and support people who have gambled at a harmful level and/or experienced gambling harms. As part of a larger project, Smith (2022) explored gambling harms among PoP (nearly all men) in the community (both those serving community sentences and those on licence post imprisonment). Smith identified that probation services were often failing to deliver the support needed to people with gambling-related offences. Similar findings were identified by Trebilcock (2023) in relation to women and Brown et al. (2023) in relation to ethnic minority communities. Research suggests that while some probation staff do try to refer people with disordered gambling to appropriate services, knowledge and practice are variable (Page, 2021). Research with probation staff also suggests that they believe they are coming across more PoP with gambling harms (Smith, 2022). Data suggests that many people under probation supervision, especially those in the community, may be gambling regularly (and potentially therefore at risk of harm). A recent survey of PoP in the community undertaken by Page (2025) indicates that 41% were regularly gambling, and 26% felt that their gambling was having a negative impact on them. While people in prison also reported gambling and that this had negative effects, Page's (2025) survey suggests that gambling harms are felt more acutely by those who are justice-involved in the community (no doubt, in part, because of the wider opportunities to gamble and the reduced restrictions on their lives).

2.8 Recovery capital and the criminal justice system

The analysis in this report is informed by previous research with justice-involved people. Our analysis draws attention to the different experiences of people affected by gambling harms while under probation supervision and the ways in which their interactions are dependent on the different types of capital that they may have. The concept of recovery capital was first developed by Granfield and Cloud (1999:179) in the field of substance misuse, and was defined as 'the sum of one's total resources that can be brought to bear in an effort to overcome alcohol and drug dependency'. This alerts us to the notion that a 'person's structural location in society and the relationships, networks, and other assets that adhere to one's social position greatly affect one's chances for recovery' (ibid:178). The concept of recovery capital has since been used with other 'addictions' including gambling where higher levels of 'positive recovery capital' (PRC) have been linked to improvements in relation to DSM-5 gambling disorder (see for example Gavriel-Fried et al., 2022).

In Granfield and Cloud's (1999) original model, recovery capital is made up of different components: physical capital (e.g. financial resources and assets); social capital (e.g. social networks and support); and human capital (e.g. health, education, and skills). This was later expanded to also include cultural capital (e.g. values, beliefs, and attitudes) (Cloud and Granfield, 2008). Other researchers have adapted the model and incorporated other types of capital, including 'community capital' (White and Cloud, 2008). (For a review of the different models and research in this area see Hennessy, 2017.) Research suggests that recovery capital can be accrued over a number of years and can also occur following a significant turning point (White and Cloud, 2008). In a brief review, Lloyd et al. (2019) illustrate how different categories may be more or less relevant depending on the addiction and the person involved.

Research has also sought to explore ‘negative recovery capital’ (NRC) and how some forms of capital, such as money, can be negative and work against recovery because they may be used to fund addictions or to mitigate the consequences of the addiction. In the context of DSM-5 gambling disorder, Gavriel-Fried and Lev-el (2022:279) suggest four ‘negative recovery capital domains’: ‘Human NRC (urges and uncontrolled urges, cognitive distortions, inaction, sensation seeking, stressful life events, negative emotions, ability to conceal, a lack of motivation to recover), Social NRC (lack of social or familial networks, conflictual or dangerous social networks), Community NRC (an environment that encourages gambling, money lenders), and Financial NRC (financial distress and debt, money as a risk factor)’.

In recent years, scholars have attempted to adapt recovery capital models to more adequately capture the specific experiences of those who are not only recovering from addiction but are also justice-involved. Justice-involved people often have very limited physical (or financial) capital because of their addiction and CJS involvement. Moreover, recovery capital can be eroded by imprisonment (Lloyd et al., 2019; see also Best and Aston, 2015; Granfield and Cloud, 1999) because prisons are ‘almost tailor-made to deplete the wider, structural assets and sources of support thought to be so important to recovery from addiction’ (Lloyd et al., 2019:107). Imprisonment also serves to undermine relationships with family, can lead to a worsening of mental health, and the availability of new psychoactive substances makes recovery from substance addiction more challenging (Lloyd et al., 2019). The stigma and isolation associated with imprisonment can also serve to undermine recovery capital (Cloud and Granfield, 2008).

Recovery capital can be undermined further through release from prison to the community, especially where through the gate support is limited (Lloyd et al., 2019; see also Best et al., 2024). ‘Failure’ on release and re-entry to the prison system can lead to the pain of ‘burnout’ for imprisoned people and serve to undermine their capacity to accrue the capital that may be required to desist from crime (see Cracknell, 2020). While the substance users in Lloyd et al.’s (2019) study often expressed that they were tired of their addiction, at follow up, most had received very limited through the gate or community-based support, and most had also relapsed and returned to using illicit substances.

2.9 ‘Pains’ and the harmful consequences of justice involvement

The points above remind us of the ‘pains’ of criminal justice involvement. This concept is associated with the ethnographic work of Sykes (1957) in a New Jersey state prison, where he attempted to capture the different deprivations that people in prison experience as a result of their imprisonment. Sykes’ pains included a loss of liberty, a deprivation of goods or services, heterosexual relations, personal safety or security, and autonomy (or personal freedom). Since Sykes’ (ibid) original study, many scholars have sought to develop and extend this analysis to understand how different types of prisoner characteristics or prison environments may impact on the pains experienced by people in prison. Scholars have since expanded this literature to consider what pains may be experienced by people under probation supervision (Darby, 2023; Durnescu, 2011; Hayes, 2015; Phelps et al., 2022). Hayes (2015) reminds us that probation supervision can be painful, and that the ‘pains of rehabilitation’ can be intensified by the supervisory relationship between probation practitioners (PPs) and PoP. Hayes (ibid) asserts that those who are most engaged with rehabilitation are also more likely to suffer the most pains. This is because of the difficulties involved with trying to change behaviour and because of the higher levels of shame experienced by those who are more committed to rehabilitation (ibid). While Hayes (ibid) argues that the intrusion into offenders’ lives from external agencies can be painful, research in the US has identified that where PoP felt their probation officer had a good understanding of their circumstances and behaved in ways that were perceived to be fair, they were also more likely to be honest and trusting of the relationship (Phelps et al., 2022).

In the UK, Cracknell (2020) reminds us how feeling invisible and insignificant, along with not being provided with meaningful support, can also be very painful for justice-involved people. Cracknell explores the extent that short sentence men in prison may feel responsibilised for their own

rehabilitation and resettlement. Importantly Cracknell (ibid) reveals how some people may be better able to take responsibility for this, based on their recovery and resettlement capital (see Hall et al., 2018). However, the cumulative effect of multiple short sentences (and a revolving door cycle) served to erode the various forms of capital available to these men to desist from crime. The pain of burnout also served to undermine relationships with probation staff in the community who were treated with increasing cynicism and a lack of engagement, based on the anticipation that they would be unlikely to provide meaningful support.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research aims

The overarching aim of the research was to develop a clearer understanding of how gambling and gambling harms may be experienced by people in contact with probation services in England and Wales. More specifically, the study aimed to:

- Explore how gambling and gambling harms may be experienced by those under probation supervision;
- Explore how gambling and gambling harms may be related to offending;
- Explore how gambling and gambling harms are understood, considered, and addressed as part of probation work (court, sentence planning, licence conditions, community supervision, policy and strategy);
- Understand what work is being done to address gambling and gambling harms within probation services and how this is experienced by a) people subject to probation supervision and b) probation staff and other key stakeholders working in this area.

3.2 Research design

This exploratory qualitative study sought to address these aims through a combination of in-depth 1:1 interviews and focus groups with PoP, their families, probation (and other HMPPS) staff, and key stakeholders (most often those working in gambling or criminal justice support services). Its geographical focus was England and Wales, where probation services are administered centrally by HMPPS, whereas in Scotland and Northern Ireland probation services are administered differently. Our work in Wales was led by Welsh-speaking research consultant, Rob Owen.

In total, we collected data from 85 participants through 62 interviews and six focus groups (ranging from 2–13 participants). Several participants were interviewed on more than one occasion, either to follow-up, or because they had very rich lived experience of gambling harms, contact with probation services, *and* additionally held a stakeholder role in this space. Note that while many participants straddled the different participant groups (i.e. lived experience, stakeholder, HMPPS/probation), four lived experience/stakeholder participants were explicitly interviewed twice, once about their lived experience and on another occasion about their work as a stakeholder. For ease in writing up our analysis, these four participants were coded twice, and are included in the description of our final subsamples of lived experience and stakeholder samples (but not double counted in our final sample of 85 participants).

3.2.1 Interviews and focus groups

Most 1:1 interviews and focus groups were undertaken online, using Microsoft Teams. However, a small number of interviews and focus groups were undertaken face-to-face in probation offices or people's place of work. Face-to-face interviews were arranged according to participant preference, except for PoP in London, where we only had approval to interview participants on probation premises. We also completed a small number of focus groups (although some of these were essentially interviews with two or more participants). Of the six focus groups completed, four were held on Teams, and two were held at people's places of work. Interviews and focus groups were usually around 60 minutes in duration. The total audio recordings/data collection time with participants ranged from 33 minutes to approximately four hours (over several interviews). Interviews were professionally transcribed and totalled more than 60 hours.

3.2.2 Lived experience sample

We interviewed 25 people with lived experience of gambling harms and contact with probation services (note that four of these are also counted in our stakeholder subsection, but not in the overall n=85 participant total). Basic demographic information about our lived experience participants is provided in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. Of the 25 lived experience participants we interviewed, 20 had experience of both gambling harms *and* of contact with probation services following prosecution for a criminal offence (almost always linked to their gambling). Just over two thirds (n=14) of these participants were men, and the remainder women (n=6). The ages of these participants ranged from 18–64, with half of the sample aged 45 and over. The majority reported that they had White ethnicity. Participants indicated that their home location was spread across nine Census regions of England and Wales. The vast majority (17 out of 20) reported that they had been convicted of a financial crime. Three participants reported having been convicted of a violent, sexual, or drug-related crime. Just over half had been given a prison sentence (n=11), a quarter a suspended prison sentence (n=5), and the remainder, a Community Order (n=4). Only one participant had not been sentenced (although did go on to receive a prison sentence in the study lifetime).

	n=
Gender	
Male	14
Female	6
Age	
18–24	1
25–34	5
35–44	4
45–54	7
55–64	3
Ethnicity	
Asian or Asian British	2
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	2
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3
White	13
Other ethnic group	0
Region	
North East	0
North West	1
Yorkshire and Humber	2
West Midlands	2
East of England	5
East Midlands	2
London	3
South East	2
South West	1
Wales	2

Disability	
Yes	5
No	13
Prefer not to say	2
Offence type	
Financial	17
Drug related	1
Violent crime	1
Sexual crime	1
Sentence	
Awaiting sentencing	1
Community Order	3
Suspended sentence	5
Imprisonment 0–12 months	2
Imprisonment 1–3 years	6
Imprisonment 3 years +	3

Table 3.1 Lived experience sample (n=20, excluding affected others)

Five people in the lived experience sample were affected others, and their contact with probation services followed from probation involvement with their partner (or ex-partner). Most affected others in the sample identified as women (n=4), although one identified as male (n=1). Affected others all reported that they had White ethnicity, were aged between 25–64, and were based across four Census regions (London, the South East, East England, and the Midlands).

	n=
Gender	
Male	1
Female	4
Age	
25–34	1
35–44	1
45–54	2
55–64	1
Ethnicity	
White British	3
White Other	2

Table 3.2: ‘Affected other’ lived experience participants

3.2.3 Probation and HMPPS staff sample

We spoke to a total of 37 people working for HMPPS and/or probation services (see Table 3.3). Of these participants, 20 were interviewed on a 1:1 basis and they held a wide range of roles across probation and HMPPS. Roles and experiences included admin staff, Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) level staff, Probation Service Officers (PSOs), Probation Officers (POs), and Senior Probation Officers (SPOs). We spoke to several Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) leads (or deputy leads) and ‘Point of Contact’ staff who held specific roles, most often SPOs holding roles in relation to specific offence types,

particular CJS Health and Justice roles, or dedicated roles in relation to commissioning and/or training. Interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes up to two hours, with some participants interviewed on more than one occasion.

Across four probation regions, focus groups were also undertaken with Health and Justice leads, PDU leads, court probation staff, PQiPs, and Approved Premises (AP) staff. Several of the staff we spoke with now worked in central HMPPS offices rather than PDUs and were no longer holding a caseload as they had done in earlier stages of their probation career. Two HMPPS/probation staff indicated that they had lived experience of gambling harms (as affected others) and one expressed an interest in the study having previously worked in the gambling industry (as a betting shop manager).

Current role	Participants n=	Interviews n=	Focus groups n=
Senior HMPPS staff	3	3	
Head of Service or Deputy Head of Service	5	1	1
SPOs with regional/other HMPPS responsibilities	5	6	
SPOs with Health and Justice role	5	3	1
POs	3	3	
PSOs or PQiPs	3	1	1
PSOs/POs with dedicated court role	3		1
HMPPS/probation staff located within APs	7		1
Peer mentor	1	1	
Case administrator	2	2	
	37	20	5

Table 3.3: HMPPS and probation staff sample (n=37)

3.2.4 Stakeholder sample

Fifteen 1:1 interviews were conducted with 14 stakeholders and one focus group was held with 13 stakeholders. Table 3.4 outlines their organisation type and the format of data collection. Five stakeholders were interviewed on two occasions. Four of these were explicitly interviewed as lived experience participants (and are therefore double counted in the lived experience sample, but not the overall participant sample of 85). One further stakeholder was interviewed on two occasions to follow up about an initiative with community probation staff that had been implemented during the lifetime of the study.

Type of stakeholder	Participants n=	Interviews n=	Focus group n=
CRS	4	4	
Gambling treatment and support service	9	10	
Drug/alcohol treatment and support service	14	1	1
	27	15	1

Table 3.4: Types of stakeholder participants and data collection

Stakeholders working for support services represented a range of different organisations. In terms of gambling services, we spoke to nine different people across five different gambling services. Additionally, we spoke to four different people across three third sector criminal justice organisations, most often CRSs (although note that staff held quite different roles within these organisations, including more strategic levels, Engaging People on Probation (EPOP) roles, and caseworkers/managers with responsibility for personal wellbeing and finance, benefit and debt support). We also interviewed one

person from a drug and alcohol service, alongside conducting a large focus group with 13 participants working in drug and alcohol services. Alongside this stakeholder focus group, training in relation to gambling harms was also provided.

While a small number of stakeholders disclosed lived experiences of harmful gambling (and sometimes CJS involvement) during interview (or through the recruitment process), when we interviewed them in their capacities as stakeholders (and did not reinterview them as participants with lived experience), they were classified as stakeholders.

3.2.5 Lived Experience Advisory Group and participation of those with lived experience

A critical component of the research design was the involvement of people with lived experience of gambling harms and the CJS. Involving people with lived experience can serve to increase the value and quality of research (Faulkner, 2009) by moving away from more traditional and 'extractive' models of social research (Kindon et al., 2007:1). Seven people with lived experience of gambling harms and contact with UK probation services were therefore invited to sit on our Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG). All LEAG members were provided with vouchers to remunerate their time, as were participants with lived experience (except for those still under probation supervision where HMPPS rules did not permit). We met our LEAG at regular intervals during the study to discuss recruitment, data collection, analysis, and the dissemination of our findings.

3.3 Ethics and safeguarding

The study received ethical approval from Brunel University of London Ethics Committee and HMPPS National Research Committee. Initial approvals were granted by the Committee to undertake research with PoP and probation practitioners in three regions (Wales, London, and East of England), although this was extended to all probation regions in England and Wales during the lifetime of the study.

The research was conducted in line with the British Society of Criminology (BSC) (2015) 'Statement of Ethics' and GambleAware's (2020) guidelines about research involving people with lived experience of gambling harms. Betknowmore UK and our LEAG also co-produced a clear safeguarding protocol for the study, which was also approved/supported by HMPPS and our Points of Contact in relevant probation regions. As part of our safeguarding arrangements, all lived experience participants (subject to consent) received a follow-up call within 72 hours of their participation by a member of our LEAG to check in and assess if any further support was required or appropriate.

All lived experience participants have been given a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. Many of the staff we spoke to held quite specific roles that are in practice difficult to anonymise, so we made sure to check what participants were comfortable with us reporting and how they felt we could best protect their identity.

3.4 Data analysis

The initial analysis was undertaken independently by the two academic researchers. All interviews and focus groups were recorded. Verbatim transcripts were made and one of the research team undertook their analysis on paper, while the other used NVivo, a computer package for the management, classification, and analysis of text-based data (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2020). Several analysis meetings were held by the research team to discuss emerging themes, before these were discussed with the LEAG to gather feedback and aid reflection. Following this iterative process, the research team then revisited the data to agree the coding of key themes. This process enabled discrepancies to be identified and consensus reached regarding the interpretation and application of the coding framework. This highlights how involving people with lived experience in analysis can help bring 'additional insight

to the data through their personal experience and understanding' (Dowling, 2016:12). Any data that did not fit the coding framework led to the generation of new themes and revision of the framework.

3.5 Limitations

This large qualitative study provides rich data about the lived experiences of PoP, HMPPS and probation staff, and other key stakeholders, in relation to their experiences, perspectives, and understandings of gambling harms, crime, and probation work. However, and as we expected, our sample of participants is inevitably skewed. This follows from several reasons, including the challenges involved with identifying people with gambling harms under probation supervision, the limited awareness and understanding of, and interest in, gambling harms among PPs, and because of challenges of speaking to people who may not immediately identify as suitable participants for the study. HMPPS rules that prevent payment to participants are likely to have limited participation among those under supervision. We suspect that there are many other voices among those subject to probation supervision who suffer gambling harms who have not been captured in our data. These challenges are to be entirely expected and reflect many of the key themes in our analysis (and the very limited previous research in this space): those who are affected by gambling harms are often hidden from services, with many services not thinking to ask or attempt to identify those who may be affected by gambling. Given that many people with lived experience indicated that they may be unlikely to disclose or discuss their gambling with probation (or other CJS) staff, it is highly likely that many relevant potential participants would not have wanted to put themselves forward for the research on the basis that this would have indirectly indicated to probation staff that there was harmful gambling in their lives.

Our sample of HMPPS and probation staff is similarly skewed for reasons beyond our control. Sadly, we found that it was very difficult to recruit practitioners 'on the ground' holding a caseload, with most of our sample holding more senior roles (either in probation or in central HMPPS). This limitation to our sample also reflects some of the key findings of our research in relation to the pressures probation staff and services, especially those on the 'front line', are currently experiencing. We suspect, given the limited understanding of gambling harms among PPs, that many potential participants would not have wished (or been particularly motivated) to put themselves forward for a study specifically concerned with gambling.

4. Findings I: Gambling harms and the criminal courts

4.1 The Pre-Sentence Report experience

All lived experience participants were asked about their contact with probation staff at court and their experiences of the PSR process. PSRs should be completed by probation staff to provide the court with a clearer picture of a person's index offence, the possible causes, the person's risks and needs, and to help inform the sentencing decision made by the court (especially where a custodial sentence may be likely).⁶ People reported a range of experiences in relation to PSRs, reflecting one of our overarching themes of CJS inconsistencies in relation to gambling harms. Most participants did not recall any contact with probation staff through their court dates and indicated that no PSR had been completed. Diane told us:

Nobody came to see me. Nobody sat and wrote my story or listened to me. There was absolutely nothing. (Diane)

Family members of defendants also recalled having very limited or no contact with court probation staff, even when they were present in court. Simon indicated that even though the judge requested that probation talk to him to assess the potential impact of a custodial sentence on this partner's mental health, no contact between him and probation occurred. Frustrated by the lack of communication with probation and the courts, Susan took it upon herself to write directly to the judge to detail the impact of the gambling harms upon herself and the rest of the family:

I wasn't invited, wasn't involved at all. There was no question or anything in regards to family, affected others, again because why would they? They've got no knowledge or understanding around what's led up to that ... There was no question of involving me, that was never on the table. The first point of any connection was when I took it upon myself to write to the judge to explain about his gambling journey and gambling harms and how it's affected us as a family. (Susan, Affected Other)

Returning to our lived experience sample who were in court because of having committed an offence, a small number remembered their experiences with probation court staff positively. They indicated that staff made time for them and showed an interest in their circumstances. This sometimes took the form of lengthy interviews and what they felt was a thorough review of their circumstances and case. While some still went on to receive custodial sentences, it was apparent that this investment of probation time and interest did at least add a sense of legitimacy to their experience. Rob recalled having spent between four and five hours with court probation staff, while another participant, Harry, indicated he had spent three hours with a PP at the Magistrates court:

It's almost like she knew it inside out really. Yeah, knew it inside out, appeased my questions as well around the first thing was after that introduction was almost, 'Do you know what this report is for?' And I said, 'Well, to some degree, yes, it's to get my side of the story across.' And she actually went into depth around the different areas of the pre-sentence report, what she needed to ascertain and the purpose of that, so she spent quite a long time justifying actually why are we doing this report. (Harry)

While a small number of our sample found the PSR process to be conducted thoroughly and with care, the majority who did recall compilation of a PSR indicated that their gambling was not really discussed

⁶ Under s30 of the Sentencing Act 2020 'If the offender is aged 18 or over, the court must obtain and consider a pre-sentence report before forming the opinion unless, in the circumstances of the case, it considers that it is unnecessary to obtain a pre-sentence report'.

or explored. In practice, many of those who had received a PSR considered the process to have been a formality that was allocated very little time or genuine care:

You're just a number, you're a tick-box, how quickly can we get you in and out and job done.
(Paul)

The limited time afforded to most PSRs meant that there was little scope for defendants and probation court staff to develop enough trust or rapport to enable any meaningful discussion about their gambling. Amanda found the PSR process to be upsetting because of the limited interest shown by the PP in the reasons behind her offence:

There wasn't no understanding ... he was just there just writing down what he needed to write down [...] So as I was saying, 'I'm living with an alcoholic' there was no like, 'Oh ...' it was like, 'OK, yep. Marriage broke down, OK, yeah ... OK yeah.' Not like, 'Oh, that must have been horrendous.' No empathy. Just the facts ... he didn't have an understanding, ... he wasn't really interested in the background of the crime in that respect, why I did it. Just more what I did [...] he'd just be sitting there like, no emotion sort of thing. You know, a young bloke with this woman crying in front of him. (Amanda)

Several of the probation staff we interviewed acknowledged challenges with PSRs, with one probation staff member observing that they can be very 'process-driven'. Probation staff reported that the drop-down PSR menu does not contain a prompt for gambling harms and as a result, any discussion of gambling relied on the defendant disclosing issues relating to gambling. However, given the limited time available to complete PSRs, most PPs accepted that any such disclosures were unlikely. Most staff highlighted the lack of time available to them to conduct and write in-depth reports due to wider pressures on the criminal courts and probation services. In practice, staff reported that this often led to the use of shorter oral reports, where the opportunities to collate and then communicate key information to the court were severely limited:

I was doing court reports, assessing people for sentence and over time that became more on the day. It started off with being full reports and as the court system, well, the policy evolved, it became more on the day type oral delivery reports. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

There aren't enough people in court to do those on the day reports and have enough time to actually talk to people in depth about what the root of the problem is. (008_HMPPS, Court Administrator)

These experiences were reinforced by our interviews with stakeholders, who recalled many conversations with justice-involved people where they reported having tried to disclose their gambling behaviour and harms to probation staff at court. These people reported to stakeholders that they felt their gambling harms had not been taken into account in the PSR, and that when they had disclosed gambling harms, they had not subsequently been signposted to relevant services. Aside from not feeling heard, many of the lived experience sample found court to have been confusing, frightening, and, in Mark's words, 'overwhelming'. Many indicated that they were given no explanation of the purpose of the PSR and neither did they understand the roles/purpose of different court officials. Irfan, for example, had no knowledge whether court probation staff were present or not during his hearing. Diane wasn't sure how to behave in court, while Rob commented that he had no understanding of the PSR process:

[I've] never been in a Crown Court in that position in my life and I didn't know where to look, what not to look but I knew you had to stand up, sit down. (Diane)

I didn't really understand what a pre-sentence report was, I had no clue. I'd never been in any kind of court situation before so I didn't understand the process. (Rob)

These quotes reflect how most of our lived experience sample had no previous CJS involvement. This left them very unclear about what to expect, the potential pitfalls they could face, how to behave, and

what to say. In practice, most had very limited ‘criminal justice capital’, and appeared to be quite bewildered and lost trying to make sense of the process and systems. Most recalled how they had tried to be honest and not to hide anything about their (most often, gambling-related) offence. Our sample emphasised how they had tried to represent themselves as ‘respectable’ and as people who were usually ‘non-criminal’, but instead had fallen foul of a serious addiction. Many appeared to feel ‘atypical’ and some recalled occasions where staff reinforced their sense of being ‘different’. Yet, they also reported that that probation and court staff appeared to hold an unquestioned assumption that they would have an understanding of procedures. In practice, this meant that they felt staff saw no need to explain the PSR and how it would be used. Lily explained that had she known the purpose of the PSR, she would have given more information during its preparation and could have ‘played the system’, and this may have helped her to avoid being given a custodial sentence:

I might’ve been a bit more vocal about how I got into that situation and the things that I’d done and I probably would’ve offered a lot more information. But again, when you’re nervous as well at the time you just want to get in and out, do you know? [...] I was totally honest in there, and there’s all these people that know how to play the system and I know that if there was two things that I’d have said in there I probably wouldn’t have got a custodial sentence. I think I was just trying to show that I wasn’t some terrible criminal, and my kids were well looked after and that I had my shit together. (Lily)

Notably, given most lived experience participants described mixed experiences of the PSR process, one stakeholder, who also had CJS lived experience, highlighted that their gambling support service now ensures that all their clients make sure to request a PSR at the earliest opportunity. Moreover, the same service also encourages solicitors/barristers to undertake (and/or request) psychology reports to help support the court’s understanding of gambling addiction. While the greater use of PSRs in gambling-related cases is positive, it was apparent that when courts did have clearer information about gambling, this was not necessarily viewed by the court as a mitigating reason for the offence. Indeed, many lived experience participants expressed concern and uncertainty about how a disclosure of gambling may serve to benefit or disadvantage them in the criminal courts.

4.2 Understandings of gambling harms and links to offending

Where gambling was discussed with probation staff or at court, inconsistencies were also apparent in court staff’s understanding of gambling addiction and gambling harms. In some cases, participants reported detailed conversations about harmful gambling and its relationship to the criminal offence, but ultimately most felt that probation staff just ‘did not get it’ and that their gambling had been misunderstood. One participant expressed regret about disclosing a gambling addiction because he believed this led the court to form the opinion that he had committed a financial crime to maintain a lavish lifestyle. This reflects a perception by some of our sample that gambling-related crime is viewed as being motivated by greed and dishonesty, rather than addiction. Several participants expressed frustration that, despite their efforts to explain how gambling was directly related to their offence, they still felt that they had not been properly understood and that their addiction had been overlooked/misinterpreted:

The lady [probation officer] really struggled. She was trying to get round it, trying to understand it, but you could tell it just wasn’t ... I spoke to her for two hours, it was like going in her ear and then she was coming out with like stupid questions after and saying, ‘Why did you do that?’ and just not understanding that gambling disorder is a disorder and an addiction. (Richard)

It was very misunderstood about what the addiction side of it was [...] nobody that understood and probation probably the least. (Rachel)

They had no concept of what it [gambling] was like [...] I can remember saying, ‘It creeps into your head and into your skin and before you know it, you’re doing it and then you’ve done it and

then you've gotta fund it.' [...] I remember her saying to me, 'Well, everybody's got a choice. Everybody's got a choice.' (Diane)

This sentiment was echoed by a member of court staff, in a reflection about one of their previous cases:

In my head I'm just thinking well, you know, surely you could just stop! [...] when I first started working with that individual where I just didn't hear what he was saying at all. (028_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

By contrast, some members of court probation staff were positioned as more insightful and as seeming to 'get it', and this appeared to be more common among those who had a greater understanding of other addictions. Anna, for example, felt during her PSR that the member of staff was able to grasp the nature of addictions and of her gambling:

She was actually very, very nice. I was very lucky. She was actually very nice, very compassionate, very caring, and understood the gambling side. She was very good when it came to any addiction, I could tell. (Anna)

Rob, like Anna, was given an opportunity to explain the gambling harms he was experiencing and has since become aware of the extent to which his experience differs from most:

The probation guy that I met was very, very engaged and supportive in trying to understand the crime that I'd committed, which having spoken to other people since then, I think I was very fortunate to have someone that was actually interested. (Rob)

Those members of staff who were curious and took the time to explore the gambling harms and the reasons behind the crimes sometimes did not then enter these into the PSRs but chose instead to focus upon the general mental health of the defendant, not knowing how to report the gambling harms and how the court should take them into account. Richard revisited his PSR for the purpose of this research:

There's nothing really in it about the gambling, when I'm looking through it. Risk report and stuff. When it goes onto physical and mental health, it all just goes on mental health ... when I look at it now, it's like yeah, she still didn't grasp it. (Richard)

Similarly, Mark and Rachel did not feel that their PSRs had really focused on their gambling, or the links between their gambling and their offence:

There was minimal focus on the gambling I would say. They didn't necessarily want to hear reasoning or want to understand anything about that. (Mark)

I think she was asking more about the crime than about the gambling. It was me that explained to her about the gambling, and by that time already I was really fixed in on the recovery side of it [...] But yeah, it was mainly about the crime. (Rachel)

For Paula and Diane, there was never an opportunity in the court setting to talk about their harmful gambling at all, or the role it played in their crime:

There was no discussion of why my offence occurred and the financial afterwards, other than it was a financially motivated offence, off of which I was convicted of theft. (Paul)

I didn't have a professional conversation with anybody regarding my crime, how I did it or why I did it and what I thought was gonna happen. (Diane)

The inconsistencies evident in court experiences reflect the absence of a systemic requirement for routine questioning of defendants about gambling harms. It also highlights the disparate PSR process for defendants at court. One member of court staff commented that gambling is the 'ugly stepsister' to other addictions because it is rarely talked about. Another staff member highlighted that gambling would only be likely to feature in court discussions if it was very obviously linked to the index offence. Many

practitioners indicated that finding out more about gambling would be dependent on staff skills and the time available to court staff:

It's only if you really dig past crown prosecution documents or what happened with the offence that you may find out well actually, why are you here? (001_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

By contrast, our focus group with court staff in Wales revealed that they have introduced a self-assessment questionnaire that asks defendants if they have a problem with gambling and if gambling is linked to their offending. A gambling support service that provides support to Wales (along with other regions) has also (for those who self-refer) been pushing for defendants and their legal representation to advocate in relation to gambling harms. Despite these pockets of good practice that we observed, most obviously in Wales but also occasionally in other regions, one court staff member in Wales observed that self-assessment questionnaires were not enough to get to the bottom of the issue through the court process, and that there was more work to be done:

It doesn't really lend itself very well I don't think to exploring that further. I cannot recall a time that anybody has actually said yes to that question, but like I said I do wonder if that's because of the way it's worded and perhaps because of ... we've not really focused on it. (027_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

The absence of a systematic requirement to ask about gambling at court generates inconsistencies because of the reliance on individual members of staff to ask about gambling. Different staff showed varying levels of professional curiosity, understanding, and concern about gambling, and this contributed to the range of positive and negative experiences for our lived experience sample. One member of court staff illustrated this personalised approach to asking questions about gambling:

I always prioritise gambling, alcohol and drugs as the same, 'cause that's my background, so I will always ask the relevant questions and just be like, 'What do you get up to on a weekend?' 'cause a lot of people go to the betting shops on a weekend, try and get them to say what their routine is and they might give me something and be like, 'Oh, what's your bet on' or 'how much' and it stems from there. That's how I do it though. I couldn't tell you how everyone else is, but that's just my opinion. (017_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

Sadly, the level of professional curiosity and skill of this court officer was not evident in other staff that our lived experience sample had encountered. Indeed, court staff acknowledged that they were unlikely to be asking the right questions about gambling because of the limited time available to them, due to limited training, a lack of confidence, limited experience of gambling-related cases, and a lack of awareness about appropriate services to signpost defendants to:

We're probably not going to be asking the right questions because we haven't had the training, but it's the more we do something as well, isn't it, the more confident we become and our knowledge and awareness, you'll learn to ask more questions. (027_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

Current pressures on the courts, along with the wide range of other issues that a PSR should consider, limit the time that staff have to explore possible gambling harms with defendants. However, the following quote from a court officer reminds us of the importance of finding that time so that gambling harms can be identified and defendants can get the support they may need:

At PSR stage there is so much you need to cover, but at the same time that isn't an excuse for this not to be covered 'cause again it can be part of a criminogenic need, that needs addressing. The support will help them in terms of their rehabilitation so it is really important that it is captured, so yeah, it is important that we focus on it. (027_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

4.3 Support for defendants

Probation court staff can advise the courts of defendants' support needs, which can then be mandated during sentencing, and they can also advise defendants of support pathways open to them while their court hearings are pending. Our interviews with both defendants and staff revealed that support for gambling is almost never mandated as part of sentences (in large part because no specific requirement is available for gambling). One of our lived experience sample speculated that he was given 250 hours of unpaid work requirements because there was no gambling-specific treatment requirement or clearly commissioned gambling support service to which he could be referred. This contrasts with the support requirements available to defendants with alcohol and drug problems, where treatment orders are issued by the courts and commissioned support services are in place. One court-based probation officer felt that commissioned specialist support for gambling was required to support justice-involved people with gambling harms:

We work in partnership with very many agencies when writing reports and that is what's going to support us moving that forward. (028_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

A small number of people we interviewed did recall being asked by court staff if they needed support for their gambling. However, because these individuals were already accessing support, some explained that they declined the need for more:

I seem to remember she did actually ask about the gambling, if I needed support with that, but at the time I was OK and I'd been referred to counselling through my GP. (Liam)

In large part due to the considerable delays in the CJS investigating and prosecuting their cases, which for some took several years, most participants reported that while awaiting police investigations and court hearings, they had used their time to access support and enter recovery. Many reported that criminal justice involvement had prompted this because they recognised that they could not continue to gamble. Additionally, the delays that they experienced with their cases were reported to generate further harms to their mental health, employment, relationships, and more, so the need to access support had become greater. Mark highlighted how his CJS involvement served to generate additional challenges in his wider life, for which he received no additional support:

After the court date, I lost my job. At the time I was with my partner who I ... ended up losing that relationship as well. It was just a really, really difficult period. (Mark)

Most people indicated that they had had to find support themselves, with no signposting or referrals from criminal justice agencies such as the police or probation services. One court officer illustrated the lack of knowledge of gambling support services:

I wouldn't know really where to turn for if they had a gambling addiction. (017_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

Many of our lived experience sample indicated that they felt there had been very little interest in the support they were accessing and their recovery from gambling harms, failing to register it as even relevant to their case:

There was no, 'Yeah, totally get it. What are you doing?' No help and support. Nothing. (Amanda)

Affected others expressed the belief that the courts often assumed that family members would provide the support defendants needed, without considering the impact on and risk to them of assuming this burden:

So, there was just very little knowledge and awareness around it at all, and so it was very much me supporting him through that. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Moreover, and as illustrated by the quote from Susan below, affected others expressed concern that probation staff and the courts had little interest in exploring if intimate partners could pose a risk to defendants and their efforts to desist from further gambling and/or offending:

It's another organisation where I just don't exist ... I could be anybody doing anything. Who's to say I'm not a gambler? Who's to say that I haven't got a gambling addiction and I'm actually putting his recovery and his ability to not commit crime in danger? They don't know the first thing about me. (Susan)

The lack of knowledge among court staff of the support services available for gambling harms was commented on frequently by our lived experience sample. Sometimes defendants took it upon themselves to inform staff of the services they had accessed and where they could find them. Susan, an affected other, also became a source of information, not only for court probation staff but also the judge. She recalled:

It was really bizarre, and he [the judge] was saying to the probation officer, 'So can you just let me know that these are legitimate support services?' And ... probation's looking at me, and I'll never forget it, and I was nodding as if to say, 'Well, yeah, for God's sake!' Do you know what I mean? Like surely, you've looked into it ... and the probation officer was just sort of looking at the judge like a bit gormless to the point where the judge actually went, 'Do you think you could go over and ask that lady that's nodding?' I was a bit like, 'Oh my God.' [...] I did send them some information around gambling harm, funnily enough <laughs>. I thought, 'Oh, I'll just send you some info because clearly you don't know what the fuck you're doing.' (Susan, Affected Other)

Knowledge of support services among court staff largely appeared to sit with specific individuals, thus explaining the inconsistent experiences of defendants. One court officer, for example, reflected that their knowledge stemmed from a previous job:

I could give my own personal experiences and help them personally, but the resources where I would go from there are the services I know through my last job, I'm a bit stuck for but I can go into it just on a personal level with them. (017_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

Another member of court staff revealed the potential of conversations on support needs to be a means to identify problematic, harmful behaviours, rather than starting conversations with the latter and then talking about support. Again, this demonstrates the levels of knowledge and skill that sit with individual members of staff rather than in the service as a whole:

I think sometimes especially people who are new to the criminal justice system might think that they're gonna get in trouble for saying if they use certain drugs or saying this or what's going to happen if I tell you this information? And actually it's about us getting all the information to inform our assessment, to ensure that we're making an accurate proposal based on their risk and needs, and I think that's how we try to promote and almost sell it I guess, at pre-sentence stage. But rapport building is always challenging, at PSR stage [...] but I think that's where our techniques come in and the experience of the CDOs [court duty officers] to encourage. (027_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

The inconsistencies evident among staff in their willingness and ability to engage with gambling support needs ultimately have repercussions for the wellbeing of defendants and their desistance from crime. One court officer acknowledged this:

it could be a massive trigger and motivation to somebody's offending and if we're not fully exploring that and unpicking it further and offering them the right support to address that, then

we're not meeting their criminogenic needs, are we, and offering that appropriate support? (027_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

4.4 Sentencing experiences

Many people with lived experience, alongside several stakeholders, expressed the belief that sentencing practices in relation to gambling were extremely unpredictable and inconsistent:

I'll be honest, I've seen people that you expect to go to prison don't, and then I've seen people that you don't expect to go to prison go to prison. (003_Stakeholder, Gambling Support Service)

The ways in which our sample experienced sentencing in Magistrates and Crown courts varied and at times felt very personal, regardless of the sentencing guidelines in place. Many lived experience participants recalled that although a Community Order had been recommended in their PSR, they went on to receive a custodial sentence. Many felt that this was a result of the links between their offence and their gambling not being considered or understood. Indeed, one defendant chose not to disclose his gambling at all for fear that it would be viewed harshly in court, while others felt that they were punished because a gambling addiction was perceived to be an insufficient reason for offending and because they did not fit the stereotype of a criminal. This sense of being 'doubly punished' was felt by both Diane and Masom:

I think I even fell through the cracks because I was articulate [...] I don't know if I was treated differently because I was deemed a professional and you should've known better and you were trusted, you came from a trusted position. (Diane)

Unfortunately for me, with the nature of my case, it was one of those, 'Well-spoken, got the money, oh is it just a blag?' It wasn't. No one really took me down to my core to go, 'You are a gambling addict, we can see that actually that was what drove all your other behaviours not the other way round.' So when probation were looking at me, when the courts were looking at me there was always comments about how well-spoken I was, how much of a salesperson I was [...] To me it felt like probation, the courts made it sound like it was something I could control because of who I am and because I was always well-presented, well-spoken, not that the gambling was actually driving everything else I did. (Masom)

While many PSRs recommended a Community Order, this was often based on caring responsibilities, being a proven responsible citizen, poor mental health or first offences, rather than gambling being presented as a mitigating factor. Vijay, for example, described how his care for his elderly parents was presented as a mitigating factor, while gambling was not:

They sat down with me, asked me what I'm doing, I told them about the gambling stuff, and they asked me about my parents. My parents are quite elderly. So ironically, even the lawyer, the barrister, was saying for the probation that was the thing that would have swung them. (Vijay)

With no previous contact with the CJS and no understanding of the weight that would be given to PSRs, some defendants and their families were shocked by their custodial sentences and the absence of gambling addiction and recovery as mitigating factors:

I was told I would get a suspended sentence <laughs> even by my barrister all the way through until court date, which was adjourned about four times as well. When we finally got there even the judge said... I think he started off by saying, 'I'm pretty sure we will never see this lady in our courtroom again. She's taken all the steps...' blah, blah, blah. And then, 'But, she's stolen from the Crown's purse and for that we're going to give her a 20-month custodial sentence.' [...] I wasn't a threat to society or community, so I don't understand why no suspended sentence was offered if it ... teach me a lesson. I don't know if it taught me a lesson. (Lily)

Even on the day of sentencing, it wasn't really taken into account the longevity of his recovery at that point, the things he'd done to try and sustain his recovery and give back to the lived experience communities, all of that. It was very much disregarded at that point and the whole time it just felt like there was so little knowledge, awareness, understanding and perhaps really in-depth knowing the level of harm that it does give to a person and their families. No comprehension of that at all, I don't think. (Dawn, Affected Other)

There was no understanding, nothing about the mental health side of it at all, what had caused it, why you did it, where you did it, how you did it; none of that came into it [...] It all surrounded the crime; very little surrounded the addiction or treatment for it. (Rachel)

Similarly, Vijay, at his first court hearing was denied bail, even though this meant that he could no longer access support for his gambling:

During that time I was [...] at the National Problem Gambling Clinic, the NHS one, so they were aware of that [...] so they knew that and even then, I got denied bail. (Vijay)

Other lived experience participants and stakeholders expressed concerns about how delays and uncertainties in court proceedings (exacerbated by Covid-19 and associated backlogs) made accessing treatment, especially residential treatment such as that offered by Gordon Moody, very difficult. Some identified what they perceived to be good practice, including deferring sentencing to enable participants to continue in gambling treatment, but many also described times where treatment could not be started (or offered by a service) because of uncertainties about court proceedings. For some participants, this meant that their recovery was deferred until their court date. And for those who were imprisoned and then not provided with gambling support, this meant it would be some time until they could access the services they needed.

Custodial sentences were given even when the judge or magistrate recognised that the defendant had not benefitted financially from the crime because of their gambling, and this was especially for defendants who had offended while in 'positions of trust'. Diane, who had committed fraud while in a position of trust, received a custodial sentence for her first offence and a community sentence for her second. Some participants who had received a custodial sentence felt that this had followed from the judge having taken a personal dislike to them and their crime:

I think the judge was ... I think it was a bit personal. That's my opinion. There was a lot in it that felt very personal. And I think that does happen. (Anna)

I could have come up with a cure for cancer and that judge would not have cared what I had done whilst awaiting sentencing. He really had no empathy, nothing at all for me. It was like contempt, it was hate if anything. (Amanda)

Not all of our lived experience sample felt harshly judged, however. For example, Helen felt like the judge understood her gambling harms, but unfortunately, among our sample, Helen's experience stands out as atypical:

I was really expecting to go to prison, obviously 'cause it was the second time for the same thing basically and I was 100% I was going to prison. The judge seemed to really understand the gambling side of things, the gambling harm [...] as something real, where I think some people don't see it as a real thing, they think you can pick and choose to gamble or not gamble. (Helen)

4.5 Financial punishments

Family members highlighted how they were often directly and negatively impacted by sentencing and court decisions, especially in relation to Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) orders, fines, and compensation orders. Across our sample, there appeared to be limited recognition by the courts of the long-term

financial implications of POCA's for the family members of defendants (or for the defendants themselves whose proceeds of crime had swelled the profits of the gambling industry). Dawn described the consequences of her husband's POCA and the lengths to which she had gone to protect their assets to ensure financial stability for her dependent children:

POCA's a huge thing, people don't think about POCA and the stresses of that; we can never own a house together and we've sought legal advice from separate legal teams around whether if a house is obtained legally through hard work and saving, does that still count towards POCA. And they've said, 'It depends on where you live, it depends on the judge but it's not worth the risk.' [...] if he inherited anything the processes it goes through and it would be made aware so his parents have changed their will to try and get around that system so that the girls aren't left without anything and that side of things, their pensions, who they're left ... people don't think about, like actually what happens if this pension is assigned to someone and then I die and then that pension gets taken off of them ... they don't actually benefit from it. So yeah, there is all those things and my own will, I had to think about, well, normally if I died it would go to your next of kin [...], but I can't risk that because the CPS could take it from him because of the POCA and then I've gone, they don't have a house and so I've left it to the girls in a trust [...] I only know that 'cause my mum's a lawyer and she deals with wills and probate, so she's done it for me, but it's how you have to work the system to be able to support your family. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Fines, POCA's, and compensation orders can also have unintended consequences for defendants and some of our lived experience sample commented that their judge had understood that they had not benefitted financially from their crimes and therefore such orders were not appropriate:

He did say in my favour, he said, 'I'm aware there was no financial gain from your crime. You will not receive a POCA.' (Amanda)

There was no compensation order ... he was satisfied that the money had gone and been spent in the places where I said it had, so I didn't have to pay anything back. (Billy)

For others, their judges had failed, in their opinion, to recognise that the proceeds of their crimes had been gambled away and only the gambling operators had benefited. Mark described how a compensation order exacerbated the financial pressures he was under, compounding the temptation to gamble or to borrow money to meet the court orders:

When you've got a gambling addiction as well, and you put someone under pressure to pay money, it really exacerbates the addiction. It makes it even worse; it almost gives you a reason to go and gamble <laughs> [...] so these expectations that someone with a gambling addiction can just go and start managing their finances and paying x amount of money. If you put them under pressure there's a likelihood the person's gonna go and gamble to try and get money to pay stuff. So, I found that a huge challenge and the constant in and out, I had to go and get these reviewed, these payments reviewed and go to my local magistrate's court to get that done, and it was really so stressful. It added a lot more pressure onto me. And it was a huge contributing factor to a couple of times where I caved in and gave into gambling again [...] It was like, 'OK, can barely afford this,' they were asking for x amount and I didn't have it coming in. The first thing in my mind is how have I been able to make money in the past when I've really needed it? [...] it's like when I went to these courts to speak about it, there was no understanding, there was no thought about the fact that you're talking to someone who's had a gambling addiction, or continues potentially. There's not even a thought that it's potentially continuing as well. (Mark)

The perception that POCA's, fines, and compensation orders could be counterproductive for people recovering from gambling addiction was shared by some HMPPS staff. Indeed, one observed:

I don't think you should be fining people when they've got these offences related to gambling. It just seems that's the illogical bit ... If the person's crime proceeds are sitting in the gambling

industry or in the financial sector because they've been gambled, that doesn't make sense to me they should then be recovered from their property and stuff ... I think it needs looking at in relation to these particular offences related to gambling harms. Again, it comes back to not wanting to re-victimise families, partners, parents, but also not then [...] creating a new driver for further offending. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

5. Findings II: Gambling harms and prison custody

5.1 Screening for, and disclosure of, gambling harms

All imprisoned people sentenced to 12 months and above under the Criminal Justice Act 2003 should receive an OASys (Offender Assessment System)⁷ assessment within eight weeks of sentencing under Prison Service Order 2205.⁸ OASys is used by prison and probation staff to complete an initial needs and risk assessment, which should then be regularly updated (at least annually). However, HMPPS staff highlighted how there are limited opportunities to capture gambling behaviour, risks, and harms, beyond a brief drop-down tick-box embedded within a self-assessment questionnaire. Probation staff we interviewed indicated that during a structured OASys assessment, questions on finances are currently the main opener to a discussion on gambling. However, in practice, staff recognised that this was unlikely to elicit much further information about any risks and harms relating to gambling:

When it comes to the OASys assessment itself there's only one question and it's kind of a hidden question in a way. I use the word hidden because this is a sort of hidden group, almost invisible in some ways. It's in section 5 of OASys which deals with finances. It's a question, I think it's 5.6, which talks about impediments to budgeting. When you look at the manual and you tease out what that question is asking, it's looking at things not to do with drugs and alcohol, which are very common, obviously, amongst our people but it is looking at issues like gambling, whether that is an impediment to somebody's budgeting. That's the only question we ask. (HMPPS_003, Senior Probation Officer)

Just over half of our sample with lived experience of gambling harms and a criminal conviction received custodial sentences, and on arrival at prison, as part of their prison induction, most participants reported that they had not been asked about gambling during their OASys (or any other prison-based) assessment, even when their offence was very clearly linked to gambling:

The only screening I got when I went into reception [to prison] on the day I got remanded was finance, benefit and debt, 'Do I have any debt concerns?' Wasn't linked to gambling. They asked me about financials, but they didn't ask me about gambling at all. There wasn't even a question. (Masom)

I remember there was a few forms that you have to fill in here and there saying what the problems and gambling wasn't even on them forms. There was drug addiction, alcohol addiction. I don't think gambling was even listed. (Lily)

Sadly, the failure to capture gambling risks/harms through prison induction screening and in early OASys assessments appears to continue throughout people's imprisonment. In subsequent OASys reviews/discussions with staff, PoP also felt that it was unlikely that discussions about gambling would be initiated by prison probation staff. Because gambling harms are not explicitly flagged on OASys, this placed the onus on imprisoned people to make voluntary disclosures, which may only occur by chance, as illustrated by Lily:

I remember, when I was in open prison ... the counsellor coming in and looking around and saying ... 'have you got any drug or alcohol problems?' And I was like, 'No.' Then as she was walking then I went, 'Ah, gambling.' She came back, she went, 'Ah, yeah, well I can see you as

⁷ Note that the long-term plan is that OASys will be replaced as part of the Assess Risks, Needs and Strengths (ARNS) Programme.

⁸ See Prison Service Order 2205, Offender Assessment and Sentence Management, https://insidetime.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/PSO_2205_offender_assessment_and_sentence_management.pdf

well.' So, it wasn't part of the process, even though obviously the counsellor knew that it was an addiction but obviously it wasn't on their radar. (Lily)

Where participants had disclosed concerns about their gambling, most felt that they were met with indifference and a clear message that there would be no support for them while in a custodial environment:

When you first go in there, [...] you go to an assessment and as I say, all these people, you have no idea who they are, who you can trust, who you can tell truth to, and so the woman said [...] 'First time in prison, how are you feeling, have you got any suicidal thoughts, are you on medication, what's your mental health like, have you got any physical health disabilities,' all of that. And then she was like, 'Right, have you got drugs, alcohol problems?' I was like, 'No.' She was like, 'OK, anything else?' And I was like, 'Mm ... I've got a gambling addiction.' She went, '<Snorts slightly> We can't do anything for you, unfortunately, so there's no point putting you forward for any of the programmes because that's for drugs and alcohol.' So, there was nothing. So that was from the off. That was what you was welcomed to in prison. (Amanda)

While some lived experience participants indicated that they had been forthcoming about their experience of gambling harms while in prison, many also highlighted that there were many barriers to making a voluntary disclosure in custodial environments. Many indicated that they found the CJS very difficult to navigate because of their unfamiliarity with it. This meant that they often did not know who they could approach for support, but more significantly, that they did not know who to trust and/or talk to. A lack of trust appeared to be particularly acute for those entering prison for the first time. Indeed, Paul spoke about the dangers of being seen talking with prison staff, which act as barriers to disclosing gambling problems and support needs:

Very rarely are you gonna go to a staff member to ask for support 'cause that'll be used against you [...] the relationship between inmate and guard is not a rehabilitative relationship – you're the person who locks me up, I am not gonna come and ask you for help [...] Because then you're a grass and that puts you in a bigger hole than you need to be in [...] You get a keyworker sometimes if you're really lucky and they might have capacity to do some key work with you, but you don't really wanna open to them. So, the best people you can open to are your peers, the guys who are on the wings. (Paul)

Anna also commented that the nature of addiction itself acts as a barrier to disclosure, as those engaged in harmful gambling may wish to keep it secret. A member of probation staff also reflected that OASys self-assessments may not be completed honestly and that people may just tick 'no' boxes so they can complete the questionnaire as quickly as possible. With so many barriers to voluntary disclosure of gambling harms, many probation staff members suggested that explicit questions about gambling should be incorporated into the new Assess Risks, Needs, Strengths (ARNS) system that will replace OASys:

So, it is not something people will talk to you about unless you, in a sense <laughs>, really force ... not force them to [tell] you but you really have to put some effort in if you actually want it to come out. (HMPPS_004, Senior Probation Officer)

Reflecting the inconsistent understanding of gambling harms among probation staff, as explored elsewhere in some detail, it is not surprising that staff had a range of opinions on where a gambling harms question should sit within a screening assessment tool. Options included finances, corresponding to the widespread perception that gambling harms are primarily financial, but also wellbeing, addictions, and health:

I'd put it under finances, I think. I've thought about this a lot over the years because it is an addiction so it's technically a health need, but I think ... and you can make an argument for putting it with substance misuse, you can make an argument for putting it under health, you can

make an argument for loads of things, but I think because the harm it causes tends to be, it starts with being financial harm, I think it makes sense to put it with finances. If you're asking someone about their financial situation and about debt, I think that's when you ask them about gambling. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

The wide ranging and far-reaching nature of gambling harms made it hard for staff to reflect on where gambling questions should naturally sit. Taking a contrasting view, however, one of the stakeholders we interviewed was keen that any question asked should focus on gambling behaviours, rather than gambling harms:

It's not a case of do you have a gambling problem, 'cause no one's gonna answer yes to that question; it's do you gamble? Then you can start that conversation up. (003_Stakeholder, Gambling Support Service)

The absence of clear gambling screening in custodial settings has a range of implications. One particularly serious one is that if gambling is not captured during OASys assessments (or other screening opportunities), it is highly unlikely to then feed into sentence planning processes or lead to signposting for support.

5.2 Sentence planning and contact with probation

OASys assessments should be used to inform sentence planning; the principal purpose of which is to address the needs and risks identified in OASys with the aim of trying to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Sentence planning should be undertaken between a Prison Offender Manager (POM) and the person in prison and updated at regular intervals. Like other CJS experiences, our lived experience sample reported a range of experiences in relation to sentence planning. Some indicated that sentence planning had been completed in accordance with guidelines, while others indicated that it had not been done at all, done late, or done without their involvement. It was often unclear to participants if a sentence plan had been completed, with many reporting that they had limited or no contact with their POM and the Offender Management Unit (OMU) in their prison. Several participants said they were unaware of the affiliation of the members of staff they had talked to. Rob, for example, had no understanding of whether staff belonged to probation or the prison service in his first custodial setting:

I didn't realise that they were sort of part of the probation system as such. I didn't have any real contact with that internal probation when I was at [...] prison, they categorised me straightaway as suitable for open conditions and that was more or less the only contact I really had with them. (Rob)

It was apparent that many of our sample may have assumed that the POMs they met were actually prison officers, with many insisting that they had had no contact with probation staff while they were imprisoned:

I never saw probation again or anybody to do with it. (Diane)

I didn't have any contact with any probation, whilst in custody, no. (Billy)

I didn't see a probation officer once. I got my ... what's it called? <Pause> Do you know what, your pack with your stuff on, what you've been sentenced for etc. I got that three weeks before I was leaving with a plan what I needed to do in prison before I left! (Richard)

As most of our lived experience sample had no prior involvement with the CJS, they had never even visited a prison before their custodial sentence. Several recalled the challenges involved with trying to figure out who was who within custodial settings and where they should or could go if they needed additional support. Some participants also indicated that they felt they had to prioritise any requests they made to prison staff, because of their perception that resources were limited. When transferred to

an open prison, Rob's contact with his offender manager centered on meeting the conditions needed so he could secure day release. While he was aware that he could approach his POM for a wider range of needs, including support, he held the belief that in order to secure Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), he needed to limit any other requests because the OMU was so overworked:

That's kind of your priority, so you're not really asking for any help with your actual underlying reason why you've arrived in prison because you almost feel as though you can't ask these people too many questions or too many things because the things that are important to you will fall off of the list basically. (Rob)

Notably, some of our sample were in prison during the Covid-19 pandemic, which heavily impacted upon all aspects of their experience in prison, including the implementation of their sentence plan and their contact with probation:

While I was in prison I never really heard of anything of probation coming to see me or doing anything surrounding me. We have to also remember that my time there was during COVID, so very, very little to know. I had a sentence plan and a manager and all the rest of it, an offender manager and all the rest, but I was in prison for two weeks when COVID hit, and then everything was locked down. (Rachel)

When sentence plans were developed, they frequently made no mention of gambling behaviours, harms, and support needs, even when offences were directly related to gambling. Where people had already accessed support for gambling, some felt that it was assumed that their risk of returning to gambling (and related offending) had been addressed. Anna, for example, felt that because she disclosed she had received counselling to support her with harmful gambling, an assumption was made that she no longer needed support and so this was not incorporated into her sentence plan:

So on arrival you have ... do you know, it was bloody midnight, that was the problem, when we arrived and I saw someone and that was when they weigh you, when they do this, ask you questions, medication. They mentioned my gambling. You see the difficulty is that because I had had therapy, I was asked that a few times ... so do you get asked, 'Have you had therapy, have you had treatment for it' 'cause obviously people are coming in at all different levels with their addiction. So, my answer was, 'Yes, I have had and I've been clean for x amount of time.' (Anna)

Anna's experience shows a lack of understanding among probation staff of harmful addictive gambling behaviours and their enduring nature, as well as the challenges that prison may itself present to someone's recovery. Most participants felt, as had been their experience through court, that there was little understanding of gambling and its relationship to their offending:

There was never any awareness shall we say. (Masom)

This same lack of understanding was perceived by other people in contact with probation staff in prison. Lily, for example, had ROTL conditions to help control her gambling but these reflected the difficulties of preventing someone from gambling online. Her ROTL conditions included not being allowed to go to land-based gambling premises such as betting shops, casinos, and arcades, despite her history of gambling being exclusively with online slots:

They started to plan when you go home on a weekend what you can and can't do and I think the only clause in there that I wasn't allowed to go near any gambling venues. So, I'd put down that perhaps I'd like to take [the kids] to the seaside and they'd said no because there's amusements there. (Lily)

Other participants who had secured ROTL from open prisons indicated that there had been no gambling-related conditions in their licences. Many felt that this reflected a lack of regard for or interest in their histories of gambling and a failure to adequately assess the potential risks relating to gambling. In most

cases, measures to support people who had experienced harmful gambling, even when it was clearly linked to their index offence, were largely absent at all stages of people's journeys through custody.

5.3 Gambling in prison

Fortunately, many of the people we interviewed had begun their recovery from gambling prior to imprisonment and reported that they had been able to resist gambling in prisons. However, many still highlighted the multiple and diverse opportunities to gamble within prison and expressed concern about how prison gambling cultures present considerable challenges to someone who is in recovery from gambling harms. The opportunities to gamble in prison, coupled with the lack of opportunities for support with gambling, were highlighted as particularly problematic. While some HMPPS staff recognised and accepted that gambling occurs within prisons and that there are distinct cultures surrounding it, this did not appear to be an understanding shared by all staff. Notably, the presence of gambling within prisons was most often understood as a problem for its links to violence, rather than following from an appreciation that it could lead to relapse for people trying to abstain from gambling, or indeed lead to addictive gambling behaviours that may not have been present prior to people entering prison.

For some of our sample, the opportunities to gamble in custody presented a serious challenge to their recoveries or a potentially harmful activity. Moreover, participants described the wide range of opportunities to gamble, and different motivations for potential participation:

At Cat B the temptation was always there. (Masom)

Definitely being bored an individual would gamble, feeling depressed because they don't see family, worried about their future so they turn to something that kind of gives them that boost and makes them feel a bit great again. (Jay)

For a minority of people, prison presented an opportunity to stop because it marked a new low and turning point or because they were no longer able to gamble online and felt liberated from it. Lily, for example, was no longer able to gamble online and was not tempted to gamble in prison because of her fear of interacting with other prisoners. For Mason, prison was also an opportunity to stop:

When I was in closed prison I didn't mingle with anybody. I purposefully kept myself to myself so I don't really know what was going on because I didn't want to interact with anybody. (Lily)

Custody saved my life 'cause in three weeks of being in custody after 20 years of gambling, I didn't tell myself I was never gonna gamble again but it was the first time I ever saw the harm everywhere: family, relationships, money, my mind. (Masom)

The protective effect of prison was not, however, widely shared among our sample. Sadly, it appeared that the opportunities to gamble in prison were far more numerous than opportunities for support for harmful gambling:

[In Cat B] there was table tennis tables and there were often card games and opportunities if that particular custodial manager for the wing wasn't there. So, there were a lot of opportunities. [...] In Cat D there were loads of opportunities; people were gambling for actual money, for amounts on the canteen. (Masom)

5.4 Lack of support and its consequences

When members of our lived experience sample disclosed harmful gambling to staff in prison, they mostly reported that no gambling-specific support was offered, and at times they were explicitly told that no such support existed. While one person we interviewed was given the phone number of the National Gambling Helpline, our sample were mostly offered cognitive behavioural therapy-based

mental health support and places on financial management courses, relationship courses, and/or drug and alcohol programmes. Even though many of these courses were perceived as unhelpful (because they were not targeted at gambling), many participants still attended on the basis that they were something that helped pass the time and demonstrated their willingness to be compliant:

I wasn't being pointed to any practical help for the gambling, the counsellor was just more discussing, I don't know, effects on relationships and my thought processes and things rather than actually addressing the gambling in a practical sense. (Lily)

It is blatantly obvious that support for people that have got any kind of problem, whether that be past or present with gambling, support for people with that in the prison environment is very little. (Rob)

They put you on the courses like your wellbeing courses, so how to assertive courses, all of those ... a lot of it's how to get women to feel better and a lot of it is with the intention of getting into work. (Anna)

For those people we interviewed who were in prison during the pandemic, even basic mental health support was not available. Overall, it was rare for our participants to indicate that they had been able to access support for their gambling while in custody, and where they had done, this usually followed from their own initiative. One participant, for example, recalled spending £25 per week to phone his gambling support worker in the community, while Rob, when he was transferred to a Cat D open prison found a local Gamblers Anonymous (GA) support group himself and requested permission to attend it on a weekly basis:

So, they didn't offer any support to me when I was there [...] I started to have a look at local support ... I was aware there was a lad that I'd been chatting to at the prison was being allowed to go to NA, so Narcotics Anonymous, and he was allowed to go down into the city centre one evening a week and go to an NA meeting. I thought, well, if I can find a GA meeting then maybe they'll let me go to that and that would be a good thing for me to do, it'd get me out of this place for a few hours of an evening as well. So, I found a meeting [...] I didn't speak to probation about it, I spoke to the governor of the prison ... And obviously he knew my background and he knew why I was there and the simplest way of putting it, he said, 'Yeah, that's fine, you can do that.' When I was in the prison system that was the only support that I had for my gambling but it was also support that I went and outsourced as opposed to support that was offered to me. (Rob)

Another of our participants, aware of the absence of support for gambling in his prison, even tried to set up his own gambling support group, though it never materialised:

[All] I ever had really were people that were telling me to look at finance orientated sentence planning, booklets or support. I think it's GamCare, I think there was the GamCare number on the free phone section, and no one was signposting me to any of this. I then requested to do a Prison Education Trust thing on addiction counselling, because I wanted to start GA meetings within [the prison] because there was alcoholics interventions and drug interventions there ... but there was little to nothing in the way of gambling intervention. I certainly didn't get signposted. (Masom)

Stakeholders working in this space firmly indicated that prison represented a 'lost opportunity' to address gambling harms on the basis that the institution had a captive audience for interventions. Yet, interventions appeared to be very limited, generic, or initiated by the imprisoned person themselves. Despite nearly all our lived experience imprisoned people and some HMPPS/stakeholder staff acknowledging that gambling can be rife in prisons, many perceived staff to hold the view that gambling was inevitably stopped by imprisonment and therefore wasn't a risk or something that needed to be addressed in custody. This left some imprisoned people with gambling harms feeling forgotten and vulnerable. While many indicated that they made sure to avoid gambling in prison and to 'keep their

heads down' (often because of the unfamiliar prison environment), they were anxious about returning to gambling on release because while they had not gambled, they had also not had the opportunity to address their gambling addiction while in custody.

Participants told us that the lack of gambling support in prison served to contribute to poor mental health, relapse into gambling, and for some, reoffending. One of our interviewees, who was detained on remand, was offered no support and felt suicidal. A first-time female offender in prison described the experience as terrifying and that her self-isolation in her cell contributed to her deteriorating mental health, while another of our sample reflected on the dangers of relapse as a result of receiving no support:

Maybe if all that had been done a lot earlier, the relapse, it would've prevented me getting back into the depression after. (Lily)

When that individual isn't able to break that cycle in custody, they then get out and go back to that behaviour. (Jay)

Jack, who continued to gamble while in prison, spoke of the gambling debts that he acquired in custody and that he was still paying off these debts while under probation supervision in the community:

Even when I come out of prison, I was still paying my mates for that, for gambling from outside, I was still sending them money that I owed them from Blackjack [...] you're just sitting there betting like things that no one even has yet ... it's probably the worst thing in prison is gambling. [...] I'm literally still paying my mates from gambling in the cell with them. (Jack)

Many probation staff acknowledged the consequences of people not receiving support for their gambling, including gambling debt-related violence in prisons. Moreover, they recognised that the failure to adequately screen for gambling harms and/or collect any meaningful data about gambling behaviour among those in prison, meant that there was no evidence of the prevalence or scale of gambling harms that could be used to justify the provision of the support people need:

If you don't ask the questions that need just does not come on the radar at all and that has all sorts of implications. (003_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

We don't ask about it in our assessments, and because we don't ask about it, it's hidden. And if there is something that is really impacting on someone's life and we don't know about it, we can't help them to address it, and if we can't help them to address it, then how are we going to address their reoffending or the harm they cause to other people? We can't. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Notably, the effects of poor support were also felt beyond prison walls, with partners raising numerous concerns about the impact on them and their families. Concerns about the mental health of those inside were particularly acute during the pandemic, when mental health was reported to be low and the provision of support (for mental health, let alone gambling) was reported to be very limited. Simon, the husband of a woman given a three-year prison sentence, expressed how anxious he was about his wife's isolation and suicidal ideation while being imprisoned during the Covid-19 pandemic. She was rarely allowed to leave her cell, had no access to courses or work, no home leave, and no visitors, and he reported that this had severe implications for her mental and physical health. Through dogged persistence he managed to contact probation within the prison to advise of his concerns, but despite his efforts, he reported that little changed:

I thought, quite naïvely possibly, that the probation officer, I could communicate with them and they could tell me how [Rachel's] doing or I could tell them [Rachel] really wasn't doing well at the time. But it really didn't work like that. I seem to remember finding her probation officer and she didn't show much interest or it wasn't in her remit, me telling her how bad [Rachel] was. So,

I was left quite disappointed because, besides [Rachel] herself, I had no other authority that I could really speak to on behalf of [Rachel] (Simon, Affected Other)

Dawn, the wife of a man in custody during Covid-19, also spoke of her concerns that he would relapse while in custody and without support. She additionally raised concerns that he had not been able to transfer to open conditions prior to release and that this had had an impact on family relations:

He never got dropped down to a Category D so was able to come home and things so he just remained in Cat C for the whole time. So, we had lots of things that interfered with the potential to have that reintegration into home life ... none of that was really taken into account with probation and the potential exposure within prison to gambling as well and that acknowledgement that it happens, and quite often people will start gambling who weren't gambling before and things like that. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Most family members indicated that they were usually coming into a prison for the first time following their partner's sentence, which unsurprisingly was described as difficult and uncomfortable:

I used to get that in prison as well when I'd go and visit him initially. The prison guards would always say to me, 'You always dress so nice. You're not our typical prison visitor.' Things like that and so I was very aware that I probably stood out like a sore thumb when it came to this type of environment. (Dawn, Affected Other)

I found it quite distressing ... there was no toilets anywhere. With prostate cancer as you need to go you have to otherwise you have an accident, so that was really, really tough for me. [...] the first one [prison] that she went to when I went there they give you, it's sort of a plastic plate with a key attached for your locker to put your belongings in and I found this very demoralising, for me. I mean I hadn't committed a crime but obviously I was really sensitive and that's how they operated. [...] I felt totally unsupported and let down, personally for myself, and probably frustrated 'cause I couldn't communicate [Rachel's] difficulties to somebody with authority or somebody that could help alleviate my concerns. (Simon, Affected Other)

5.5 Through the gate and gambling resettlement support

Prior to release from custody, people in prison should meet with probation staff to discuss their resettlement in the community. Very rarely did these meetings result in any signposting or referrals to gambling support in the community, or even a list of local gambling support groups or services. Instead, the focus appeared to be confined to checking what the imprisoned person would do in relation to housing and work:

They were talking about, 'Are you gonna carry on with the job? What are your plans in terms of where you're gonna live?' It was that type of stuff. There wasn't anything around what support networks do we need to try and look at to reduce your chance of reoffending, I suppose is the way that they would look at it, but we didn't talk about anything like that at that point. (Rob)

In preparation for the release of a prisoner into the community, community probation staff may conduct home checks to ensure that the person will be in an appropriate home environment. While some of our custodial sample did not recall such checks having been made, others reported that probation staff had visited their home prior to their release or had made phone contact with family members to assess the suitability of their home environment. Where checks had been made, participants reported that there was a consistent failure to consider gambling risks in or near the home. Dawn, for example, received a phone call from probation prior to the release from prison of her husband:

There was no mention of anything in terms of, 'Do you gamble, is there anything we can do to support that process? Is he coming home into an environment that could potentially be what made him gamble?' There was no conversations around trying to understand that avoidance of

going through that again and trying to minimise the potential of him going back through that same process at all [...] It was just she sort of spoke through what the tag would do, how that process would happen when he came home. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Amanda remembered that while she was in custody her partner had received a visit from probation, however, it did not involve any assessment of any gambling behaviours or risks at home:

They have to, upon release, make sure that this place is OK for me to stay [...] she was like, 'If you need anything,' [...] 'If you've got any questions. Are you OK with [Amanda] coming home to the house, and how do you think it will be?' So she was very ... asking questions, making sure everything's OK. [...] they didn't ask no questions, personal questions about like his gambling or behaviour or habits or addictions or anything like that, no. (Amanda)

Diane, who was imprisoned for a gambling-related offence, can best be described as having 'fallen through the cracks'. With a history of being subjected to domestic abuse, she was released back to her home where her abusive husband was living. Probation staff were aware of concerns surrounding domestic abuse, but because her home was in a different probation region, they did not visit in person to assess if it would be safe for her to return. Her new probation officer from her home region did not conduct a home check either as the handover from one region to the other was last minute:

They'd spoken to him over the phone, which obviously they got... that's when the [...] probation got the feeling that something wasn't right but my date of release was imminent, like two days away. [...] They didn't have the time. I suppose in a sense, without being judgemental and dismissing the services that they do do, they didn't have the time to re-do a report because they hadn't acknowledged what I'd already sent them to say that I was moving [...]. They hadn't jumped on that, they'd just had this last minute telephone conversation where they didn't think it was right but they hadn't passed it over to probation at that point [in the other region]. They were in the process of finding me a probation officer when I was released, and I don't think it was actually until I was released that I got a probation officer. (Diane)

Failing to assess potential gambling risks in or near the home could lead to potential relapse and even reoffending. Indeed, sadly this was the case for Diane, who after returning home and experiencing further domestic abuse at the hands of her husband, then returned to gambling as an emotional escape, before going on to commit another gambling-related offence.

6. Findings III: Gambling harms and probation supervision in the community

6.1 Restrictions and requirements in the community

Failure to identify and explore gambling harms (and associated risks) is a theme that reoccurs throughout our findings. People with lived experience (and some staff) also highlighted these themes in relation to probation conditions and restrictions attached to Community Orders, home detention curfews (HDCs) and licence conditions. It was rare for participants to report that they had been given conditions related to gambling or indeed any rehabilitation requirement that they engage with gambling recovery support. In the eyes of PoP and their families, the service was failing to ‘join up the dots’ and relate the conditions of their probation to the nature of their offence and to their support needs.

6.1.1 Home detention curfews

Many of our sample were fitted with a GPS electronic monitoring device (or ‘tag’) as part of a court or prison order. Tags are usually fitted to a person’s ankle, with a wireless monitoring base unit installed in the home. The Electronic Monitoring Service has overall responsibility for the service, but private companies are usually contracted to fit, install, and remove devices. While some of our lived experience sample recalled that having their tags fitted and removed was straightforward, participants more commonly reported that they felt the contractors were ‘incompetent’ and ‘insensitive’. For Rachel the experience of having her tag fitted can be understood within the theme, explored elsewhere, of her being atypical among PoP and her struggling with others perceiving her as ‘a criminal’:

Let’s go back to the person who put the tag on, for example. There were two of them, very pleasant, very ... respectable, or treating me respectfully, and that wasn’t a bad experience. The people who came to remove it had such a look of absolute disgust for the person they were dealing with. Obviously, they didn’t know who I was, what I was or what I had done. They just saw me as the convict, as the criminal. (Rachel)

The tagging process was also potentially distressing for family members. Dawn, for example, recalled concerns that her young children would find out about their dad’s conviction because of the tag fitting:

Then when they did turn up, knocked on the door and he was like, ‘[...], here to put your ... probationary tag on’. And with the kids in the living room and we were just mortified, ‘cause they don’t know and they still don’t know. [He] had to take it upstairs to the bedroom and have that conversation. There was no human family element to it. I know this is what they need to do and they probably wanted to shame him into having his tag put on <chuckles> and these two gigantic burly men coming into your house ... [it] wasn’t really discussed beforehand about how to do it sensitively around having a family member who’s gone through that process and perhaps children who don’t know, like ours didn’t. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Simon also found it difficult when contractors came to fit his wife’s tag:

When they put the tag on I must admit that was not so nice ‘cause these, they were kind of officers but they were from a private company so they had not sort of an official uniform but more like a military kind of uniform. (Simon, Affected Other)

Most of the PoP and their intimate partners who spoke about tags indicated that they caused a significant degree of embarrassment and stigma. Rachel, for example, described the lengths she took to try and hide the tag and the monitoring kit based inside her house. In practice, the tag and the stigma she felt in relation to it meant that she rarely left her home:

It was more embarrassing than anything else. I was scared that I would set off the alarms in the supermarket, for example, so just having the tag on was very humiliating, degrading [...] I very rarely left the flat ... I was low risk. I think they could have managed things differently. (Rachel)

For Dawn, the curfew imposed by the tag meant that a greater proportion of family duties fell to her because her husband could not leave the home at certain times. The tag also served to heighten her anxiety, in part because any breach of the tag restrictions could have led to her husband being recalled to court or to prison:

That falls onto you as well as a wife of, in terms of our daughter, for example. She does kickboxing quarter-past-seven to quarter-past-eight, [...] I had to do all those extra things because it was outside of his tag times and trying to squeeze family events into <laughs> a day period, nothing that went over the evening and things like that. I don't think people really comprehend that level of impact that it has on families and partners or people who are supporting people going through the criminal justice system and accessing probation. [...] It's not nice. [...] they might just ring the phone just to check that you are home ... Sometimes it would ring at three in the morning and it would terrify you when you've got this really loud ring, 'cause we had to have it loud in case we were downstairs. And so you're just always on edge, you know, waiting for something like that. (Dawn, Affected Other)

The conditions and restrictions that were attached to the tags predominantly related to curfew hours, which sometimes generated problems for PoP who were working. Shift changes or the need to attend meetings during curfew hours meant that PoP had to ask their PP to change their curfew hours, in turn requiring their PP to liaise with the contractor managing the tag. When this process did not go smoothly, the PoP and family members were left feeling fearful and anxious that recall to court or prison could follow:

They agreed to put him on fixed shifts, so he spoke with probation and they adjusted his tag times so he could leave the house earlier. But on the first day they hadn't implemented it and I was at home and then the tag phone run <laughs> and they were asking for him, I'm like, 'He's at work.' 'But his tag, he's supposed to be at home between the hours...'. We just had a lot of those sorts of things, [...] that was an issue for us that if we had respect for the probation period, the probationary services before, we certainly didn't at that point we're respectable, hard-working people who were trying to do the right thing. [...] you still have that worry that you're going to get that knock on the door and go back to prison because of something that you're trying to be compliant with and trying to get your life back in order by getting a job. He could've just signed on and sat at home and get benefits, which I assume there's probably a lot out there who would do that because it's easier, and you can understand why if these are the types of things that they've done first time round that perhaps they've thought, 'Do you know what, it's not worth the hassle.' But we were trying to do that right thing but it was difficult. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Dawn also highlighted how she felt that curfew restrictions and probation in general make relapse into gambling even more likely due to the boredom:

Being restricted to being at home and those types of things and understanding that level of boredom and restriction that that could potentially be something that might make someone want to gamble again to pass the time 'cause they can't do much else. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Tags were not used to impose any gambling-related restrictions upon our sample, such as a ban on entering casinos and betting shops. Indeed, one person argued that tag conditions related to land-based gambling would have been logical, as tags can be a means to track where a person is at all times. Rachel, for example, recalled that there was nothing to restrict her movements (other than the shame she felt)

and she could have easily gone to a casino while wearing her tag. Similarly, Susan, when remembering the tag her husband had to wear, commented:

No, no, no, it didn't prevent him from going into bookies, no it didn't. No. No, it didn't because I'm trying to think, did he relapse during that period? Obviously not that he declared that to anybody else. Especially not his probation officer most likely. No, I think it was a curfew as in what time he had to be home. Yeah, yeah. I don't think it had any gambling attachments to it. (Susan, Affected Other)

6.1.2 Licence conditions

Most of our lived experience sample who were given custodial sentences did not serve their full sentences but were instead released early on licence. The rules or conditions attached to licences must be followed by PoP, or they run the risk of being returned to court or prison. If deemed necessary and proportionate, in addition to standard licence conditions, licences can also be used to restrict 'specified conduct or specified acts', such as gambling. However, among our sample of PoP, it was apparent that licence conditions related to gambling were rarely used (or heard of). Licence conditions, according to our sample, mostly centred upon their residing at their registered address and on the need to be in approved work. Outside of the standard licence conditions and those focused on employment, most of our sample had no conditions related to gambling harms:

There weren't any licencing conditions other than don't contact the people involved in the case, and my only condition that they wanted was sustainable employment, which I got pretty much a month after [...] I could've walked out of probation, gone to my bank, taken out five grand in cash, put it in my pocket and walked into a casino and they couldn't have done a thing about it. [...] There was nothing, I think it's absolutely mental, there was nothing about, 'You are not allowed to attend any gambling establishments.' I was fully expecting to see it on my licence conditions, 'You cannot gamble; you cannot go to an established licenced betting shop or premises; you can't have more than a certain amount of cash on you.' There was just absolutely nothing at all and I just think that's mad. (Masom)

According to HMPPS staff we interviewed, there are limited options for incorporating gambling harm prevention into licence conditions. However, other staff reported that bespoke conditions can be added, but that in practice, restrictions relating to gambling are very rarely added. One reason for this may follow from the limited knowledge and awareness among probation (or court) staff that gambling harms are present when setting restrictions. As highlighted throughout the report, there are multiple challenges with screening for gambling harms, and many obstacles to people disclosing their support needs, even when their offence has followed from harmful gambling. According to a member of probation staff there is a general licence condition that could be used by probation in relation to people leaving prison, but its use would require prior knowledge of gambling harms:

There's a blanket condition that would sit on a licence to engage with any programme or treatment to address your needs. So, if gambling was clear and identified then you could use that condition (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

Among the few members of our sample who did have a gambling-related licence condition, these included attending support, such as from GamCare and GA, and staying away from gambling premises. None of our lived experience sample recalled being required to install self-exclusion software on their phones or use schemes such as MOSES (Multi-Operators Self-Exclusion Scheme) and bank blocks on gambling sites. Anna recalled that her conditions stipulated she inform probation if she had an urge to gamble again:

Mine even stipulated if feels need, needs to contact if gets urges, needs to contact probation officer. (Anna)

Rob, upon release from prison, was told that he would have a licence condition that mandated his weekly attendance at a GA meeting. Concerned that if he missed a week through no fault of his own, he would be recalled and using evidence that he had been voluntarily attending GA all through his stay in open prison, he successfully argued that the condition should be removed. Rob was also required to give probation staff access to his bank account, but he was never told whether this was for the purposes of monitoring his gambling behaviour or spotting further fraud:

I had to give them basically my bank details, so my account number, sort code and everything else so if they wanted to look at it, for whatever reason, then they could. Why they wanted that I've never really asked. I don't know if it was so that they could ask to see my bank statements or whatever to see if I've gambled or if they wanted to look at my bank statements to see if I'd suddenly got a whole load of money going into my bank account that I couldn't account for, in terms of another crime situation. (Rob)

Lily also had a licence condition that related to gambling: a ban from entering any casinos or betting shops, however, there was nothing to restrict her from gambling online and no requirement that she install GAMSTOP or other such software, or attend any support services. The focus of the conditions on restricting access to land-based gambling premises failed to take into consideration that all of Lily's harmful gambling had taken place online. When asked if probation staff had known that her gambling was all online, Lily replied:

I'm not sure 'cause nobody ever asked. <Laughs> It was never discussed so I'm not sure. (Lily)

This was contrasted with the common use of licence conditions to restrict and support those with substance problems and substance-related offences:

Technically my index offence is fraud by false representation, but really I was put in prison for my gambling. So, if you want to reduce reoffending then do something about it – you're not gonna put a drug dealer in prison on possession so supply Class A drugs without whacking him with a load of licence conditions. (Masom)

For some, the absence of gambling-related conditions represented a missed opportunity, while others expressed relief to have as few restrictions as possible. Taking the first of these stances, Masom argued that licence conditions restricting his ability to gamble could have acted as a deterrent:

If I came out and I just couldn't wait to go back to a casino I could've gone, but if a licence condition had told me I can't have a certain amount of cash, you might still do it, but you're gonna think twice. [...] they weren't monitoring anything as far as I could tell. [...] And as a recovering compulsive gambler I didn't, all the way through probation, gamble, but I could've quite easily done it but I would've been frightened to death of going back in if I knew I had a piece of paper that said, 'You cannot do this; you cannot carry more than this amount of cash.' So yeah, for me that is a fairly straightforward one. (Masom)

Vijay felt the same and said:

Had there been [licence conditions], ironically, I would have been too scared to gamble. (Vijay)

However, some participants felt that introducing gambling-related conditions could set people up to fail and potentially lead to their recall to court or to prison. For those not in recovery or with fragile recoveries, Richard argued that licence conditions mandating people stay away from gambling premises could be very counterproductive:

That licence condition of not allowed to go into a betting shop sets people up to fail. Relapses happen in recovery. Now if someone goes into a betting shop, relapses, they're not going to speak to anyone about it 'cause they're going back in prison, so for me that is a big no-no. I'll be honest, I've seen it happen a few times. It's something I'm strongly against, really strongly

against. I think instead of that, there should be something in the thing where you will attend some sort of treatment every week for your gambling. Now that is different to, a different licence condition where they're keeping up the recovery, compared to you're going to licenced premises, it's a breach of licence. Who's going to speak up if they have a relapse? No one. (Richard)

Rob argued that even using licence conditions to mandate access to support would be unhelpful, as recovery is only successful if the person wants to recover:

I was never pushed in that direction and my experience of GA is if people are pushed into the room, like if it's a wife or a husband that pushes their partner into the room and says, "You need to go and sort yourself out, you're going to GA every week." My experience of being in that room for the last 18 months is that that doesn't really work. You need to want to go, support yourself, so I don't feel as though you need to make it a mandatory condition. (Rob)

For others with established recoveries trying to get on with their lives, more demanding licence conditions would have been unhelpful and even stressful. Given that many people in our lived experience sample were professionals with no previous CJS involvement, their focus was on complying with probation and trying to move on as quickly as possible. Dawn, for example, reflecting on life while her husband was on licence, commented:

We knew it'd be short lived so I think that was what gave the motivation to look forward, whereas if it had've been two/three years I think I probably would've lost the will with it all because it was dysfunctional. It didn't really sit with the type of people that we are. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Although a handful of probation/HMPPS staff felt that licence conditions should be more tailored towards addressing gambling harms, most staff indicated that licence conditions are rarely used to deter harmful gambling behaviours, instead observing that in relation to gambling, they were used mainly for violent offences in gambling premises. One probation staff member in Wales expressed that licence conditions could be used to help obtain support for someone experiencing gambling harms, and as a way prevent a repeat of gambling-related crime:

If it was an offence that specifically demonstrates issues around gambling, making money, losing money, then they would ... there would be a requirement for them to work with certain charities to address those. If it's linked to their offending behaviour then there would be an ask for them, as part of their licence, to work with certain individuals to address those needs, so that they don't fall back into a cycle of offending or place themselves in a dangerous situation where it might lead to further offending or relapsing back into gambling, that could end in them going back to prison (007_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

While some probation staff highlighted the potential value of gambling-related licence conditions, others highlighted anticipated difficulties with imposing such conditions. Concerns were expressed about the challenges of monitoring and enforcement:

I think we do have those tools available to us within those licence conditions ... [but] ... they need to be manageable and monitorable. So, if we do make a stipulation that somebody shouldn't be doing something, how are we going to check that that's happening? Because without that it becomes a bit pointless. (014_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

Some staff also raised the issue of proportionality, especially given that gambling is a legal activity, while one person highlighted the need to avoid unintended consequences if any gambling-related conditions are not proportional:

What HMPPS are going to be concerned about, really, is, one, proportionality and something being achievable and realistic in some way. But the answer to that is yes, they could. Excluding somebody from certain premises could be done and I know that has been done certainly around public houses, things like that. I can envisage something around betting establishments. The

danger with that, of course, is then you might drive somebody to a loan shark or illegal gambling, so you've got to think carefully about that. (003_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Another challenge was identified as the danger of recall due to non-compliance of conditions, thereby taking people away from potential support:

We need to exercise caution here because there can be a sense of, 'Right, let's slap everything on here.' And all you're going to end up doing is have the person go back to court within a matter of weeks and months and then be sentenced to custody. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Staff also highlighted that people with gambling problems commonly need long-term support, and some felt that licence conditions that mandated access to support could present a cliff edge when the licence expired, leaving the person without any support. More fundamentally, some probation service staff highlighted that licence conditions can be ineffective in relation to addiction because recovery cannot be forced:

So, I think there's lots of reasons why it's very difficult ... logistically to monitor and enforce, but also there's that age-old question about compelling people to engage in treatment and how legally we can't do that, and even if we did I don't think it would be particularly successful. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Probation staff also commonly expressed the view that basics, such as housing, needed to be in place before PoP could meaningfully start to address addictive behaviours. Despite all these challenges, some probation staff believed licence conditions could be used to deter harmful gambling and reoffending:

You could put a condition on to say, 'I will attend an engage in appointments as directed by my supervising officer to reduce my gambling', something along those lines. (015_HMPPS_Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

So, in the cases where it's eminently provable that their offences are linked to gambling, you could maybe have something like they're required to sign up to GAMSTOP so they can't gamble online [...] maybe it'll make it harder to gamble online. It doesn't make it impossible. We know that. They could have some sort of order excluding them from betting shops, maybe, pass their photograph around to the local betting shops and say, 'This person's problematic.' Yeah. I don't know. I don't know where we'd stand on that, actually, linking in with the betting shops. But yeah, something along those lines on a case-by-case basis, that might work for someone and might not work for the next person. (018_HMPPS_Peer Mentor)

Some staff expressed the need for a more in-depth process of working with the person on probation to ensure their understanding of and commitment to their licence conditions. However, given the current challenges surrounding the delivery of probation work, and the ability of the service to work in this resource- and time-demanding way, this seems far off:

Talk to the person and get their buy in to self-exclude themselves from land sites. Do you see what I mean? Give them the knowledge, show them what's available, what do they think would be helpful and then get them to be really open and honest with you as much as possible, 'Have you been going, have you been walking past them regularly?' Get a diary of, 'Obviously you're not allowed in. Have you tried to go in? Have you tried to use them?' (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

6.1.3 Rehabilitation Activity Requirements

For those on a Community Order (or subject to requirements in the community following a suspended prison sentence), most of our PoP sample were given unpaid work and RAR days. None were required

to undergo mandatory gambling support from a CRS. One person on probation was given a requirement to undertake unpaid work when he already had a full-time job. He then had to go through the process of getting that requirement lifted. By contrast, another person on probation reported that probation carefully considered the type of community work that would best suit him and his prior professional experience and level of education.

As part of a Community Order, the courts can require that PoP engage with a number of RAR days. At court, the number of RAR will be stipulated, with the activities to be undertaken then decided by probation staff and the PoP once under supervision in the community:

The important thing is that they are for, if you like, purposeful activity. That's what's good about them, really, because clearly something around gambling would be great, that would fit absolutely. What's good about it is that they're not defined so if somebody has got an array of needs, if you've got ten or 15 days to work with, that's ten or 15 weeks, potentially, of intervention which could be pretty good. (003_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

The enthusiasm for RAR days of this member of the probation service was not widely shared by others. One staff member described the RAR system as a mess and a hangover from Transforming Rehabilitation, while another said the rules governing RAR were unclear. Probation 'Reset' was also described as placing more pressure on services because of the shorter timeframe for PoP to complete RAR days. In relation to gambling harms, the fundamental problem raised was the absence of gambling support services available from CRSs that could be used towards RAR days. Probation staff and stakeholders indicated that there are currently no specialist CRSs for gambling harms, and RAR rules do not allow non-commissioned services to be used due to the need for monitoring of attendance:

It comes back to judiciary, doesn't it? You need to know that if you give that as a requirement that there is the help and support out in the community to be able to deliver that requirement. It can't just be a bit of paper, there has to be some sort of pathways in place and treatment interventions in place to make that happen. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

There was also the worry that RAR could lead PoP to engage in other non-monitored harmful behaviours and a fundamental doubt about the effectiveness of RAR days to 'force' recovery, like the doubt raised about licence conditions to do the same. One member of staff spoke of the difference between attendance of mandatory RAR activities and proper engagement with those activities:

So, we would refer to, so once they're referred, CRS services can be enforceable appointments, so once referred we can enforce them non-attending of the appointment. They don't have to engage with the appointment. (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

Some staff highlighted how PoP who do not have RAR as part of their Community Order, but do have a genuine need for support, are not able to engage in services attached to the CRS pathways:

'Oh, well actually we've got a gambling need.' If they haven't got activity days we can't send them off, core would say, 'Well, you don't have any RAR days so we can't do that work.' Nonsense. (009_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

Given the absence of specialist gambling CRSs (discussed in more detail below), mental health and financial management support activities were often reportedly used as RAR days for people experiencing gambling harms:

Although there are lots of services that probation uses where they can send: it's not the same for gambling. I think they would just look at well, how can we manage your finances, I think. (010_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

One person in our sample was given general wellbeing-related tasks as RAR, even though these were essentially a repeat of the courses they had already done in custody. Liam was given 10 RAR days, which

were made up of wide range of activities. While he did report some were useful for exploring his gambling, none of the services he accessed had any specialist role in relation to gambling:

It might've been Mind [mental health charity] ... just the one session just for the RAR day. On top of that I've had a different counsellor – I can't remember who that was with. That was with the mental health liaison with probation, done a couple of sessions with them, one was a one-to-one, the other one was a phone call. One was about my general mental health and if they could advise anymore and they've given me links to the gambling as well for different people and for counselling as well. [...] It also came out at the end I had some financial issues 'cause I'd taken out some loans as well to help with the gambling and I had some financial issues, and through the RAR days they helped me organising that financially. (Liam)

Overall, Liam felt his probation officer was unsure how best to use the RAR days to support him, and it became an exercise in box ticking to get them signed off:

Sometimes it was a bit like, 'What are we gonna do with these days?' It's a bit like, 'Ah, well we've gotta do something.' It felt a bit like that sometimes, what's the best way to use them. [...] Well, you call them days, a half-hour conversation could be classed as one. They're not actually days they're just sessions. So, stuff around it could be an hour chat with someone or one of them was just a phone call and the phone call lasted five minutes – I can't even remember what that was for. That was just a sign-off at the end of one of them. That was to do with my self-esteem and my self-worth and my mental health around that, we done a few sessions and then the last one was just a quick phone call. As I say, sometimes it's a bit like, 'What can we do?' (Liam)

The absence of specialist gambling services attached to CRSs reflects the lower priority afforded to gambling harms across the CJS when compared with other addictions. Without the systematic screening of PoP for gambling harms throughout their criminal justice journey, there are no data relating to the scale of gambling support needs, and therefore no basis on which commissioning specialist services can be justified. As commented by a member of HMPPS staff:

You wouldn't push all that through unless you thought that there was a substantial amount of people that actually needed that requirement. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

6.2 Experiences of contact with community probation staff

6.2.1 People on probation

Among the people we interviewed who were given community sentences or those released into the community after custody, there were some positive experiences of contact with probation. Rachel, for example, received home visits from her community offender manager (COM) while her husband was receiving cancer treatment and they were unable to travel to the PDU. When Rachel was released from prison, she was fearful that being on probation would be as challenging and traumatic as custody had been. Instead, she found that:

When I actually walked in it was really nice. The people were very nice, the staff were very nice. It was quite nice. You were actually treated with more respect there than you were in prison, that's for sure! (Rachel)

Richard, who in contrast to most of our sample had had the same COM throughout his period of probation supervision, reported that he had managed to build a constructive and supportive relationship with him. As Richard worked within the gambling harms support sector, he used his time with his PP to educate him about gambling harms and when Richard finally finished his time on probation, he was even nominated for an award. Summing up his experience, he said:

He was alright, [...] to be fair, I haven't a bad ... I'll be honest, I haven't got a bad word against to say, my probation officer was good. (Richard)

Positive experiences with community probation depended upon luck: the luck of being assigned a COM who took the time to build a relationship with the PoP and show an interest in who they were and what they needed. Masom had a COM who took that time to understand him, while Liam also found that both of his COMs were empathetic:

They've both been very good, they're very empathetic listening. The first one knew more, she was more experienced, second one is a bit green I suppose. [...] she's got more ideas and knows more now than she did back a year ago. (Liam)

Like Liam, other people in our sample drew some distinction between probation staff who were older and more experienced and those that were new to the job:

The ones that I've been able to relate to more have been the older ones. And I think that ... there's not many of them now, not as many as there used to be, and there's definitely been a change in guard, in terms of people's ... ability to be able to perform the role that they wanted to do, I think. The older ones always seem to have a bit more empathy, seem to have a bit more knowledge around what's happening, what's available. (Billy)

Generally, but not always, the more experienced COMs were reported to provide better support. However, it was also clear that the personality of the individual PP was a determining factor, with PoP especially valuing non-judgmental, empathetic, and supportive approaches. Irfan's first COM, for example, was described as:

Super-nice, super, initially super-helpful, she was super-caring, she really wanted to get me off probation or she really wanted to help me out etc. And yeah, I was motivated, I was very motivated, 'cause I was like well, she's here to support me and that's what I need'. (Irfan)

Unfortunately, Irfan's experience soon turned sour, with little interest being shown in him and his (sometimes urgent) support needs by a later COM:

Not once did she call me, and she knew that the likelihood I could definitely go homeless and she didn't care, because her mind is, 'He's fine, he's not gonna commit another crime, is he? He's low risk, he's not gonna do anything, he's fine.' ... She never called me for an appointment. I contacted her to ask 'can I have an appointment' and that was ... when I was still on tag at that time, and after tag ... she never contacted me, never once, not for anything. [...] I poured my heart into that email, genuinely. [...] the fact that she didn't reply to that, she didn't care. (Irfan)

Inconsistencies owing to the skills, experience, and personalities of COMs contrast with a consistent feeling among our sample that they were atypical PoP and of low priority to the service. Irfan's observation that he was perceived as low risk because his crime was financial, and therefore not warranting attention, was widely shared. There was a commonly held perception that COMs saw them as an anomaly among their caseload: low risk, compliant, proactive, and unusual in their gambling-related offences. The atypical nature of these offenders is discussed in various places in this report, but here it is relevant to show how it impacted upon the amount and quality of the time they felt their COMs were prepared to assign to them:

He was just like, 'I know you're not going to cause any problems so I'm not going to force you to come here all the time.' It was just occasionally 'cause he wanted to check my book with the hours of the community service. (Vijay)

The feeling that I got is that she had a heavy caseload and there was people that needed her attention a lot more than me, I was doing absolutely fine. I think a lot of our conversations you'd be lucky if they lasted more than five minutes. [...] our phone calls were very short and she was

like, 'Yeah, you're doing amazing, you're doing great, off you go.' And she wasn't delving or asking more questions, probably gave me the sense that compared to other prisoners that she's probably got on her books I'm probably one of the phone calls that she's looking forward to because she knows she's not gonna have a load of work to do when she comes off the phone sorting housing and rehabilitating and whatever else. Although, there was gambling because I did go back to gambling after probation had finished. (Lily)

It's a lot more, as you say, understanding and sympathetic than I thought it would be. The probation officers are. But maybe that's just 'cause I complied and I've been quite easy and good. (Liam)

The focus of the probation service on high-risk offenders and urgent support needs was confirmed in our interviews with staff. Some members of staff who had been in the service for many years commented on the reduction in the amount of contact time they have with PoP, with their primary focus being on risk management and meeting essential needs, to the cost of rehabilitative work:

They don't see people as often so they don't have the time to spend, they don't build the relationships in the way they would have done in the past when they had more frequent contact, and they have to prioritise according to what is linked to risk of harm. (019_HMPPS_PDU Head/Deputy Head)

They're not being able to spend enough time with people on probation [...] I think it's just time. And now if you've got a caseload of 60 ... you can't spend 45 minutes with people every week 'cause that just doesn't add up in terms of time, so you've got to pick who are the ones you're most worried about. (001_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

They don't have the time to spend with the cases and do all of the best practice things that they should be doing, and it's a really difficult job. [...] you're having to spend all of your time on emergency things like releasing people from prison early, so you're trying to scramble round and find them accommodation. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

The educational and professional backgrounds of our lived experience sample were felt, by them, to influence the relationships that they developed with their COM. Masom used his professional standing and confidence to assert himself with his probation officer when the service mistakenly marked his attendance record as incomplete, demanding that senior staff get involved to clear up the mistake. Diane, as an ex-social worker, felt she was seen as an equal by her COM, while Rachel grew to describe her COM as an acquaintance:

He was far more busy, far more conscious over his diary being full. I got the impression he was talking to me as a colleague. [...] I got the impression he was thinking, 'Well, what I say, she knows.' [...] he knew I would be very easy, could go in, sign the book, bye. That was his time and he could probably go off and have a tea break. (Diane)

They didn't really need much time with me because I would go in there and we're just friendly people so you know, she was an acquaintance. (Rachel)

Because of the friendly relationship Rachel built with her COM, she even took her flowers and cake in their last meeting:

My last meeting with her, we took her a bunch of flowers and some chocolates, or some cake, and she couldn't believe it! She said everyone was going to be killing themselves laughing, that I was the first person to ever do something like that! (Rachel)

The perception that our PoP sample were 'easy' clients, who presented no risk to the community, appeared to be reflected in the quantity, frequency, and quality of time that most of them spent with

their probation officers. They generally reported very short appointments when meeting with their COMs:

20 minutes to 25 minutes I'm usually out the door again for a month. (Rob)

I'd just come in, show my face, sit down for two minutes and just go. (Vijay)

It was just very quick check ins, five minutes and that's it. There was no real questions about what's going on in life, work, and stuff like that. That was it. (Mark)

'Hi, tell me about yourself, what you been doing? OK, great. Any issues?' 'No.' 'Perfect.' They were getting shorter and shorter, the check ins. (Amanda)

'Are you up to no good? No? Ok. Fine. See you later?' (Mark)

George insisted that he had had virtually no contact at all with his COM, while, due to Covid, Lily never saw her PP in person. Similarly, Irfan and Mark reported that they had very little contact with their probation officers:

during that time did she contact me once, and even during Covid, why could she not call me? Why didn't she email me to see where I'm at, bearing in mind I've already told her about potentially going homeless at this point. So, I could ... not to make it exaggerated, but could have been dead, 'cause she wouldn't know. (Irfan)

I think I could probably count on my hands how many times I saw probation, overall, and it was probably five times, I probably had five interactions, maybe six at tops, with probation throughout that whole period [of 12 months], throughout that whole time that I was on supervision. (Mark)

The frequency of meetings with COMs also diminished rapidly for most people. For Liam, Probation Reset in 2024⁹ meant that his meetings ended ahead of schedule. For most, weekly contact very quickly shifted to monthly contact:

We went to two weeks, so it would be a phone call and an in-person meeting, so I could do that once a month, and I think from like August it just went down to in person once every month. (Richard)

Initially started seeing weekly, which then phased out over a period of a few months. But then, by the time I'd come off my tag, I was down to once every two or weeks, then eventually once a month by the end of my sentence. (Billy)

So I started off seeing her weekly and then after about 10 or 12 weeks it briefly went to fortnightly and then it went to monthly. (Rob)

For the entire year, with the probation officer and that was once a month every single month. [...] Face-to-face always. (Anna)

Basically he said to me, 'Well, I'm not quite certain what we can do here, my books are really busy. I've got a full diary. You'll just have to come once a week.' I think I went for about another two weeks, for ten minutes each time, and then he said, 'I think we'll leave it to once a month.' (Diane)

Some of our sample welcomed minimal contact because they were, as their COM correctly perceived, compliant, low-risk, and committed to getting on with their lives and recovery from gambling harms. Rob was one such person, self-directing his recovery and needing little support from probation:

⁹ See <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-03-11/hcws332>

I think because I've taken that proactive approach with them, she's basically left me to get on with my own recovery, rather than trying to drive courses or processes or whatever it might be, into me. ... It's basically the last third of your licence period is going to be still on licence but no requirement to go and actually interact with them, which again, doesn't really bother me either way but it's just meeting that you don't have to have I suppose. (Rob)

For Amanda, her monthly in-person short meetings were uncomfortable because she was one of the few women attending her probation office. She would not have welcomed more frequent visits:

You don't wanna engage in conversations with those people! <Laughs> And that's not being snobby or anything like that, it's just as I say, it was more men than women, the women would be outside waiting for the men, so it wasn't a case of it was a woman's environment. (Amanda)

In contrast, some of our sample expressed that they would have appreciated spending more time with their PP and receiving a higher level of support. Many indicated that they began probation supervision with high expectations that they would be given the support they needed. On occasions this related to gambling harms, but other times it was related to basic support needs such as housing and poor mental health. Irfan, for example, was feeling suicidal because he was about to be made homeless, yet despite his many phone calls and emails, his COM did not respond to his pleas for a meeting. He reported feeling continuously let down and sometimes angry about the support he received:

I really wanna see my probation officer and she doesn't wanna see me! (Irfan)

Paul also felt that he was given very little support from probation and that the service was 'tick-box' orientated:

You're just a number, you're a tick-box, how quickly can we get you in and out and job done? [...] 'You could be my saviour – no you can't 'cause you don't know anything because you haven't got the time or you haven't taken the time.' And they're both intertwined, I suppose, and will always come back to capacity. (Paul)

The probation staff we interviewed also confirmed that time, or the lack of it, was one of their greatest challenges and frustrations. Most recognised that they were unable to fully identify and fulfil the support needs of PoP, and that even if needs were identified, there was limited support that they could offer:

The day-to-day firefighting that the practitioners are doing is just making sure the public are protected and not the luxury of having the long conversations with people, like we all had when we trained, of being able to spend more time with the person individually. It's just firefighting. (036_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

We've got to sit at our desks, and do our assessments, and do all our write-ups and have them done in a certain time frame. Actually, it's stopping us from sitting there and really listening to people on probation because we've got, 'Sorry, look, I've got another one', I've gotta do the write-up, I've gotta do this, that and the other. It's very, very challenging. (012_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

The pressures of high caseloads, understaffing, and rapid changes in policy, resulting in the prioritisation of high-risk cases, when combined with the absence of processes and skills to identify gambling harms, meant that PoP with gambling harms received minimal support, time, and attention from the service:

There's time pressures and that time pressure will often mean something is neglected. Now why that's important with gambling is that it's largely hidden anyway. That means it gets doubly neglected. (003_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

It's something which is more niche and is not ... a really obvious need, and also people may well have gambling needs but we don't know because they don't tell us because they don't want to,

and we don't have the time to do intense one-to-one work and spend that time with those individuals and find it out, you're not going to know, are you? (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

An exception to the general trend of community probation having little time to give to low-risk offenders with gambling harms is Approved Premises (APs), where some PoP are housed after release from custody. APs, by their nature, mean that there is greater familiarity between staff and residents, more opportunities for the building of relationships, and more scope for staff to observe residents' behaviour:

It seems quite a lot of the time that because we see them so differently, like we see them around all the time and it's a slightly different setup, often we're trying to build those bridges between them and their probation practitioner that maybe aren't so solid yet. (022_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

AP staff appeared to be more familiar with harmful gambling behaviours among PoP compared to COMs, owing to the time spent with them in the residential setting (and no doubt their higher risk profile that may have led to AP accommodation in the first place). However, most PoP are not in APs. Moreover, most people with lived experience reported that they had often been supervised by several different PPs during their supervision. This meant that they had often spent very limited time with each member of staff, thereby limiting the opportunities for the PP to develop a full understanding of their risks and needs, and for the PoP and PP to develop a trusting and honest relationship. Where PoP had changed probation officers, most indicated that handovers between staff had not been well organised or supportive. Masom, for example, had six COMs within two years, with little evidence that information was effectively passed from one to another. Billy and Mark also reported similar experiences:

There was no handover either, [...] their protocol is that there should be a handover, there should be as much notice as possible, but the reality of it is, is it didn't happen for me and it doesn't for others. (Billy)

So I was going in once a week and then my probation officer just stopped responding, [...] And then nothing happened for a while, no communication, and then I was told that I would be moved to [...] probation office, and there was probably a gap of six or seven weeks before I saw someone again. (Mark)

The rapid turnover of probation staff made it difficult for some people to build up trusting relationships conducive to disclosing harmful or risky behaviours and support needs:

I think I had about five different probation officers in a very short period of time ... it would've been ... five over ten months, which is not an uncommon experience ... it's one of the most common issues that people have, is that consistency. It's hard enough to trust somebody, let alone whenever you start, you feel like you start over again ... (Billy)

The probation officer was constantly changing the first time, it would be every other time it would be somebody different ringing and as a female going through that for the first time it would've been nice to have some continuity with it, keeping it a bit more constant. (Helen)

The turnover of staff also meant that some of our sample had to repeat their stories over and over, with traumatic effect:

I did for the first couple and it's even more triggering 'cause you ... so let's say that's three or four months in, you've probably had enough time out to start to feel like you're reintegrating into society ... I was beginning to feel like a member of society again. Then to have to re-live that, even for me, it does, it triggers you. (Masom)

Reliability was frequently cited as a problem experienced by our sample of PoP. Many felt ill-informed and confused by appointments that were changed with no prior notice and responsible for chasing their

PP themselves. Given that they knew that a missed appointment could lead to recall, this resulted in considerable levels of stress and anxiety. Masom had contrasting experiences with two different COMs. One understood he had made a genuine mistake when he missed an appointment:

She knew that every Tuesday I help my parents with a prescription run to elderly parents and she phoned me about the next one and I forgot. She then phoned me at the time of the appointment and said, 'Are you coming in 'cause you're normally 20 minutes early?' And I was just completely honest with her and I said, 'Shit! I was on the prescription run – I haven't written it down.' She said, 'Do not panic. It's not going down as a miss. Can you come in later?' I said, 'Yeah.' She was like, 'Don't worry about it then.' (Masom)

Another COM was hostile and adamant that a missed appointment was Masom's fault when the fault in fact lay with the service:

She was just really, really hostile for no reason so I was just a bit of a ... I insisted on her boss, told her boss I had her boss's boss on the phone, which I didn't, and then she apologised afterwards, then the duty officer came and said, 'Look, can understand.' And she was quite open about it, she said, 'Look, we've had this with her in the past, I'm really sorry.' And that was that. But I had to be a bit of a prat about it when I did it. (Masom)

Other people in our sample had stories of appointments missed or changed through no fault of their own:

When I went into probation, that first day, my probation officer was actually not there. So, they were really scrambling to find somebody else for me to talk to. [...] I was petrified! All I knew was that I had to take photographs to show I was there, I just had to cover myself at all costs. [...] my first probation officer, as sweet as she was, I was chasing her for appointments. She would set up a date or something and then send a message that she'd cancelled and I was then chasing her to find out more. And it was a constant thing. I was constantly ... I was chasing her. (Rachel)

For Helen there was a mix-up over the end date of her probation, with her COM incorrectly asserting that would still be under supervision for another six months:

And when I thought it had finished, they were telling me, 'No, you've got another six months.' It's like, 'No, I haven't got another six months. My probation's finished.' They just didn't know what they were doing, didn't have a clue and it was all really frustrating. (Helen)

The picture painted by the above is of a probation service that is stretched to its limits, forced to focus upon the essential risk-based basics and thus neglecting the needs of PoP experiencing gambling harms. While PoP did report pockets of good practice, more common in their stories were inconsistencies in supervision and care. Overall, most of the PoP that we spoke to felt that they were very low priority. In practice, this meant that they were not given the time, consistency, and attention that many of them needed and wanted.

6.2.2 Affected others

Any contact that occurred between probation and the intimate partners we interviewed for this research was limited to basic probation procedures, such as home assessments. There were no explanations given to them of how to contact a PP or what supervision (or licence) periods would entail. Susan, the wife of a man on probation due to a gambling-related offence, contrasted her experience of contact with probation due to her husband's offence with her contact with probation due to the drug-related offences of her sister. Whereas there was considerable family involvement in her sister's case, during her husband's, her contact with probation was reported to have been very limited:

So, there was that bridging, there was that kind of real family involvement ... I think at one point they [probation] even invited everybody that ... a bit like a best interests meeting where they're

inviting everybody that would be involved in my sister's recovery moving forward, do you know what I mean? [...] It was just a different journey; it's just been a different journey to gambling. It's like I can't explain it to people, the differences are huge. (Susan, affected other)

Susan went on to explain why she felt the differences were so vast. She contrasted the in-depth knowledge of probation staff about substance use with their limited understanding of gambling and gambling harms. She also expressed the belief that probation appeared to see her husband as low-risk and therefore low priority. While she also highlighted the pressures currently being felt by probation services, she felt that this low interest in gambling-related cases meant that her husband received very limited support, and she was not involved at all. Indeed, the main contact she had with the service centred on the various initiatives she took to educate probation staff about gambling harms.

Gayle's experience of contact with probation services, also owing to her husband's gambling-related offence, was similarly described as entirely lacking. She never received any form of direct communication from them, but instead just a message passed on to her, via her husband, that she could contact them if she wished:

Because nobody communicated with me, [...] I think it comes down to being on edge and that nobody has spoken to me. Like I said before, it feels like I've done something wrong. (Gayle, Affected Other)

Gayle separated from her husband, and this may have had a part of play in the absence of any contact between her and probation. Sally indicated that she had a similar experience, after having separated from her husband due to gambling-related domestic abuse. She argued that a restraining order and their separation meant that probation would not communicate with her or listen to her attempts to get support for her husband:

We were separated, I tried to get in contact with probation, not wanting to have any information but to try and tell them [...] he needed help with his gambling and those issues, and nobody would speak to me. [...] they answered the phone, but because I had that order in place and because we were separated, it didn't matter that I was his wife. The security or the data protection or whatever was that they couldn't speak to me. (Sally, Affected Other)

Simon, like Sally, tried hard to get support for his wife while she was in prison, and also when she was released into the community. He tried to be proactive and contact her probation officer before their first visit so he could tell her about his wife's support needs, but recalled the following:

I remember battling to get through to her [COM] and battling for her to respond or to phone me. It took a while before I actually could speak to her and then when I did speak to her it was like that wasn't part of her job or maybe I just assumed that she wouldn't know everything about [my wife] and what she was going through. (Simon, Affected Other)

Dawn, by contrast, received a phone call from her husband's probation officer when he was released from prison, but reported that this was for the purpose of asking her to support her husband, rather than discussing how probation could support them:

I remember at that phone call the probation officer asking me what I was going to do to make sure he didn't gamble again, the onus was very much put onto me to make sure that that wasn't going to happen. [...] I didn't have any further interactions for support, for myself and having someone in recovery. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Generally, then, intimate partners of those convicted of gambling-related offences had little contact with probation in the community, and even less contact that was helpful to them. That said, Simon's experience of his wife's second community probation officer was better than his first. Despite Simon's wife's health being hugely impacted by her imprisonment, Simon was not, at first, allowed to

accompany her into the probation office during their visits. The second probation officer to manage his wife's case took a different approach and allowed him to also attend his wife's meetings in the PDU:

She [probation officer] never made me feel uncomfortable and always allowed me to be with [his wife] and I just went mainly for support, to make sure you are gonna get through this, and although there were times that I really didn't feel like going and taking [his wife], we just did it right till the end and it was really fine. (Simon, Affected Other)

Simon's positive experience with this particular probation officer appeared to be an exception among family members.

6.3 Training on gambling harms

Most probation staff indicated that they had not received, or been offered, training in relation to gambling or gambling harms. Of those who had, many indicated that they had sought this out (often following a specific case) or that they had engaged with voluntary training because it was of interest and they could see its relevance. The provision of training to probation staff appears to be very inconsistent across the different probation regions, and often dependent on key champions and/or the efforts of local gambling services. It was apparent that considerable efforts had gone into staff training in the Wales region, but even there, staff still expressed that inconsistent practice remained, with one staff member indicating that more training was still needed, particularly in relation to where PoP could be signposted for more tailored support:

The pockets of good practice are there and sometimes you'll find a probation officer that has made it their purpose to go out and get some training to understand what sort of questions to ask for to pick up some of the signs [...] most staff wanted more training, they felt that even if they had asked the questions they wouldn't know where to signpost somebody to actually get some help. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

The need for probation staff to be trained on gambling harms was widely recognised by the staff we interviewed, and indeed where training had been provided, it was argued that more was needed for it to make an impact:

Within finance and debt you explore it, within emotional wellbeing you'd explore it, but asking practitioners to do that without having the knowledge of having the awareness of gambling harms is a big ask. (031_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

I've never been trained on gambling awareness, for example, so I don't particularly know how staff would be confident in how you think about that and how you ask the questions and dig deeper. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

But it still was something that didn't have enough; it wasn't embedded in our practice, that's what I'm trying to say. It was something that people were given insight into but it wasn't embedded in our practice. (020_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Without access to training, some of the members of staff we spoke to had taken it upon themselves to find information on gambling harms through internet searches and watching online videos:

I know of videos that would be really helpful to watch in relation to gambling harms that are from research studies and so on, but they're not, to my knowledge, on Equip, I've found them through Googling them and links I have. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Staff argued that training on gambling harms needed to focus more clearly on how to ask the right questions:

the big takeaway piece for that is how you take a social history. That's the same skillset and actually if we can get things like that right, identifying something like gambling would be easier. (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

'Why are they here?' That should be your question: Why are you here? In terms of the gambling question and every single person that I've spoke to I said, 'Right, they said no, but if you wanted to explore that more would you know what to do with it?' And they didn't. So, very much identified as a need to do some raise awareness, to do some training for staff so they know how to progress that. (009_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

In addition, it was argued that staff's attitudes toward gambling would need to be questioned and challenged during training so they would feel comfortable asking about it:

we currently live in an environment where gambling is so normalised, and especially within sport it's so insidious [...] Oh, everybody drinks, everyone has a flutter on the Grand National, it's not a big deal, and we haven't really spoken about that side of it [...] if we're going to be training staff so they're confident in addressing gambling, you'd need the training to explore how you deal with that attitude and maybe even examining their own attitudes around whether gambling's ... not acceptable, but harmful, I suppose. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Lived experience was also argued to be key to impactful and effective training:

lived experience in all the training is the take away with people, the lived experience stories, they are the stories that really set the training into context but also what people remember. (020_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

In Wales, our focus group with court staff revealed the need for training relating to gambling to more clearly focus on the potential risks that gambling may present for PoP and for probation staff to develop a much fuller understanding of the very serious harms that may follow from someone gambling:

It has three layers of risk and it looks at the different types of offending and where those risks may be at. It's not about necessarily risks of serious harm from a probation perspective, but risks that are harm from a gambling perspective. So this is where I mentioned before about serious organised crime; you wouldn't necessarily think that gambling maybe linked to that or domestic abuse. We know that we've got the financial abuse that comes under one of those identifiers, but it can be a significant thing there in terms of those harms. [...] also the links to women as well, and it's not just the harms of the individual that's involved in gambling, but also those that are in their family, so the wider circle, isn't it? And how they're being impacted in terms of gambling harms. (028_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

Challenges to providing training on gambling harms were identified, however. These included workload pressures, especially in the context of Reset. For new recruits, the existing scope of their training was felt to be huge already, without them having to learn about gambling harms:

I think the challenge is, when you look at what a person coming into the service, a new entrant has to learn about, they have to learn about the whole criminal justice system, in a sense ... It's actually very overwhelming, the skills and theory you have to get and the different policy and the policy keeps changing and the laws keep changing. And so whenever you know anything you still don't know it and then it's updated, and actually you use so much time to keep ahead and abreast of that so a lot of the learning is in your office between peers with your immediate managers and you'll have some SPOCs, Single Point of Contact, which are like the expert people that should be keeping abreast of that stuff in their particular specialist area. [...] I just felt it's so much. Within that you get a, not a new area, it shouldn't be a new area but a new area pops up and it's not until there's training that's part of your, you have to do it, it's mandatory

rather than an option, that then it starts to become something that's in your mind when you're doing assessing. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Staff also highlighted the challenges that follow from online (PQiP) training and the consequences of hybrid working arrangements leading to *all* probation staff having less contact with each other, and therefore fewer informal opportunities for dialogue and learning. This mirrors one of the concerns shared by a CRS worker that opportunities to meet, discuss, and engage with probation staff were very limited, and that work was often undertaken very separately and was reliant on the Refer and Monitor (RAM) reporting system. Changes in training protocols were also observed by staff, with online eLearning now being the norm for most training, though currently some of gambling harms training being delivered in England and Wales is in person:

Training isn't training anymore, it's this eLearning. We have just started to do some face-to-face, which is great, 'cause to me that's proper training. [...] the training's very different now, it's very quick, very intense and very basic, in my opinion. It's not like the old school training I call it. [...] around gambling I was like, 'Well, I always ask more questions. I always have done.' But that's because when I did my training I trained as a social worker (009_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

The perception that there is a relatively low prevalence of gambling harms was also suggested as a barrier to providing training opportunities. The loss of time and associated costs of training were felt to be too great to be warranted by gambling harms:

There's so much that probation staff have to consider and all of this new stuff that's going on all of the time, if it's a kind of service that's only going to be in reach for a handful, maybe one or two of their cases, it's not the kind of thing that's going to stay in their brain. So, it's really difficult to engage with staff about this. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

That raises another whole lot of problems because obviously that's staff training and there's a cost implication to that; asking the questions itself is another resource intensive thing to think about. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

This last quote highlights how staff were concerned not only about the time involved with attending training, but also the limited time available to put any training into practice. Several staff indicated that unless training on gambling harms was mandatory, then it was unlikely that staff would engage and find time for it:

Unless you had the time and the inclination to do that [find services] on top of what is probably an extremely busy job and, in my view, a lot of staff do things when they're told to do things and when it's mandatory; when it's voluntary you'll get some good guys but not everybody will be in that position. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

6.4 Understanding of gambling-related offending and gambling harms among community probation staff

The PoP we interviewed overwhelmingly felt that community PPs had very limited understanding of gambling behaviours and harms, of their relationship to offending, and of how difficult they can be to manage and overcome:

So she had an interest in what I was doing, but maybe knew nothing about anything, never said, 'Oh, could you give us some more information?' She just knew nothing. (Amanda)

[He] basically said I'm learning off you here but I would always go in and show him stuff what I would do, and I would send him in stuff, and I'd go in and say how many groups I've attended this week, any counselling support. So he was very good like that. However, their knowledge wasn't that good. (Richard)

There was very little understanding [...] probation had no idea about gambling, and I was telling them. (Rachel)

The perceived lack of understanding about gambling behaviours and gambling harms was evidently met with frustration and disappointment from some participants:

I'm 100% certain she didn't have any knowledge about gambling, no chance in hell. [...] 100% believe she didn't know a single thing, or she still to this day knows nothing about gambling. If I were to contact her, she still wouldn't know, I'm certain of it. (Irfan)

I have had conversations with probation about gambling, and in some ways they really don't get it. They don't really get it. (Jay)

The probation officer I've got now, I've asked her what she understands of gambling harms and everything, she didn't really have nothing to say. I don't think they understand. I seriously don't think they understand. (Helen)

While some members of probation staff we interviewed illustrated high levels of understanding about gambling harms and gambling-related offending, this is likely to reflect our sample of staff, some of whom were in roles related to gambling, while others may have opted to take part in the research because of an increased interest in, or understanding of, gambling. Many of these staff were less confident about the extent to which frontline practitioners in the community would possess similar levels of understanding (or have the time to acquire that understanding or adequately explore it in their caseloads), and this is reflected in the above testimonies.

6.4.1 Staff perceptions of the links between gambling, crime, and risk

Given the lack of mandatory training on gambling harms, it is unsurprising that levels of interest in and concern about gambling behaviours and the harms that may result (including crime) varied considerably among our staff sample. Most of the probation staff we interviewed had, at least for a portion of their probation careers, held caseloads. Those whose caseloads had included people experiencing gambling harms showed sometimes nuanced and thorough understandings of those harms, as did the small number of HMPPS staff who disclosed their own lived experience of gambling harms.

Among staff who did not have professional or personal experience of gambling harms, many were able to speculate about how gambling could impact on PoP and may be linked to offending. Several staff made links between drug dealing, theft, and shoplifting to fund gambling activity or to repay gambling-related debt. Other links to crime made by HMPPS staff included gambling-related domestic violence, child neglect, organised crime, dog fighting, and forms of illegal gambling:

But dog fighting, gambling will always be an underlying factor of that. I've seen lots of service users bring those kinds of dogs to the office (003_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

So, thinking about a typical Saturday down the pub where problem behaviours would be, they'd be gambling, drinking, cocaine use, domestic abuse 'cause when they get home they've lost all the money and there's an argument with their partners. So, it's that. My crossover would be with that. And then we can get to the extreme, where it's to the point where someone's gambling's so problematic that they're losing all of their money, so then how do they fund themselves? And that's when it gets into petty theft and crimes such as that. (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

Illegal gambling but that's all part of the mix. That is definitely there somewhere, I don't know where, but it just struck me (003_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

But I could imagine that if a family, for example, is suffering because of financial issues linked to gambling, then if they have a child, that child might be going to school with no food, then they're

stealing food or they're ... they feel that they have to commit crimes, because of their current circumstances and the situation that they're in. (007_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

Although PPs were able to speculate about the links between gambling and crime, they most often also acknowledged that unless a person's index offence was directly linked to gambling and had been made explicit in the case files, it was highly likely gambling would be 'hidden' and they would remain ignorant of it:

I think gambling didn't really come up, or if it did, it was actually quite hidden. We don't necessarily have anybody that comes to probation, or I haven't had much experience of anyone that's come to probation necessarily directly because of gambling. (001_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

Even when harmful gambling behaviours and offending were known, one member of staff revealed that because such people were considered as low risk, then working with them to understand their gambling would not be a priority:

The guy that walks in who looks like he's had a good job and sensible, it's a prejudice, but you're thinking, 'He'll be alright. <Chuckles> He won't come back round. We'll give him a bit of attention but it's gonna be...' and most likely, I don't know, I'm just trying to think. Are those people coming back and forth or do they come in once and then go out and their risk of reoffending stays low because they're not... I don't know if they're revolving door type people or not, if you see what I mean? And that would be really interesting because if they are then we should be putting more resources on them. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

A key finding across the research was the perception, held by people with lived experience as well as many HMPPS staff, that gambling harms represent lower priorities in probation work, and are commonly secondary (or absent) concerns in relation to other behaviours, including violence and substance use. These perceptions appeared to follow from probation staff's limited understanding of gambling harms and a belief that gambling does not contribute significantly to people's risk, with risk management being the key priority for probation services.

6.4.2 Perceptions of the harms caused by gambling

The assumption that gambling does not heighten risk levels was challenged by some staff. Some recognised that gambling harms and gambling-related offending do not just centre on money but could present significant risks to PoP, their families, and wider communities:

I think you could've assaulted someone and have a gambling harm and you could've done that out of whatever, frustrations or for other reasons potentially. So I think, yeah, we're missing the asking the question from everyone, no matter what the age, the gender and all of that kind of stuff as well. (012_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

Staff were also able to speculate about the potential impacts of gambling, such as poor mental health, alcohol use, and relationship breakdown:

It can be mental health, can't it, debts, it can be domestic violence, it can be relationships, can't it? It breaks relationships, doesn't it, and the harm that causes then ... to the family members, including young children. (002_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

So gambling is predominantly a male boisterous pastime, so the football bets, the forces etc. And then that's linked with other behaviours such as alcohol use etc. I think some of the challenge and the change is online, shifting to that online world, but it still very much marries, right? (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

I just think gambling amongst a cohort of people who are less likely to have high incomes is likely to have a devastating effect on them. If someone was to lose their benefits for the month or something like that, or the fortnight, by going to the bookies and chucking it all in the machines in there or all on the horses, I can see how that person would then be laid quite low, and definitely it could contribute to reoffending. (018_HMPPS, Peer Mentor)

A handful of staff drew attention to the implications of gambling to a person's mental health, occasionally highlighting the high levels of suicide, self-harm, and suicide ideation among PoP, speculating that that its worst, a gambling problem could contribute to suicide or suicide ideation. Others indicated an awareness of how harmful gambling could present challenges to wider family members:

I think what's wrong there is that we do have to be aware of people's risk to themselves, that's very significant as well on prison populations and probation. That's being missed, I think, if you haven't got a good understanding of what financial harm really means and how that impacts people, but also it's not just financial harm, it harms in terms of mental health of the partner and the finances of the family. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

While gambling behaviours and associated harms remained 'hidden' for many staff, those who did recall managing people with gambling harms demonstrated a greater understanding of the complexities and risks associated with gambling. One member of staff (notably a PQiP) explained how online gambling could pose a risk to a Registered Sex Offender (RSO) as well as how gambling can have a problematic relationship with alcohol use:

If we've got an RSO and he's gambling online, then there's that risk, isn't there, of that dark web popups coming up and that temptation. 'I've run out of money on this site; I'll click onto this site,' and then before you know it, you're down that hole. With others it's more to do with the buzz and the feeling you get from gambling, so [...] he was saying to me that he got a buzz from dealing drugs, and now he gets his buzz from gambling, and it's like ... switching one for the other. [...] it can impact substances, like, 'I've lost 100 quid today so I'm gonna have a beer to commiserate' or 'I've won £1,000 today so I'm going to go out and buy a bottle of champagne to celebrate' so it kind of ... swings both ways. (015_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

Other members of staff had experienced observing gambling harms in particular communities:

Some people openly say, 'This is against my religion, it's against my belief, I've promised I won't do this anymore.' There's many different reasons why they shouldn't be doing it that they claim, but then they're still doing it because they get something from it. Whether it's the buzz or whether it is trying to win money, whether it's to escape homelife, it can be anything, it could be a recent passing of a family member. There's so many explanations, but it's the same with alcohol and drugs. (017_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

Several staff expressed concerns about the possible links between neurodiverse people and harmful gambling. Indeed, one staff member highlighted:

I've worked with quite a few autistic lads who are quite open about their need for gambling – fascinating! A chap who very much got involved with Bitcoin and just the nature of the way his brain works, he finds it a puzzle to work out and has made a fortune at it, but admits that he's now hooked. He's addicted to this network of Bitcoin investing. So yes, lots to do in terms of neurodiversity. (031_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

Also with a nuanced understanding, stemming from their professional experience of working with women on probation, one member of staff described how women who gamble can be both perpetrators and victims of gambling-related domestic abuse, and how gambling can lead to violence towards parents:

Women being both perpetrator and victim as well is kind of highlighted when you start looking at those probation service users that have not just stolen money but been involved in criminal activity because they've got debt to clear and some of it's been coercion and very much related to the context of abusive partners. But also with children, so I'm aware, I've had cases that was probably... and you don't view it as gambling so much, I guess, 'cause again it's in the context. I'm thinking of their sons that have been violent towards them and have demanded money from them and have got in debt and have gone through their parents' funds in order to pay and clear some of that debt. (031_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

Some of the staff we interviewed also had their own lived experiences owing to a family member's harmful gambling. They displayed predictably high levels of understanding of the impacts that gambling can have, and argued that lived experience was essential to having a real understanding:

A lot of people who don't gamble have trouble understanding [...] gambling harms and how people have become addicted to gambling (008_HMPPS, Court Administrator)

Finally, there also appeared to be regional variations in the levels of understanding and interest shown by probation staff. In Wales, where the probation service has been investing resources into improving its response to gambling harms, staff who had accessed training were keen to demonstrate that they understood both the dynamics of gambling harms and their potentially serious implications for crime:

Linking to some of the serious organised crime, trying to generate the finances to fund not only the substance misuse but also might be the gambling, and with the domestic abuse you've got, like you said, the financial harm that might come there, so the family money, the incoming [money] for the family being spent on gambling and then you're seeing other behaviours that come up that might be the physical / emotional / psychological harms, so it's a factor. So, in itself it's not the sole cause but it can be one of those factors that you might see that is linked to those more serious offences. (028_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

6.5 Gambling and Approved Premises in the community

While research has started to explore the prevalence of gambling in prisons and the cultures that may surround it, to our knowledge, no research has explored gambling behaviours or cultures among people involved with probation within APs. HMPPS staff based in APs demonstrated a higher degree of insight into gambling behaviour and gambling harms than we observed among other staff involved with probation work, most likely because of the increased contact these staff may have with their residents. In addition, APs are often located in deprived areas where betting shops, gaming centres and arcades may be clustered and AP staff highlighted how nearby land-based gambling premises are potentially welcoming, warm spaces where PoP can interact with other people and where they may feel anonymous and less stigmatised:

I think when you look at fuel poverty and things like that, those issues have been around for a long time, not just recently, certainly for our cohort anyway. If you're living in a flat or you don't have a stable place to live, a betting shop is quite a helpful venue just to meet somebody and just stay out of the cold for an hour or two, you know. I wouldn't underestimate that. And, again, if you're there you might be tempted to spend what money you have on gambling. (003_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Some probation staff highlighted how boredom could also play a key role in the decision by AP residents to gamble, while potential underlying causes of harmful gambling behaviours, such as poverty and major sporting events, were also explored in a speculative manner:

They're all living with a bookies down the road so it probably doesn't even matter whether they've got gambling harms, they could all retreat to that type of behaviour out of boredom. (012_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

We did notice that during the Euros and the football, people were going up there to put bets on the football team. So, when there's a big sports tournament they tend to increase, I think, with gambling. (029_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

Our focus group with AP staff revealed their concerns surrounding PoP being inherent risk takers, making them vulnerable to harmful gambling. Indeed, one AP staff member observed:

If they've got no money, they will take the risk with the little they've got, to try and get more. [...] their future is tomorrow, not what's happening in a month's time, six months' time, a year's time. (023_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

APs themselves were described as potentially risky environments for people with a gambling problem because, in contrast to drug and alcohol use, gambling is not a banned activity or monitored in the same way. Some staff felt that residents may be more inclined to 'take up' or 'switch' to gambling because it is legal, unmonitored, and readily accessible online or in premises near to the AP. Some staff also raised concerns that the AP environment may also serve to provide a 'safety net' to residents, encouraging gambling behaviours:

What I've experienced is if anybody's got a gambling addiction it's usually ... where they switch sometimes from drugs to alcohol, it will be a substitute for that, so they've usually got other addictive habits as well [...] they get fed here, there's always food, they've got a roof over their head, they've got all the comforts that you would have in your own home. And it is their home. So, it's not like, 'Well if I lose all that money, I can't pay my rent,' or 'I can't pay my mortgage. I can't pay the gas bill, the electricity bill, so I won't have any TV. They've still got all that so the risk is worth it. It's worth it because they've just got to wait for the next lot of benefit money to come in. I mean obviously there's other implications, I'm not saying that. I'm just saying regarding pay check to pay check or, if we lost all of our money then how would you pay your rent, your mortgage, your electricity, everything, your water, they don't have that worry while they're here, so they've got less to lose, haven't they, and more reasons to gamble. (037_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

The consequences of gambling in APs were also widely understood by staff as varying between health harms, poverty, reoffending, arguments, and debts, sometimes with the debts being to the AP itself, which would stay with the person in the long term and make their reintegration back into society more difficult:

If there was a win coming through, they'd often want to share it with their new-found friends in the AP, and yeah, people would come back under the influence of all sorts. [...] you can just see a big decline in their presentation in terms of just keeping clean, losing weight 'cause they haven't got money to eat food and get snacks, so you can actually see people going downhill, but then you do see at the other end that if they're not gamblers they're going out getting takeaways and they're putting on loads of weight! So you see different sides. (025_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

They're going in, blowing their money, they can't pay their rent and this, that and the other. And that can lead then to, I don't know, arguments, frustrations potentially within the approved premises, which then has a knock-on effect on are they gonna go and do something that's criminal in that sense. There are examples of that and that definitely does happen (012_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

In similar ways to that observed in prisons, several staff highlighted that gambling behaviour among residents could lead to increased tensions because of debts associated to gambling or because some residents would encourage others to also gamble and/or celebrate a win:

We see quite a lot of borrowing of money and it not getting paid back, and tensions arising from that. That's just one of the things. And getting other people sucked in, if somebody's had a win, encouraging others. (023_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

Finally, the long-term consequences of a gambling problem were also mentioned if it were not addressed or indeed became worst during a stay at an AP:

How are they going to sustain a tenancy when they move on? How are they going to prioritise bills and shopping for food and that? because there isn't that support around them when they move on, so I feel unless it's addressed it's almost hopeless for them. (023_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

6.6 Asking about gambling harms

Most probation staff based in the community acknowledged that it would often be by chance that they may find out about gambling harms. This follows from the lack of dedicated screening questions, the limited time available for in-depth conversations with PoP, and an unwillingness (or lack of confidence) to explore gambling further. Staff acknowledged that questions on gambling tended to be asked when the harms were obvious, for example when there was a gambling-related offence in the case notes or a record of it on OASys:

So, there were three ways we could find out – money advice, person telling me, [...] or if we were really diligent, we managed to tease it out from OASys. (003_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

It was also argued that questions about gambling were more likely to be asked of people who had committed acquisitive crimes:

I think that would be the general consensus, if you were talking to staff now and managers, staff would probably slightly be more inclined to explore that, maybe, if it was a person on probation who had committed a theft from an employee or fraud or something like that because that's what's associated a bit more with the gambling. But I think we're missing something there because I don't think that is just necessarily the case. (012_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

The next quote, from a member of probation staff, illustrates a theme that runs throughout this report: if you don't ask about gambling harms, you don't see gambling harms, and if you don't see gambling harms then you assume they are not there:

'What did you find?' And very often it's like well, didn't really look at it, didn't see anything about it, didn't ask. So really it's not there. It really isn't there. (010_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Our lived experience sample, when reflecting on their interactions with their COMs, consistently reported that staff didn't know how to ask them about their gambling behaviours, harms, and support needs. Even the most basic questions about gambling were not asked:

They just assume I'm not and I would tell them if I was. They don't say, 'Have you gambled?' or anything like that, no specific questions (Liam)

Obviously, she would ask how I was, but it was never, 'Have you gambled, how's your gambling, how's your urges?' Nothing at all. [...] no one asked me, 'Have you gambled' when I went back to probation. Had that have been drugs, there would have been, 'Are you clean?' and you know, but there was no questions around [the gambling]. (Amanda)

There was no acknowledgement of the gambling issue. There was no discussions, there was no conversation, there was no check-in about that specifically. It was almost like they had no record of exactly what had happened and what I'd done. (Mark)

For some people, the absence of questioning meant that their gambling harms and support needs remained hidden or unacknowledged, despite their gambling-related offence. Lived experience participants indicated that they were unlikely to raise the issue themselves because they wanted as little contact with probation as possible, because they felt they already had access to the support they needed, or because they perceived there was little point because probation services would be unable to offer any help. Paul, who had waited three years between his arrest and conviction for a gambling-related offence, explained:

There was no discussion of anything, and it took three years from being charged to being sentenced, so that's quite a big spell of living in limbo. There just didn't seem to be any concern around, 'Why has this guy got himself into the situation, what's going on for him?' It was kind of, 'Well, now we've got him sentenced, now we've got him down, that's it.' (Paul)

Other PoP, however, reported that they did provide information about their gambling and the harms it had caused without being asked to do so. However, these same participants often also indicated that their COM appeared to have limited interest in finding out more about their gambling, and that it was often overlooked or not subject to any meaningful discussion:

And I didn't see them as being very good at trying to find out more about things. They didn't say, 'What would you suggest would be the road-signs we should be putting up to help people, to post them in the right direction?' None of it was ever done. It was always, always me telling them. (Rachel)

They asked me about financials but they didn't ask me about gambling at all, there wasn't even a question. It then became quite apparent, because I spoke about it more than anything else, that there was never any awareness shall we say. (Masom)

While some participants did report that their COMs had asked about gambling, where this had occurred, most felt that the questions they had been asked had been perfunctory, with little probing. This accords with the 'tick box' approach of probation described elsewhere in this report and is described here by Lily:

It was never really talked about in any length other than maybe the one question, 'Have you gambled this week?' 'No.' 'OK, let's move on.' [...] It wasn't even a question that was asked of me weekly or every fortnight. I think it might've been asked in the beginning and then maybe thrown in there maybe once over a three month period. It wasn't a religious question that I was asked every week. (Lily)

Lily's observation that she was questioned only sporadically about her gambling was reflected in our interviews with staff. On one occasion, a HMPPS staff member highlighted the need to ask relevant questions about gambling at multiple touchpoints throughout the probation journey, but that this was something that did not usually happen:

So having a system where we keep checking in and asking the same questions is important, so it's not just we ask that on day one because on day one I might not be comfortable to disclose everything to somebody I've just met who I've no idea whether their best intentions for me or not and yet they want me to tell them my life story and give them all the dark secrets about me. I'd be very wary of that. So I suppose having those points within any sentence or any review that we keep chipping away and asking those questions again. (014_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

Without the systematic capture of information about a person's gambling harms through OASys and NDelius (and CRS data systems), and without systematic regular questioning of PoP about possible gambling behaviours and harms, there is no consistency in whether or how questions are asked. When staff do enquire about gambling, they do so in ways that vary from one staff member to another, reflecting their varying levels of experience, skills, training, empathy, and interest.

Where practices appeared to be better, this was because PPs had had impactful professional or personal experiences of gambling harms. Indeed, one member of staff with lived experience reflected how that lived experience meant gambling was always on their radar:

[I've] seen one of my best friends get into it, and stuff like that, it's a very scary, dark hole you can go down and it's not really highlighted enough compared to other addictions people may have [...] I do always try to ask 'cause that's what I mostly know about before coming into this job. (017_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

This same member of staff illustrated the type of questions they would use when asking about gambling:

I will always ask the relevant questions and just be like, 'What do you get up to on a weekend?' 'cause a lot of people go to the betting shops on a weekend, try and get them to say what their routine is and they might give me something and be like, 'Oh, what's your bet on' or 'how much' and it stems from there. That's how I do it though. I couldn't tell you how everyone else is, but that's just my opinion. (017_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

Another member of probation staff we interviewed recalled a historic case of gambling harms, demonstrating the considerable time and skill that was necessary to develop trust, and then uncover the gambling harms being experienced by the person on probation:

It seemed like there was something that he wasn't telling me, and because I was seeing him weekly and we were focusing ... I was in the fortunate position where I could actually spend a bit of time doing offence-focused work with him, but also it was very conversational, we were talking and it was just trying to get him to explain to me about his relationship and why this had happened, because he was clearly someone ... he wanted to be with her, he didn't want his daughter to be witnessing domestic violence, but I couldn't work it out, 'cause it was money problems, and he had a really good job! I said, 'I don't understand. You've got such a good job.' [...] I'd clearly broken that barrier where actually he was willing to disclose what was actually going on. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Other members of staff also described the skills, consistency, and continuity needed in order to achieve a disclosure of gambling harms:

If I was sat with one of my probation officers and I was in the room there you'd be really listening out for the moment where you could perhaps ask a question that would be linked to this, but you can only do that if you're aware of it in the first place. You may not have a list but there's something there, you've had the training, you've got the experience and just active listening and you pick something up in your file system in your head. It's the same as selling somebody something really, you're listening out for those things, so it's very important to be in the correct place at the correct time and asking the right questions. (020_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

It is about having those conversations and having the starting point somewhere and just building on it every time you see them and have a keyword, just bring it into the conversation. (037_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

It's about building a rapport with the person, isn't it? It's about ... it's their time to rehabilitate. Like I said, if you explore and things don't add up, we need to challenge. (002_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

In Wales, some probation staff have received gambling harms training and there is a greater momentum towards addressing gambling harms among PoP. Inconsistencies are apparent, therefore, not just between individual members of staff but also between PDUs and regions. One member of the Wales service described how they would explore an offence to see if gambling played a role:

So for every offence there's a build-up why that offence occurred. It doesn't always mean to say that you've stolen £20 from somebody's purse, that's the offence; what led up to that offence, why did you want that £20, what was that £20 for? Was it for food, was it ... So that theft is for us workers to explore, explore what led up to the offence. (002_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

It is also clear that opportunities are being missed to talk about gambling when PoP in the community are in financial difficulties, because some staff are failing to understand the connection between gambling and financial problems. One member of staff commented that there is an assumption that everyone on probation has financial problems and therefore there is a lack of curiosity about the reason for those problems:

I don't feel that our staff are particularly thinking about asking questions about that, in the way that they perhaps are about other areas of ... substance misuse is, I think, really clear; mental health, relationships and they will ask about financial situations. I don't think we're great at really breaking it down to understand what some of the barriers are or the issues are in terms of someone's financial management. I get the feeling that we assume that the people we work with aren't great at managing their money or have a very small income and that's why they might have financial problems, rather than going much further into it and really understanding if gambling is part of that. (019_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

A member of staff from an AP illustrated this:

I've been in this role for 2.5 years and I've had loads of conversations round financial management. I've not had a single conversation about gambling, and I'm sure that I've worked with people where that would have been a useful conversation [...] We wouldn't know unless either they self-disclosed or it was apparent that hang on, you had £300 yesterday, where's that gone? And then they might say, 'Mm, actually ...' (024_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

Aside from the easily hidden nature of gambling, another reason for the lack of questioning about it was argued to be the normalisation and legality of gambling as an activity. Some staff argued that they felt uncomfortable questioning behaviours that are legal and asking people how they spend their money:

It's like it's not necessarily an illegal activity and it could come across as quite intrusive, and maybe that's the barrier there but then drinking's not illegal when you ask people how much they drink and how often and who and when and where and all that sort of thing. (015_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

As it's not illegal, they may feel it's not legitimate but they should still have the skillset to bring that up as part of a conversation in supervision anyway. (035_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

But I sometimes think it's about ... it's not illegal. So gambling isn't illegal. And that line between professional curiosity and nosiness, and ... there's something about a legitimacy to asking some things. (019_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

I don't think we quite know what to do because on the one hand this is people are entitled to this money. It's the, it's their, it's their money. And but but what are people doing with that? (021_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

Other members of staff described how an addiction to gambling remains taboo, therefore making questioning difficult, while one member of staff argued that gambling can be a working-class activity and they would worry that, as a middle-class professional, any questions about gambling would feel like a criticism of the PoP:

It's a taboo, I think gambling is still something that's not being brought up to the forefront really, like people discuss their alcohol addiction and drug addiction. But gambling, it's still a taboo. I

dunno why. I don't know if it's more of like people don't go to the betting shop as much and they do it online, it's more of a problem. (002_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

In terms of looking at those that live in deprived areas that are more likely to be gambling, is there something about that class system that we don't like. I'm often aware that I sound like a white middle class woman and so to be sat in front of somebody and I'm asking them... they're not gonna want me to criticise. It's that critical eye, isn't it? You don't want to be criticised any more than you have to be so that shame and guilt overrides what you disclose. (031_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

Another member of staff argued that the secretive nature of the addiction itself meant that staff do not have the time and skills to uncover it. They made the case that given the time pressures on staff, outside agencies are now better placed to uncover those harms, yet as discussed elsewhere in this report, there are no CRS pathways for gambling harms, so it often remains unknown whether outside agencies have the requisite skills:

I think for someone coming into it with those emotional blocks to being open about it, I think being very secretive, you've been deceitful, those things, sort of traits of that addiction, not all addictions but that one particularly as well, you're really gonna need that work. And probably that is realistically best suited to an outside agency at the moment while practitioners haven't got that time. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

The probation staff we interviewed also discussed the confidence of staff to ask about gambling behaviours and harms. A lack of confidence seemed to stem principally from being unaware of what to do should PoP disclose gambling harms:

[There's] a confidence thing around if they do tell me that, then I don't really know what to do with that information. (036_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

But if you ask that gambling question, it puts you in that territory of, 'Thank you for sharing that with me, but I need to look into what we can do to support you with that.' And that's ... not something that somebody on probation potentially wants to hear. (015_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

Generally both staff and PoP argued that intrusive questioning is a part of probation work, so there should be no reason why staff should lack confidence to ask about gambling harms. Helen, for example, described being asked about her sexual behaviours but not about gambling:

I wouldn't have said it was a lack of confidence, I'd say they're not aware. I think it's the lack of awareness around it all. They're quite happy to ask me if I've got any STIs or about my sex life and things like that, you know. I'm 52 years old and she's quite young, so if she's got the confidence to ask me that I would've thought she'd have the confidence to ask me about my gambling. (Helen)

When reflecting on the levels of confidence and comfort staff feel to ask about gambling, staff speculated that new questions and a lack of training may mean some PPs are not confident:

We ask so many invasive questions. But you do sometimes come across things, like ... we had it for a while where we hadn't recorded some, I think it was disability information or information about religious beliefs, and people were like, 'Oh, I don't feel very comfortable asking that' and I'm like, 'But you're alright to ask them about their ... sexual activity? How ...' (019_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

I think there's something about people feeling comfortable and I accept that it might not be something that people are comfortable, but at the end of the day this is a job where you need to have professional curiosity. If you work with sex offenders, you have to ask them about

masturbating, so we have to ask, part of our job is to ask uncomfortable questions. Now in order to do that, we have to feel confident that we can do that, and there's a training need relating to that (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

There was also the suggestion that senior probation staff with more challenging caseloads may be better at it than more junior staff, and that maybe the legal nature of gambling made staff feel uncomfortable, as discussed above:

I ask people that have committed sexual offences what pornography they use, how often they masturbate and all that sort of thing, so maybe it's a PSO/PO barrier, probation officers that have had that training to ask those awkward questions, maybe they feel more comfortable with that whereas the PSOs, they don't hold ... probation service officer, medium/low risk, they don't hold sex offender cases. They don't hold that on their caseload. (015_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

We have had such an influx of new staff, so we are quite an inexperienced staffing group and for our probation service officer grade, the training package isn't great, so if that's linked to their not knowing whether to ask them questions, about whether it's professional curiosity or nosiness, I think there's a gap in the training. It's not for PQiP so it's not for the trainees and the probation officers that will have had that training, but the large group of new inexperienced Staff perhaps this is something that we need to capture, to say, 'It's not nosiness, it's ... asking those questions that you should be asking.' (036_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

This last quote highlights that many senior probation staff felt that some newer probation staff exhibited less professional curiosity than those before them. One experienced probation officer noted:

You probe gently, you ask questions and you try to find out what's going on for that person, because that small piece of information could open up a huge need or huge area that maybe there's assistance that could be provided, and I don't see that going on. (010_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Staff described areas of good practice, but also commonly expressed the view that there was limited provision of support for those with gambling harms on probation. One staff member highlighted how these inconsistent practices were likely to affect the diverse range of PoP in unknown and different ways:

In terms of, say, diverse groups, that probably became even more complex because we knew that there must be certain groups that probably were more unlikely to come forward and say they've got gambling problems than others. So really, for me, it was just about a postcode lottery and where you were. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

Given that training on gambling harms is, to date, very patchy in the probation service, it is unsurprising that many staff explained low levels of questioning about gambling harms by referencing staff's poor understanding of gambling and their low skill levels:

The skill is in how you ask the questions and that comes down to, again, a little bit of training and raising awareness. Again, you've got to get things in the right order. (009_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

You have to take every case on a case-by-case basis, don't you, and take that individualised and tailored approach, but if something has worked before and you've thought oh actually this technique worked really well for me to get this information, I could try it again here. So I think it's probably going to be a little bit of that as well. It's not just going to happen overnight, is it, that we've had the training and straight away we're going to be able to get all this information. I think it's building that confidence to do so but being met with the barriers that we do have day in, day

out, that we look to overcome the best we can, if that makes sense. (027_HMPPS, Probation Court Staff)

But also I think we've got such a ... trying to think of a nice word ... inexperienced workforce, that perhaps people don't even know what they don't know, if that makes sense. Back when I started, if I didn't know, at least I knew what to ask. I think people don't know that anymore (001_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

6.7 Disclosing gambling harms

Given PPs do not routinely ask PoP about their gambling and there is a lack of systematic screening or appreciation of gambling prevalence among probation caseloads, there remains a reliance upon self-disclosure by PoP:

We're always reliant on disclosure and that's going to be the first challenge is some people don't want to disclose their issues or problems. They might think they might not have a problem. (014_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

I know you can look out for signs and things, but it is something that we rely on the person to tell us. I didn't, from what I'm aware of, have that many cases that had a gambling problem, but I might not have known. (026_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

As these quotes illustrate, without disclosure from PoP, PPs feel that it is unlikely that they become aware of any problems relating to gambling in their caseloads. Practitioner accounts also revealed how they considered gambling addiction much more challenging to spot, because it wouldn't be as physically obvious as a substance use or alcohol addiction might be:

'OK, there's obviously something going on with this person, he doesn't look the same, he doesn't present the same,' and then you start seeing a difference in appearance, behaviours. But with gambling, you wouldn't really know, unless they told you specifically (007_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

It is heavily reliant on self-disclosure because say you can't look at ... their eyes aren't dilated, they're not smelling of alcohol, it's not something that you can see that they're under the influence of. (023_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

While many of the lived experience participants indicated that they had disclosed their gambling to criminal justice staff, some highlighted that generally people experiencing harmful gambling would be unlikely to disclose it to probation staff:

There's just a lack of awareness from a probation practitioner's point of view as to what questions to ask. Also, on the flipside of that, who's gonna tell you? (Masom)

Several participants indicated that PoP would be unlikely to disclose because of fear of what the consequences for their probation supervision may be. There was a perception that disclosing gambling harms and especially a gambling offence could lead to repercussions such as more contact with and surveillance from probation or even recall to prison:

They haven't told you, they don't feel safe enough to tell you, they hear from other people, 'Don't say anything to your probation officer because she's gonna breach you', if you escalate your risk. So, I can imagine there's always a lot of ... anyone that's been on probation with prison, they all have a talk about what you do and what probation are like and what you do and don't say, 'Never say this.' So those things are barriers and if you're not spending long with your probation practitioner you can't get a sense of whether you can trust them (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

If they ask me questions it'll be "Yes/no." I'll give them the bare information because I wanna be out of here and I want to get on with my life. (Paul)

Another reason for not disclosing included a history of keeping gambling secret:

And if I had been gambling and it was a problem again I probably wouldn't have told them, because that's how I gambled the first time round, I didn't tell anybody (Liam)

They did ask me a couple of times if I was gambling and obviously I'd say no but I had gone back to it. (Helen)

Allied to this were feelings of shame and guilt around gambling harms, which staff were aware of:

It's very much a hidden issue ... there's lots of shame, isn't there? You can have 15 credit cards and be bouncing them from one to another and it's something you keep to yourself. (031_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

I think that it could be he was hiding it because it's not against the law, is it, to gamble, and there might be some sort of guilt and shame or embarrassment there as well. (015_HMPPS, Probation Service Officer/PQiP)

Part of it is being, for want of a better phrase, mugged off, sucked in, suckered. You gave your money away to an online casino or a bookie's or whatever, and you feel stupid as well. (018_HMPPS, Peer Mentor)

Judgement is probably the first one; the fear that they're gonna be judged, opening that can of worms really. Not wanting the truth to come out; they might not want their families to know, they might not want professionals to know (007_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

For Anna, her relationship with her probation officer was itself the barrier to disclosure, as she felt she was not treated with any empathy and no trust had been established:

You're never going to open up. It was very tick box, tick box. [...] She'd ask me about gambling but she'd be so shocked that I'd think well actually I'm saying really minor stuff that you should really be knowing about in the community! But again, because she was so clinical, I would not necessarily feel that I could open up to her. There was one time, but purely because I was so tearful and emotional, and I had just had a hysterectomy, so it was one of those, so it was forced out of me. But because she was so clinical, she was a tick-box only person, so she would still ask the questions and it would be very, again, matter of fact, black and white. So 'Have you had any triggers?' 'No.' If I had of, maybe would I have opened up? I really don't know. Probably not. (Anna)

In addition, the assumption that probation would not be able to help with a gambling problem was also a barrier. One member of staff commented:

A lot of people never say they've got a gambling problem across the criminal justice system because they don't think there's anything available. So, a lot of that is a hidden harm. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

The importance of a trusting relationship between the member of staff and the person on probation to achieve a disclosure of gambling harms was confirmed by staff:

If there's no good working relationship between them both, and a good rapport, then it's unlikely that that person is gonna open up and say, 'I've got an issue with gambling, I need to reach out, I need help.' However, if there is that level of trust there, then it could be that they say, 'I'm really struggling, I need to know where I can get support from?' (007_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

Yet another obstacle to achieving such relationships is the lack of diversity among probation service staff and the lack of lived experience within the service. This was acknowledged by one member of staff who argued how important lived experience is to developing trusting relationships with PoP:

How important it is that we've got representation right across the criminal justice system but we've still got a long way to go. I'm under no illusion that we most definitely need lived experience at the moment. I think in terms of how far removed we are from the societies that we're supposed to be serving we definitely need our peer mentors, our lived experience that can say, 'Yeah, I've had addiction, I'm in recovery, I know what this feels like.' (031_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

With a trusting relationship and some gentle probing, Masom reflected that he would have told his probation officer about the harms he was experiencing, but not without those things being in place:

I would've talked to them if they'd probed me; I wouldn't have gone off my own back if I felt like gambling and told 'em absolutely not. [...] So yeah, I would've done but they would have to have probed me and understood me and I felt comfortable enough to do it. (Masom)

Indeed Jack shared that when having a chat with his COM about other behaviours, he felt comfortable enough to disclose his gambling:

I think 'cause we were talking about a few other things, smoking and stuff like that, I don't think it was like bad conversation, but yeah, I think I just explained to her like how much I gamble, then, literally. (Jack)

Alternatively, one member of staff commented that disclosures of gambling can be 'throw away' jokey remarks, but then it is incumbent upon probation staff to explore that and find out if they are experiencing harms:

I think it when it's come up, or at least when I've when I've seen it come up, it's it's it's kind of joked about and that's how people seem to disclose it or it's a kind of I gonna go put 20 quid on this I'm gonna go for a flutter or kind of not got any money because of because of this and and and I've seen the probation officers kind of take that as a bit of a queue and to say like is this is that something that they need. (021_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

6.8 Support for gambling harms

6.8.1 Support for people on probation

The lack of support for PoP (and their families) experiencing gambling harms was evident at the court stage, while people were in prison, and unsurprisingly, also apparent in the community. As highlighted in the end of the last chapter, our data suggest there is limited through the gate support as people leave prison and return to the community, with most leaving prison without links to local gambling support services. The majority of those PoP indicated that they received very little or no support for their gambling harms when on probation in the community. When people did access gambling-related support, this most often followed from self-referral, rather than because of any signposting or referrals made by probation (or CRS) staff.

The lack of signposting for gambling-specific support left many PoP relying on other services that were not primarily concerned with gambling. Helen recalled how she had accessed services with the Nelson Trust (a substance use service) as part of her RAR days and got mental health support through them. However, she told us:

I think they should've signposted me to some sort of gambling recovery and some sort of therapy. Yeah, which never happened. (Helen)

Similarly, Sally, remembering the experience of her husband on probation, recalled that he had no help and went “cold turkey with Candy Crush” while trying to stop gambling. Mark also received no support for his gambling harms, while Diane received neither support nor recognition that her gambling and resulting gambling-related crimes were related to long-standing domestic abuse:

I did also ask for some additional help around the gambling and it was like ... it wasn't a thing. (Mark)

No, I got no support with nothing. No support with anything, apart from the general question, 'Are you OK opening up a bank account? Are you OK with dealing with any benefits? Do you understand your benefits?' (Diane)

Among the PoP we interviewed, Liam had more luck getting support through probation when, as part of RAR days, he was required to access support from his GP and then Mind. His Mind practitioner had experience supporting people with gambling harms, though Liam's access to this support appears to follow from luck rather than design. Nevertheless, some of our lived experience sample recalled their COMs mentioning possible support from GamCare, GA, and the National Gambling Helpline. However, lived experience participants also held the impression that the depth of PP knowledge of support organisations was superficial and probably acquired through Google:

So, she made a note of when I said about I needed help with this, blah blah blah. She made an note, 'OK, we need to look for support for your gambling' and I believe she would have just spoken to a colleague or Googled it or whatever it is, to find out what the services nearby are that suit what I need. (Irfan)

Dawn, remembering the support given to her husband when he entered community probation, talked about him being given the number to the National Gambling Helpline, but not much else:

When he came home he was given a sheet with useful numbers, housing and things like that. The National Gambling Helpline number featured on that [...] That was probably about as much as it was, was that, 'If you feel like you're gonna gamble again ring this number.' And that was it ... they didn't know about gambling blocks or Gamban and all that sort of stuff and that's the sorts of things that I think could be really useful to them to have that knowledge around so that they are empowering the people that they are caring for at that time but there was none of that. (Dawn, Affected Other)

Dawn argued that PPs and CRS staff could do more to advise justice-involved people with gambling harms how they could put things in place to try and reduce their likelihood of further harmful gambling. Notably, very few probation staff appeared to be aware of the ways in which people are able to self-exclude from gambling establishments, and the various methods available to restrict online gambling (such as blocks with banks and gambling companies).

In probation offices some PoP reported that there were limited resources – such as leaflets and flyers – about gambling harms, contrasting with the quantity of information available on other topics:

Whenever I go into a probation office, I never see any posters or any signposting about gambling. Nothing. There's about drugs, alcohol, employment, all this stuff; never about gambling. And I think it's a huge, huge issue. (Mark)

The scant knowledge of staff of sources of support meant that if the option they identified proved unsuitable, then alternatives were not offered. This was the case with Vijay, who was signposted to GA and to the NHS Gambling Clinic in London. Because he was outside of the London area, he later found that he did not qualify for the NHS support, but his PP was then unable to suggest any alternative provision of support:

I did say obviously 'I've tried GA. It didn't work for me. What else can I do?' And they said the only other thing we can do is just refer you to the community mental health team' but as you know, the community mental health team, all they do is they can just give you CBT, which I've had five times now. There's not much else to it really, is there? (Vijay)

Irfan had a similar experience, being signposted to a local National Gambling Support Network provider. When he did not get on with the clinician, he was offered no alternative. Instead, there seems to have been an assumption by probation staff that people would put their own support in place. Indeed, most of the support that our lived experience sample accessed in the community was found and organised by them:

She said, 'I can't offer you any support with the gambling, but you're doing that.' (Amanda)

There was definitely no support offered in terms of, 'Here's your local support group,' or, 'Here's a number to reach out to for support.' Any of that was done off my own back [...] There wasn't any, 'Here are the options.' That's what I would've liked to have seen, 'These are the options' (Billy)

[If I] hadn't known about any services, then I would have been stuck ... I would have been sent to a drug and alcohol treatment team, which wouldn't have served any purpose. (Richard)

Similarly, the partners of the PoP we interviewed felt that in the absence of any support from probation, they were expected to provide the support their partners needed for their gambling harms. Indeed, Dawn observed that when her partner left prison:

I automatically I felt like the buck was being passed onto me at that point (Dawn, affected other)

Probation staff themselves acknowledged that they had limited knowledge of gambling support services and suspected that other colleagues and frontline practitioners would also know very little about them and how they could be accessed. On many occasions during our research, we found ourselves advising PP interviewees of the various services that were available in their area. The limited knowledge of local gambling support services is reflected in the following staff quotes:

Are staff even aware of what support's there? (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

With gambling, I think it was more of a struggle for me, as ... I wouldn't say a lack of support locally to us, but it's knowing how to access that support. (007_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

The support is out there, but are staff aware of what it is and where it is and how to access it? (023_HMPPS, Approved Premises Staff)

It doesn't inspire huge amounts of confidence that we didn't know. (019_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

Given this lack of local knowledge, staff indicated that support for gambling harms would be identified on a 'need to know' basis, in other words as a response to a particular need that would present within a caseload, rather than being part of their everyday arsenal of resources and understanding. When faced with a need for gambling harms support, staff indicated that they would then search online for available services:

There are local charities that offer support for gambling. Off the top of my head, I can't think of who they would be, but obviously you can search it up online, there's advertisements on TV when you look at things, with certain numbers for organisations and charities (007_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

Finally concerns were also raised about the failure to signpost people to appropriate support when their supervision periods came to an end. Indeed, the ending of probation was found by many of our sample

to be anti-climactic, with final meetings dedicated solely to paperwork, if they happened at all. Some people just got letters or phone calls to say their probation period had ended, and no support sources and resources were given:

That was more forms she had to fill out, like tick box again on that. That was a little bit longer but it wasn't any how's your gambling or ... it was just literally questionnaire things. 'Would you recommend this service?' 'Is there anyone you'd like to thank?' and that sort of thing. (Amanda)

A final phone call to just go... I remember that one quite vividly of, 'Just checking, are you still married?' 'Yeah.' 'Still got kids?' 'Yes.' 'OK, you know your probation's over next week?' 'Yeah.' 'OK, that's it, you're done.' So, next to no supervision, next to no support – I don't recall getting anything off probation. (Paul)

6.8.2 Support for family members

Family members of the PoP we spoke to also received no signposting to support to help them cope with the impact of their partner's gambling and gambling-related crime. Sally, who had been subjected to gambling-related domestic abuse, commented:

They need somebody totally clued up to step in and support. Support an individual. So if there is an affected other, or an affected other family, there's got to be somebody, or an organisation, that's clued up with the criminal justice system, probation, prison, law, this that and the other, that can actually support that person through that but understand in what position they're in because it's gambling harm or gambling-related harm. (Sally, Affected Other)

Susan and Gayle also voiced their frustrations with the lack of support for families:

What's your family support? What's the situation there and what help do they need? And what does that look like?' (Susan, Affected Other)

If your husband commits a crime because of gambling addiction and you didn't know what was going on and didn't play a part in this, there's no support for you. (Gayle, Affected Other)

Indeed, this frustration was echoed by a member of probation staff, who commented that:

Families have a right to support within their own right (021 HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

6.8.3 Reliance on other types of support

Although PoP felt that there was scant support available in relation to gambling harms, some did acknowledge the range of other support they could access, such as support with finances, relationships, employment, and housing. Jay, for example, convicted of an offence unrelated to his gambling, described how he had been able to access a wide range of support when he decided to engage positively with probation:

I've got several different kinds of support, different lines of support in many different ways, in many different parts of my life, but before I never had that. So, a lot of things have changed from when I was first on probation to now, because I've been given emotional wellbeing workers that take you out for a coffee or how to get a gym pass or so on. You've got financial benefit and debt advisors, I've got a wide range of ... mental health [support] (Jay)

However, many PoP expressed frustration at the limited support available to them in relation to gambling when compared to the provision of drug and alcohol support:

Drugs and alcohol is ... completely different in terms of the level of support you've got, you've only got to look at the number of agencies that provide support. There aren't really the equivalent. If I'm somebody that's gambled to the point of I'm on probation, I'm homeless, I'm getting the

support for my homelessness, if I've got a drug issue, I'm getting support there, but the support for the gambling isn't as necessarily readily available. (Billy)

For me what's interesting is you've got specific support around drugs, alcohol, certain substance misuse as well, but... there's nothing there for gambling in probation services. There are no organisations that they refer to or even probation offices have multiple organisations working in-house now as well, but there's nothing around gambling, and I think it's a bigger problem than they realise but it's because no one really looks into it as much. It's not seen in the same light (Mark)

The absence of gambling support services meant that many times the support offered did, in fact, consist of drug and alcohol services or support with finances. There was an assumption, or hope, by some staff that these services and programmes would be able to offer something useful in relation to gambling addiction, or a resignation that they were all that was on offer. Some PoP felt that their gambling was understood as a problem with money and their inability to manage it, hence the frequent requirement to attend money management courses and services. Reflecting this understanding, staff expressed the following:

They will be using the financial services side, the likes of St Giles, which is what we use in the north. If they're referred in for the obvious thing, that they come out of gambling harms, which is the finances, that might be where that hits and then they may signpost out. (009_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

'cause if it was drugs, they'd look to find out where they might get substance misuse support [...] it's not the same for gambling. I think they would just look at well, how can we manage your finances, I think. (010_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

It would be me then researching into that and looking into it, or it would be around the debt side of it maybe, and not necessarily addressing the gambling. It might be that we'd make a referral to our Finance, Benefit and Debt support, or Citizens' Advice, or StepChange, or something around the financial element of that. (026_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

So, for London, for example, it's caught up within the debt awareness and gambling piece that's delivered by Catch22. (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

Some staff also indicated that the mental health support pathways available to PoP may also be beneficial for people experiencing gambling harms, albeit with some recognition that dedicated gambling support would be more desirable:

So, I'm sure somebody with mental health, managing their mental health and gambling comes up, I'm sure that would help, but I think we do need to look at getting support for people where the expertise lies. (010_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

6.8.4 Commissioned Rehabilitation Services and probation work

The reliance upon drug and alcohol services, financial management programmes, and mental health support for gambling harms reflects the limited attention to, and understanding of, gambling harms across the CJS. It also highlights the absence of commissioned pathways for support for gambling harms. Our lived experience sample showed some awareness of the commissioning structures in place to support PoP and the absence of CRSs for gambling:

There's a reliance on third party support to do that, there's no statutory body that says ... probation don't fund [...] they don't fund anybody to provide support for people that are gambling. But I would imagine if you look at the statistics for the amount of people that are convicted of offences relating to gambling, it would probably warrant some form of statutory service for it (Billy)

Our interviews with probation staff discussed the relationships they had with their local CRS and the lack of gambling support providers linked to CRS. The CRS contracts in place at the time of writing were governed by the CRS Dynamic Framework, listing five areas of work: accommodation; education, training, and employment; personal wellbeing; finance, benefit, and debt; and dependency and recovery services. While there was a perception among some staff, described above, that CRSs related to finance and dependency and recovery could sometimes be useful to those experiencing gambling harms, staff did also identify that there was usually very little CRS provision that related to gambling:

What you need then is you need a really clear pathway of what you do once you've identified that [gambling] and that doesn't exist currently ... we don't have any clear treatment pathways, there's not a, I've said before, gambling rehabilitation requirement. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Yeah, basically this whole thing is about partnership, isn't it? It should all be about partnership working with different departments to make sure that the person gets the right help from everybody that it needs to get help from. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

One member of staff from London confirmed that not only is each region different, but it is also hard to access information on other regions' CRS provision:

Different areas of the country do things differently. In London we've got a directory, what's it called? Referral directory. And basically in there you can go in and put the area, the borough you're in, so I always just use my own borough, stick in Lewisham and it will tell you all the different... it's to do with the CRS, Commission Rehabilitation Services, it will tell you all the different types of service in there [...] of course all the providers are different across the country and I don't know what other areas have [...] Do they all have a referral directory, can we access them? 'cause we're not always able to access other people's content outside of your own area 'cause of restrictions. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

In all areas except London, probation staff indicated that there was no ability to refer to gambling-related support through RAM. While a contract with GamCare was available in London, we were advised that this was subsequently dismantled due to lack of use:

Nothing really came of it, partly because it was impossible to find the information, even trying to be quite creative in terms of how you would try and identify people [...] we've said how many of you have someone on your case load that might have a gambling problem, and it wasn't gambling, it was something else, and they said only one person put their hand up out of that room of thirty practitioners. And it's that level. Because it's something which is more niche and is not ... a really obvious need, and also people may well have gambling needs but we don't know because they don't tell us because they don't want to, and we don't have the time to do intense one-to-one work and spend that time with those individuals and find it out, you're not going to know, are you? (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

The above quote illustrates a theme raised at various points throughout this report: the absence of data on gambling harms among PoP means that the levels of need for support are unknown, gambling harms remain a low priority, services are not commissioned, and therefore the data on harms and support needs remain uncollected:

It's one of those really underutilised services because of that lack of identification (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

Another probation staff member in London indicated that gambling support is now indirectly provided by Catch22 through its dependency and recovery and finance, benefit, and debt services:

The individual goes off to Catch 22 as one of their probation appointments and then they do their own assessment specifically around that need and what that support package looks like. And

then go through ex number of days of engagement, whatever, that gets ticked off against their RAR days and they can work through until such point as they feel that they've got what they needed or the days have run out or whatever their own individual plan looks like. (006_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

The failure of the London commissioned GamCare pathway to garner sufficient use, resulting in its closure, reinforced the perception that gambling harms are niche and do not warrant investment by a service that is already insufficiently resourced:

The evidence shows that if we commission one the way things currently are, it will not get used and it will be a waste of public money, and anything we commission we have to evidence need, we have to evidence ... everything has to be evidence-based because it's public money, so you really have to put together a case of why this project should be green lit, and especially in the current financial situation (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Other staff raised similar concerns about the need to prove demand in order to warrant the commissioning of support services. This is challenging for gambling harms given the absence of systematic data collection and the absence of gambling rehabilitation requirements that the courts could impose and that would necessitate such pathways be put in place. CRSs have to provide a range of data so that probation and HMPPS can assess their efficacy and value for money, as described by a member of staff:

Because if it's a contracted service, we have report after report that tells us how many people have been referred into it and we can see, we can compare that, for a lot of things, against our needs data and be like, 'Hang on, we've got this many people with a finance need, and only this many referrals'. Same for other criminogenic needs. (019_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head).

The onerous nature of the contracts was argued, by one member of staff, as a possible barrier to existing gambling support services becoming CRSs, even if the demand for them was proven. They argued that gambling support services from the third sector could struggle with high non-attendance rates by PoP, coupled with the data sharing requirements a HMPPS contract would place on them, which were described thus:

They'll be two things really they'll give, one would be attendance, no information about discussion so that's fine, there might be some work where we would want to engage with maybe the keyworker or whatever the name of the person, work counsellor, whoever it is and we'd want to do maybe a three-way if they've disengaged and we want to understand what the barriers were or was there somebody about the content they were finding difficult. They'd be that sort of thing. There would be an expectation around risk if they made any disclosures. [...] And then also we would be providing them with our sentence management plan and possibly, I think, risk management plan so that they know that they're on it, that they know they've got expectations on them as a service that they will provide however many sessions a month so that they're working in a joined up way I suppose. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

Other challenges surrounding commissioning gambling pathways were explored by staff. In addition to highlighting the limited data on which to make and justify commissioning decisions, some staff also raised concerns about value for money, the likely need for (and use of) the services, and the practicalities involved with delivery, especially in more rural areas:

If you think about places such as Wales and some of the more rural places, again, if you're going to have a treatment requirement that might present some quite serious challenge about who is going to deliver that intervention. (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

Let's think about how we [...] use that [money] in a way which is slightly more effective and more tailored because so many providers will say this CRS provider, this provision just is pointless,

not helpful or even when there is very, very good provision, the providers themselves will often say, look, we're we're here, we're we're desperate to do something, but we're just not getting the referrals from probation. (021_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

The quality of existing CRS provision was also questioned by some staff, and staff reported that levels of PoP engagement could often be low:

We have all of the usual CRS provision around finance, debt and whatever, and the men tend to not engage with it and probation are really sympathetic towards that because most probation officers say it's crap anyway. Like I wouldn't wanna go to it and but we but probation ought to be encouraging. (021_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

Engagement is very poor. We try to engage people, we are more encouraging and motivating them. We are always asking to professionals, OK, somebody is coming to see you. Please ask them to attend the sessions. It's it's like, uh, we hope it's a responsibility (013_HMPPS, Administrator)

Another possible problem with the CRS system of support was also identified as the cliff edge that would be experienced when the CRS provision stopped. This was argued by one member of staff as a reason to explore local service support outside of the CRS system:

I find it really troubling that we have such a focus on CRS provision when as soon as somebody's order has ended, they can no longer access that provision [...] And I think much better to find existing local support that that we can support them to access so that they can then build a relationship to. (021_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

As shown at the start of this section, some local and national gambling support services are being identified by staff and signposted to PoP, but this is being done in an ad hoc and inconsistent way. Staff argued that this use of specialist and local services outside of CRSs should be better managed in order to provide more systematic access to gambling support. It was commented that the number of these services can be overwhelming, so it hard for PPs to know where to refer people to:

I think sometimes there's a lot of agency support in an area, and then it makes it quite overwhelming of, actually, 'Where do you refer to? What is the best place to refer?' (026_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

In addition, because these services are not contracted, their use by staff and PoP is not recorded, and this again re-enforces the failure to collect data on gambling support needs:

I could be doing my staff a disservice because I don't know if they are referring to Break Even or other gambling-related services. I don't necessarily need to know either. If that is freely available and they can refer into it, that's great. I guess the issue is that I don't know so I can't confidently say that when there's a need they are referring into it. (019_HMPPS, PDU Head/Deputy Head)

The reliance on mostly local specialist support for gambling harms also puts the onus on probation staff to find them and then refer into them. In a high-pressure under-resourced service, this is not often possible:

'What's your referral process? How do we refer to you?' And it would be on the probation practitioner to contact them and put things in place. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

So, what we struggle with is having a kind of at a nice proper flow chart saying like, here's all of the support that you can access. (021_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

There's so many different ways that you can refer out to the CRS, there's something else, there's local partnerships, whatever. It was like, 'Wow, this is taking ages!' Just to get this one tree of this is where you could go, all the different options. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

You're fire fighting. You're not planning, you're not being methodical in, 'What's the best thing for this person, who's the best person to start to get support for them in the background?' You're literally just fire fighting and flying so fast just to try and get the paperwork in, never mind have the right conversations with people to make sure that they're OK (012_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

Multiagency is the way forward, but you can't necessarily get hold of the people who have got staff absences there as well and turnover of staff. [...] So then you're chasing, and chasing, and chasing and you don't get time allocated for the chasing, chasing, chasing and then noting each time you've done the call, you've got to evidence. (005_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

This last quote highlights how referrals for gambling support were often, in practice, made by CRS staff as a result of them spending more time with the PoP and sometimes being more likely to uncover that the person concerned had experienced gambling harms. CRS staff indicated that they had sometimes encouraged PoP to access gambling support services in addition to completing RAR days. However, they also highlighted that the onus was very much on the PoP to engage and that there was little they could do if the person dropped out of the provision available or did not attend appointments. As a result of gambling support provision not being utilised as part of RAR, these additional interventions could not be enforced, so staff felt that there was little they could do to ensure that people engaged with what was on offer. It was apparent that when PoP were engaging with gambling support and then this did fall away, very limited discussion was had about this with probation or CRS staff. The focus (and priority) was on ensuring that the RAR days mandated by the court were completed.

Some probation staff also questioned whether the support provided by local and specialist services would be effective for PoP, for example due to the digital nature of that support provision, especially since the Covid pandemic:

With gambling, it seems to be that they've gotta reach out to someone online or via text or a big charity or an organisation. If you were to present that to a person now, they would probably think, 'It's a waste of time, there's no one local to me, there's no support here,' whereas with other things, it feels as if there's support here now, if you need it (007_HMPPS, Probation Officer)

There's been a real reliance on online support and I think if you've got a finance and debt problem, great, go online, fill in your budget planner and crack on with your life. If you've got an emotional issue that makes you dependent on gambling as a coping strategy, then actually your online support's not gonna help 'cause your emotional issue needs to go somewhere, it needs to be worked on. (031_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

Waiting lists were also identified as a potential problem with non-CRS services and the under-resourcing of the third sector that means that overall, whether commissioned or non-commissioned, the support for gambling harms is insufficient. The following quotes by Anna, Paul and a member of staff illustrate this point:

The probation officer who says, 'I want to help this person, I'm going to get them seen really quickly [...] I'm going to get you the ...' and then you get there and there's nothing available for weeks and weeks and weeks, then you come back to the probation officer and they're stuck [...] It's a hard one to answer because once you're in that situation, even if you have whatever support, unless you have the resources and all the resources, and I think what happens with probation officers, they know that the resources aren't there, they know from experience. (Anna)

They've got to be resourced enough to be able to take enough referrals that come through because, I think as I said before, if you put in a referral and they say, 'We're too busy', then that shuts the door down and you've gone, 'I've asked for help. You've told me no. It's the last time I'm gonna ask for help again.' (Paul)

[The] key point is that the sooner you get started, [...] the more effective the treatment is and everything keeps getting pushed back. (008_HMPPS, Probation Administrator)

6.8.5 Consequences of failing to provide support

The consequences of not asking about gambling harms, of not being able to generate an environment conducive to the disclosure of gambling harms, and of not being able to refer into specialist support services were recognised by probation staff as potentially problematic. One key challenge that some staff recognised was that failure to ask about gambling harms meant that services were unable to establish any meaningful sense of prevalence and severity. In turn this meant that addressing gambling harms continues to remain a low priority for the service:

In other words, without us having the skills to ask the questions it's not been put on a level of importance as those issues such as substance use, such as housing (026_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

For service users, the consequence could be that their support needs may go unmet:

I don't feel that there's enough professional curiosity [...] I don't see any evidence of people digging a bit further to check what those issues might be, what those needs might be, and if assistance is sought. (010_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

One member of staff also argued that in failing to identify gambling support needs, the service could also be failing to address other addictions and/or conflict within domestic spaces. Some staff felt that skilled conversations about gambling could be a good way to begin to unpick complex co-addictions and wider support needs:

So, in some ways, the fact that we've missed the gambling in terms of identifying it, we've also missed opportunities to address substance use, 'cause it could be that if somebody had gambling behaviour ... if it was all interlinked, actually the gambling harms is a good place to start because it's a very practical issues where you're beginning to pull the thread on everything else that needs addressing, if that makes sense? (031_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

Staff also recognised that failure to signpost (or require) people to attend appropriate gambling support services could have negative consequences, particularly in relation to reoffending and poor mental health. Staff expressed concerns about how they were failing to adequately tackle issues that remained largely hidden from them:

And if there is something that is really impacting on someone's life and we don't know about it, we can't help them to address it, and if we can't help them to address it, then how are we going to address their reoffending or the harm they cause to other people? We can't. So that, for me is so what? It's hidden. (004_HMPPS, Senior Probation Officer)

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the consequences of an absence of timely, effective support for our lived experience sample included homelessness, suicide ideation, depression and anxiety (including among family members), exposure to domestic abuse and violence, relapse, and reoffending. Echoing concerns in court and prison settings, in the community there are too many lost opportunities to provide support to justice-involved people who are experiencing gambling harms.

6.8.6 Improvements in support

Despite these weaknesses in support provision for PoP with gambling harms, there are some signs of improvement and recognition that more needs to be done to improve not just the provision of support itself but also the resources to enable PPs to find that support more easily. A '7-minute briefing' on gambling has been produced by the service, for example, listing support services, while PQiP training in

London has shared information on service provision. More substantive partnerships with the gambling support sector are being developed on some regions, for example a partnership in the southwest is being developed with the local NHS gambling clinic. In the East Midlands a Nottingham-based partnership for gambling harms is also being developed by probation. In the East of England region, a member of staff described the progress made:

We've got quite a few GamFam and different ones locally. They run some actual support sessions and drop-ins and things and just getting some of that information out there or where practitioners can actually signpost. We've done some work with the NHS on their gambling, how to refer and promoting them within the organisations (012_HMPPS, Probation Health and Justice Lead)

In probation offices, posters and flyers are also starting to appear:

I've been in a lot of probation offices over past year, thankfully now you're starting to see it changing, signposting and stuff, leaflets (Richard)

Finally, the new mandatory levy on gambling operators was also regarded by some probation staff in more strategic roles as an opportunity to inject resources for gambling harms into the service, and finally enable these harms to be recognised and given higher priority:

The thing with drugs and alcohol is that we have got quite a huge budget, [...] over the years there's a partnership agreement with NHS England and there's key priorities that we and NHS England want to get across to people and delivery of services and interventions. But if you think about it that took an awful long time to put in place. Going back to when drug strategy was nothing [...], right up to this moment in time when there's a mixture of NHS colleagues and voluntary agencies delivering the services and interventions that we need. So, in that sense, gambling was a very poor relative and almost felt like it might be a bit of an add-on, rather than something that people should take seriously. But, saying that, with the levy and the fact that we will get a substantial amount of money, [...] whoever it is taking it forward would really be able to push this work through (011_HMPPS, Senior HMPPS Staff)

7. Discussion: Cross-cutting themes

The last three chapters reveal, in some detail, the mixed experiences of PoP and their families in relation to support for gambling harms while under probation supervision. By examining probation work at court (Chapter 4), probation work in prisons (Chapter 5), and probation work in the community (Chapter 6), we have set out how gambling and gambling harms are overlooked, (mis)understood, and (not) responded to at different points of the CJS where probation staff are involved. Across these different parts of the CJS, many cross-cutting themes were repeatedly observed. In this chapter, we seek to pull these together to illustrate several critical issues relating to gambling harms where they arise in probation work. These themes are explored in light of the theoretical framework in Chapter 2. To our knowledge, theoretical literature relating to recovery capital and the ‘pains’ relating to justice involvement has not been used to explore how justice-involved people who also gamble in harmful ways may experience criminal justice involvement and their desistance from harmful gambling.

7.1 Atypical people on probation

Most of our lived experience sample had no previous contact with the CJS and as a result also had very limited understanding of how the system works. Their understanding of the system (and the various agencies within it) was often based on what they had read in the media or seen in TV dramas and films. Given the profiles of our PoP sample, it is little wonder that they and their family members found their experiences from the courtroom to the prison to the PDU to be frustrating, confusing, and sometimes intimidating. It also left many of them ill equipped to understand the support available to them. Many indicated that the terminology of the CJS was often unknown to them. The PoP we interviewed were unsure how they should act and behave with PPs during the different points of their CJS contact, and most reported that they tried to present as honestly as they could. However, many appeared, on reflection, to feel that this had served to disadvantage them, because their honesty had not been met with understanding or meaningful support. Some believed that their offence (and the gambling linked to it) had been misunderstood by the courts, culminating in a long prison sentence, where no support for gambling was offered.

Many of our PoP sample had begun their recovery journeys prior to being sentenced (not least due to delays in their cases coming to court). While they had limited understanding of the CJS, many did report that their recovery communities and other people with lived experience had been vital in supporting them through their involvement with the CJS. Some used their recovery communities to learn from others with lived experience about what to expect during their CJS involvement.

Becoming justice-involved brought significant challenges, especially to those people who were given custodial sentences. Being sent to prison for some was ‘a new low’ and a turning point. Most described it as a scary and intimidating experience, and it represented a considerable source of shame. While they accepted they had committed serious financial offences that legitimately attracted punishment, they were also keen for the courts (and practitioners) around them to see them as people with a gambling addiction that had changed their normal law-abiding behaviour, rather than people who were inherently criminal. Family members, in all cases partners of people who had been prosecuted for a gambling-related offence, were also keen that the system did more to treat them with compassion and as people in need of support.

Probation staff in court, in prison, and in the community also frequently perceived PoP due to a gambling-related offence as atypical. There was a perception that these people were low-risk, likely to comply with supervision requirements, in need of little help, and also a welcome relief from other ‘higher risk’ people in their probation caseload. These PoP were seen as compliant ‘model students’ and the PoP too were aware of the contrast between themselves and others on probation in terms of risk and behaviour, but also in terms of the limited time and support they received from PPs. Sometimes a

contradiction was evident, with staff on the one hand characterising them as atypical, but then also assuming that they were familiar with probation practices and the CJS.

PoP in our research often used their professional skills and education to navigate the CJS, prison regimes, and community supervision. Some challenged their PPs and other staff and fought to proactively get something out of the system and to mitigate its mistakes. Some PoP even made it their mission to educate probation staff about gambling harms and the sources of support that are available. They did this in order to ensure that other justice-involved people with gambling harms may feel more understood and supported.

7.2 Probation's contradictory and inconsistent understanding of gambling harms

Among PoP and their families, probation and HMPPS staff, and stakeholders, there was a general recognition that gambling harms are poorly understood by probation. Many identified how they believed the real levels of gambling harms to be unrecognised and hidden among the probation population. Some highlighted how gambling represents a particular challenge because it is a normalised leisure activity that is legal. Some felt that this meant others were uncomfortable to enquire about people's gambling, and less aware of the extent to which it can sometimes represent a significant problem that leads to harm, and for some, criminal activity.

PPs and other staff had varying levels of knowledge of gambling harms, with those with the greatest understanding gaining it from specific cases or from being appointed to specialist roles (commonly those relating to Health and Justice). Some staff expressed quite stereotypical views of gamblers and gambling-related crime, for example harmful gambling as a choice, gambling-related crimes as financial and low-risk, and gambling as harmful only when combined with substance use. Some PPs were sufficiently aware to recognise that their views were probably inaccurate, while those with a greater understanding of gambling harms recognised them to be not just financial but also damaging to mental and physical health and to relationships. Some staff illustrated a recognition that gambling can lead to violence in families, resulting in harms to children and others in the domestic space, and the corresponding need for safeguarding.

Probation staff talked about how gambling can lead to fraud (especially against employers), organised crime and money laundering, illegal financial trading, domestic abuse (including violence toward parents and intimate partners, coercive control, and economic abuse), theft and robbery (including from family, friends, and vulnerable people), illegal money lending, shoplifting and burglary, criminal damage in book makers and casinos, drug dealing, violence in and out of custody, and illegal unregulated gambling. Nevertheless, this understanding sat with particular individuals, rather than being institutionalised. It stemmed from specific professional roles or experiences, or indeed from the personal lived experiences of staff, giving them an understanding of, or interest in, gambling harms and related crimes. Further research should explore the understanding of gambling harms among frontline practitioners, and the extent to which they feel confident to supervise PoP with gambling addiction.

With the in-depth understanding of gambling harms and crime appearing to sit with particular practitioners, rather than being consistent throughout probation services, it is unsurprising that most PoP felt that PPs had little understanding of how gambling had led them to offend, of how gambling had harmed their lives, and of the support they needed. They found some PPs to be ignorant but interested, while other staff showed no interest at all. PoP also expressed their concerns that PPs didn't understand how gambling harms could relate to other problems, such as domestic abuse, homelessness, or alcohol and drug use, and there was no 'joining up the dots'. This meant that those with lived experience felt that the restrictions placed upon them during probation were sometimes inappropriate and unhelpful, while little or no practical and emotional support for gambling harms was offered to them or their families.

7.3 Lack of data

Data on the prevalence of gambling harms and gambling-related offences among PoP and those in custody is very limited. Chapters 4–6 reveal the lack of consistent processes to capture this data in court, in prison, or in the community. OASys assessments, for example, contain no questions on gambling behaviours or harms, relying only on a question relating to finances in the self-assessment questionnaire. When OASys was discussed with participants, most felt that this was an inadequate mechanism to capture data or to elicit disclosure. Reflecting the inconsistent understanding of gambling harms among probation and CJS staff explored in the last sub-section, staff were unable to identify a natural ‘home’ for gambling within screening tools and assessments, and this data remains uncollected.

The identification of gambling harms or a gambling-related reasons for a particular offence, is therefore dependent on the PoP making a disclosure to their PP or another stakeholder. Participants indicated many reasons for why this may be unlikely to occur. Even where disclosures are made, there is no systemic recording of such disclosures or consistent response to the gambling harms revealed. As such, the harms remain hidden and no consistent pathway of support appears to follow. The limited data and knowledge of gambling behaviours of PoP serves to make a system-level response more difficult because there is little evidence (or recording) of prevalence, risk, and rehabilitation needs.

Changing HMPPS data collection tools and processes can be long-winded and bureaucratic. In Wales, this process has begun, with the use of gambling harms screening questions in some courts. However, we were not aware of any such initiatives in England. Ultimately the lack of prevalence data makes it difficult to advocate for clear gambling referral pathways and the provision of support in either custodial or community CJS settings. The vicious circle is completed because the absence of gambling support contracts with in-custody service providers and CRSs means there is no incentive to find prisoners and PoP to refer into these services and no requirement to collect data on gambling support referrals.

7.4 Lack of conversations about gambling

Our findings suggest that the disclosure of gambling harms or an unrecorded gambling-related component to a crime is dependent on individual PoP developing trusting relationships with an interested and supportive PP. However, Chapters 4–6 reveal that there are considerable barriers to such relationships being formed. These include staff lacking the time and skills to build trust and rapport with PoP; PPs being uncomfortable asking about legal, normalised gambling behaviours; a feeling among staff that gambling is not relevant to their work; and not knowing where PoP could get support if they disclose a gambling problem.

Alongside the lack of focus on gambling in HMPPS screening tools, probation staff acknowledged that they would not routinely ask about gambling. Our PoP sample disclosed that any conversations about gambling stemmed from their being convicted of a gambling-related crime, and that even then, those conversations were limited in scope and most often initiated by the PoP and not the PP. Meaningful discussions about gambling were dependent on PPs having the skills, knowledge, professional curiosity, and time to spend with the PoP. As such, PPs who took a particular interest in gambling for professional or personal reasons were more inclined to ask about it than others.

Probation staff and PoP who we interviewed spoke about gambling feeling like a taboo subject. Those experiencing gambling harms were unsure how PPs and other criminal justice staff would react to a disclosure of harmful gambling behaviours or crime linked to gambling, sometimes fearing that any disclosure would lead to a harsher sentence, or to a breach of their licence conditions in the community. Many PoP also anticipated that probation staff would not be particularly helpful following the disclosure. Shame and stigma also appeared to be underlying reasons for a reluctance to talk about gambling harms, and an unfavourable or judgemental reaction by a PP was enough to shut down any further conversation.

7.5 Lack of support

PPs interviewed for this research had very low awareness of sources of support for people experiencing gambling harms, despite there being a network of support providers that can be freely accessed by PoP in the community. Many also highlighted the lack of formal gambling support pathways and commissioned gambling support services within the CJS. The result is that any knowledge about support services is ad hoc and held by individuals rather than the system. Thus, PoP depended upon luck to be assigned a PP who had the capacity to explore the support options open to them. One or two PoP we interviewed had been assigned a PP who tried to find gambling-specific support (using the intranet or Google to do so), often recommending attendance at GA meetings, but most received no signposting to gambling support services.

Instead, at all stages of their CJS journey, official support took the form of courses relating to financial management, anger and relationship management, and/or mental health and substance misuse. The assumption or hope was that, at best, these services may actually discuss gambling harms or would help tangentially, and at worst, that they were all that was on offer.

Support was often provided by, and expected to be provided by, family members, with some PPs contacting intimate partners to ask them how they would be helping to support the PoP. While this reflects a wider recognition that involving families is critical for supporting desistance and recovery (Weaver and McNeill, 2015), none of the affected others we interviewed for this research had been offered any support themselves, despite some of them being victims of gambling-related domestic abuse. Instead, there was evidence of a gendered assumption that female intimate partners would hold it all together and look after children and the PoP without the needed for any support themselves. This finding is sadly supported by research by Hall and Harris (2023:227) that similarly observes that ‘desistance support provision often falls to women, with little professional support provision in place for the women themselves’. This also suggests that more needs to be done to address the ‘unacceptable inconsistency of respect for the role families can play in boosting rehabilitation and assisting in resettlement across the prison estate’ (Farmer, 2017:4).

Regional inconsistencies were also apparent in our findings. In some regions staff indicated that they had accessed a 7-minute briefing and toolkit for gambling harms, but in other locations staff reported that there was no information about gambling available to them. HMPPS referrals are reliant on different software in different regions and there is currently no formal means for staff who have found sources of support to let other staff know about them, for example by posting them on HMPPS EQuIP.¹⁰

In addition to a lack of knowledge about gambling support services and an absence of commissioned services and referral databases, there were additional barriers to PoP being offered gambling harms support. These included the perception by PPs that if the PoP is no longer gambling, they do not need support; that gambling harms are niche and so the demand for services is very low; and that PoP experiencing gambling harms are capable and educated and that they can put their own support in place. Some PoP we interviewed embraced probation as an opportunity to get the help and support they desperately needed but they appeared to quickly become disappointed and disillusioned. Those PoP that could find their own sources of support and create their own recovery communities and capital did so. Those who did not have the capacity to do this fared badly, sometimes reoffending, losing jobs, homes, and relationships. Whether in court, in custody or in the community, many expressed frustration

¹⁰ EQuIP is the primary resource for all HMPPS staff to find official policies, procedures, and guidance documents related to probation and offender management.

that their fellow PoP with substance misuse problems could access a wide range of support services and resources, while they were offered nothing for their gambling harms.

7.6 Poor multiagency working

We found that HMPPS and probation staff in strategic roles recognised the importance of partnership building and working to support the rehabilitation of PoP. The contracting out of this component of probation work to private and third sector organisations, leaving PPs with a focus on managing risk, was argued by some to have diminished the skills and depth of experience of the probation service and its staff, as well as generating new problems owing to the need for inter-agency working. This particularly centred around the use of RAR days, and supports previous concerns raised by Robinson and Dominey (2019:429) that while ‘the RAR was conceived as an enabler of flexible – and potentially innovative – rehabilitative work amenable to delivery in a fragmented and marketised world’ in practice, they may have also served as a ‘farewell to supervision’ (p451). Many PoP reported experiences that were akin to a ‘pass the parcel’ experience reported by short sentence people in prison (Cracknell, 2020), where people were often passed from one practitioner to the next, often being offered very little support along the way, and often because they were perceived to be relatively low risk.

Both probation staff and CRS staff expressed frustration about the difficulties involved with contacting the other. It was apparent that both PDUs and CRSs commonly experienced staff turnover and high workloads, and the need to follow up queries was seen to generate additional administrative demands on staff time. Although PPs sometimes indicated that they felt the CRSs available to be of low quality (or limited use), staff also indicated that the formal referral pathways made it easier for them to refer PoP to the CRSs than to look for bespoke sources of community support. Moreover, PPs indicated that they felt constrained to use the CRSs for sentence planning, RAR days, and Community Orders, with no freedom to innovate and use other support services. There was also an acknowledgment that CRSs could be unwelcoming, making disengagement more likely, and many PPs were unsure whether these services were suitable for people experiencing gambling harms. Contacting a CRS to clarify what support could be offered was reported by some probation staff as challenging.

Similarly, many CRS staff raised issues in relation to their working relationships with probation staff, reporting very limited contact with them. While some probation staff were reported to be responsive and communicative, others were reported to be very difficult to get hold of and that they had to spend time chasing up issues with them. This was reported to be particularly frustrating when CRS staff felt that referrals that should be made (perhaps for specialist mental health support) would be best made by the assigned PP. Some CRS staff also felt that due to the time spent with PoP in 1:1 sessions, they often knew quite a bit more about the day-to-day lives of PoP in comparison to the PP. However, they also raised concerns that when initial referrals would come through RAM from probation they would know very little about the person concerned and that often referrals would have been more appropriately made to other services or other parts of the CRS. One CRS stakeholder, who was responsible for managing a team, felt that there were occasions where key information relating to risk had not been passed to the CRS and that this potentially raised safety issues for staff. Some stakeholders and probation staff also alluded to online/hybrid working arrangements making multiagency work more challenging, and some staff highlighted the value of previous arrangements where dedicated services would visit probation offices and have a clearer visibility to both staff and people under probation supervision.

Where PoP did access services that were relevant to their needs, but not part of their RAR days (or other requirements set by the court or probation), there appeared to be limited monitoring or oversight of any progress that may have been made. Often, PoP had accessed other services only to then drop out or drift away from the support offered. There appeared to be little follow-up in relation to this. What these experiences reveal is that PPs (and other CRS stakeholders) need to do more to act as ‘community

connectors' (McKnight and Block, 2010) by acting as human bridges to support pathways to recovery and desistance and other resources in the community (Best, 2019).

7.7 The consequences for people on probation and their families

The limited recording, understanding, and responding to gambling harms across the CJS and probation services have consequences for PoP and their families. Some probation staff recognised that not only were PoP given little support for gambling harms but that delays in the CJS as a whole meant that long waits for police investigations and court hearings could exacerbate levels of stress and of harm.

Our lived experience participants commonly recalled their experiences of having to research, plan, and direct their own recoveries, with little or no support from probation. Many were successful, and following their arrest and criminal justice involvement, had been able to begin to build recovery capital, so that they didn't need support from their PP or while imprisoned. Indeed, many recalled how they had tried to use what they had learned in recovery to educate PPs and other CJS staff, and also support other people experiencing gambling harms. However, many still felt let down and indicated that they would have welcomed clearer support and interest from probation services, especially because their offence was so clearly linked to gambling. For others, and those in more fragile positions in their recovery, the failure of probation to recognise, understand, and support them in relation to gambling had profound consequences. These included relapses into harmful gambling, further gambling-related reoffending, a return to violent and abusive relationships, suicide ideation and suicide attempts, the breakdown of relationships leading to homelessness, job loss, living with high levels of anxiety and fear of recall because of gambling relapse or fear of relapse, and poor mental health.

Not only did PoP experience detrimental consequences, but so did their families. The intimate partners we spoke to talked about the stress on their children, living with high levels of anxiety while their partners were in custody, and then a range of additional challenges after their partners had been released on licence into the community. Many spoke of the stresses involved with having to navigate a complex CJS system without any guidance. Many viewed the system as unempathetic, unsupportive, overly bureaucratic, and on some occasions, as incompetent. Above all they talked of a system that did not see them, interact with them, or care for them. Like their partners, some of the affected others had long-term mental and physical health problems, many of which they attributed to the high levels of stress that followed from their partner's gambling addiction. Many were socially isolated and felt even higher levels of shame and stigma as a result of the criminal justice involvement with their partner's gambling. Not one of the affected others we spoke to had found probation services to be supportive of them.

While probation services are there to primarily enforce the court and to supervise the person under sentence, our data suggests that more needs to be done to support the families of people under probation supervision. Where families are more clearly involved with probation supervision and feel 'heard' by probation, positive outcomes can follow (Coley and Devitt, 2020). If this were to occur, it is likely that PoP would be better supported to develop 'resettlement capital' (Hall et al., 2018), which involves PoP being able to develop not only their personal capabilities, but also draw on families and other community resources to support their recovery, desistance, and resettlement. Given that desistance is often supported by intimate partners, who themselves have to engage with some complex desistance emotional work, services need to do more to support those who are providing support to justice-involved people (Hall and Harris, 2022).

7.8 Challenges within the probation service

Pressures within probation services were widely acknowledged by all the people we spoke to. Staffing pressures were presented as the greatest challenge, with particular problems relating to understaffing and high caseloads. Changes to work practices, such as phone working, often brought about as a result of Covid-19 and a high back log of cases, were identified as problematic by many participants because

of the challenges these present for staff and PoP to develop trusting and supportive relationships. High levels of stress, staff absence, and staff turnover were also commonly reported as creating day-to-day challenges, but also as having led to a loss of expertise across the service. Some staff highlighted that the loss of frontline staff has been particularly acute, but also that the loss of more senior staff has also led to the loss of specialist knowledge and expertise that many frontline staff rely on.

Several probation staff raised concerns, albeit cautiously, that they considered many newer frontline practitioners to be inexperienced and sometimes lacking in life skills and experience for the job. This was observed not only by more experienced probation colleagues, but also PoP who felt that they were being supervised by people with limited experience and skills. This lack of experience meant that some PPs were reported to struggle to build the relationships and rapport required to accurately assess risk, while experienced staff were too busy to support them.

An additional challenge faced by the service was seen as its failure to represent the communities that PPs serve, with insufficient diversity among practitioners, including those new to the service. The training for new probation staff was frequently characterised as poor quality (quick and superficial) compared to in the past, with much of it now being delivered online. New recruits were reported to receive no standard training on gambling harms, in stark contrast to other addictions, although staff did also highlight the considerable volume of information that new recruits to probation services were required to pick up in a short period.

Time was a theme repeatedly raised by PoP and staff alike, with the recognition that PPs had no time to delve into the lives and support needs of PoP. In practice, this meant that only the most obvious challenges and needs (housing, employment, substance misuse) were given attention and issues such as gambling were left largely hidden and out of sight. In practice, both PPs and PoP felt that people with gambling-related offences were low priority and that the limited time available needed to be directed towards those who were classified as high risk, as well as focusing on key performance indicators or targets that they needed to address. PPs also did not feel they had adequate time to learn about gambling, or research and make appropriate referrals. Overall, there was little time for PPs to build trusting and supportive relationships with PoP. This meant that some staff were frustrated by the limited time available to focus on the rehabilitative side of probation work. The issues that the service focuses on were seen as primarily driven by risk (rather than needs), and in the view of some staff, subject to fashion, with the rising focus on gambling harms in some areas of the service argued to be evidence of this. The failure to focus on rehabilitation was widely recognised, thus limiting the effectiveness of probation work. These findings echo those of Phillips et al. (2025:1) who identify that ‘probationers and staff members’ “deep” hopes were “drowned” by bureaucratic, managerial and risk-focussed cultures’.

The pace of change and repeated restructuring was also identified as a challenge for the service. With each change, or new political directive, new demands were placed on staff, which in turn made it difficult to establish good working relationships with other stakeholders (including the CRSs), and staff were having to constantly shift and respond to different (and sometimes competing) priorities. The shifts in focus were reported to be driven by reactions to particular crises, such as prison overcrowding, rather than be driven by the strategic long-term development needs of the service. Past changes, including Transforming Rehabilitation and the later reunification of probation, were commonly identified as having had negative impacts on the service.

The service was regarded as both centralised and regionally inconsistent, for example with all mandatory training decided centrally, and all voluntary training decided at the regional level, and with regional commissioning leading to inconsistencies in provision by area and over time, with some pockets of good practice evident. The staff we spoke to were frustrated by regional inconsistencies, leading to confusions, for example over the staff training on offer and different CRSs being available in different areas. The training relating to gambling that was available was reported as being region-specific, voluntary, and poorly advertised. Several staff indicated that the only way probation staff would

understand more about gambling behaviour and gambling harms, was if the training was made mandatory. The same staff also indicated that there would be considerable resistance to this because of all the other demands on the service.

The pressures on probation services meant that PoP commented on the frequency of mistakes made by the service and the opportunities it missed, for example ignoring confessions of reoffending, giving PoP the wrong dates for appointments, getting addresses wrong, not responding to pleas for help, not managing handovers, and recommending inappropriate support or licence conditions. Sometimes there were also poor handovers from one probation officer to another (between custody and community and within the community between different regions and sometimes within the same PDU). This led to PoP sometimes having to diligently pursue their new PP due to fear of recall and having to tell their stories over and over again. This fragmented supervision serves to generate increased frustration for PoP and undermines the supervisory relationship (Cracknell, 2023b).

The culture of probation services was variously described as reactive and crisis led, suffering from a lack of public trust, and being fearful of the media spotlight. Our interviewees considered it to be overly complex, with multiple partnerships and pathways, having a tick-box culture, with less freedom, less professional curiosity, and more bureaucracy since reunification. The overriding focus of the service was seen to be on risk and on ticking boxes, while the rehabilitation of PoP was neglected, despite this being the side of the job that motivates most PPs. These findings support recent research by Phillips et al. (2025) that draws attention to the importance of 'hope' for both people under probation supervision and for the staff involved with delivering it. Sadly, an overemphasis on technical compliance (Robinson and McNeill, 2008) and perception that supervision is a tick-box exercise, have been described by some PoP as 'drowning hopes' (Phillips et al., 2025). The consequences can be felt acutely, not only by PoP but also the PPs who are having to work with limited resources and limited options for creative and meaningful supervision.

It is unsurprising, given these pressures and challenges, that the PoP we interviewed mostly reported having had a poor experience of probation supervision. Overall, our PoP found the service to be most effective in the courts, worst (and mostly non-existent) in custodial settings, and inconsistent in the community. While several PoP did feel that they had been assigned supportive and empathetic practitioners, even the best of these still appeared to have limited understanding of the gambling addiction that they had experienced and were trying to recover from. CRS staff indicated that they felt they often knew far more about PoP than PPs, but that they did not have the same powers to make referrals and encourage engagement with particular services. Sadly, most PoP, irrespective of their relationship with their probation officer(s) or CRS, found probation services unable to provide them with the support they needed and ultimately to serve little purpose in terms of their recovery from gambling and desistance from crime.

7.9 Gambling harms as low priority

Chapters 4–6 consistently present evidence that gambling is seen as low risk and a lesser priority by probation services. Even when some of the complexities of gambling harms were understood and its links to violence or serious crime recognised, the appetite in the service to capture data on the levels of harm and respond to it was low. Instead, the focus of the service was described as managing high risk and focusing on 'big' things that could go wrong. By contrast gambling was considered a 'small' or niche issue that was not particularly visible or a key source of crime or harm. Visible harms such as substance misuse and poor mental health among PoP were seen to be the priority. The lived experience participants in our research expressed much frustration with the low status of concerns (and understanding) in relation to gambling harms. It was clear that many of them felt very under-protected by the justice system surrounding them. Our findings echo those of Cracknell (2023a) with short sentence prisoners, who, he asserts, often feel invisible and insignificant while serving their short sentences. This is significant since the experience of feeling invisible, along with not being provided with

meaningful support, can be a particularly painful experience for justice-involved people (ibid). Importantly, it can also work against the development of recovery capital as people fail to get the support they need and also become more disillusioned with the services that they expected to provide support. Indeed, the ‘absence of institutional care and attention led service users to feel neglected’ (ibid:342).

In his paper Cracknell (ibid) also charts how short sentence prisoners have been largely invisible in penal policy. A similar observation can be made in relation to gambling harms and their relevance to crime and criminal justice policy. Cracknell also argues that the statutory supervision period introduced by the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 was ‘akin to a pass-the-parcel experience’ as people left prison and were subject to limited support from probation services before being passed to another agency to complete their post-sentence supervision (ibid:343). Participants in Cracknell’s research felt that they were often ‘unseen by staff’ in custody and then, similarly, misunderstood and of low priority to staff in the community. This ‘culminated in a form of supervision that was very perfunctory and experienced by service users as remote and uncaring, exacerbating pervasive feelings of insignificance’ (ibid:346). Drawing on the work of Deleuze (1992), Cracknell (2023a) argues men serving short sentences are ‘dividualised’ into a statistic, leading them to feel abandoned in a homogenous mass of short sentence prisoners. Notably, for the men and women in our study, who may also experience pains of insignificance and invisibility, no data about their gambling is even routinely held by the CJS – a failing that may serve to make them feel even more hidden from view and neglected by those responsible for their punishment and care.

While gambling has started to be recognised as a public health problem, gambling harms continue to be overlooked by many social, health, and welfare agencies, as well as the CJS. While the increased attention that gambling has received is to be welcomed, with ambitions to develop a national HMPPS gambling harms strategy, this work appears to have stalled following staffing and organisational changes. There continue to be some very good initiatives and examples of work across the country, but these appear to have emerged in particular pockets of the country and have not followed from any clear national strategy or commitment to addressing gambling within the CJS. This means that the support provided to people convicted of gambling-related offences or experiencing gambling harms unrelated to their offence is commonly sparse and inconsistent. Funding for gambling-related initiatives has been low, with many small pilots, like one in Nottingham City led by probation, funded from drug and alcohol budgets. Any such pilot projects relating to gambling are highly dependent on a small number of people embedded in them, and so can be vulnerable to changes in strategic priorities, staff turnover, and cuts in budgets.

While most staff recognised that gambling harms are important for the CJS to address, most staff (except those involved with specific projects or the development of gambling strategies as part of their Health and Justice role) were not aware of CJS specific work relating to gambling. There was a recognition among many probation staff that gambling is there, but it was largely seen as a hidden problem. Staff reminded us of the difficulties involved with finding time for training on gambling harms, or to find the time needed to talk meaningfully about it with PoP. While prevalence data and screening remain limited, it is difficult for agencies, including probation services, to justify allocating resources in this area. People with lived experience are acting to push gambling harms up the CJS agenda, and the new mandatory gambling levy brings some hope that additional resources may be made available to address gambling harms among PoP.

8. Recommendations

Our findings, which specifically concern the delivery of probation services to those affected by gambling harms, suggest that clearer understanding and strategies are needed to better support justice-involved people in relation to gambling. Our research echoes previous findings on people's experience of the CJS when they have experienced gambling harms. Our findings also suggest that more needs to be done to support the recommendations set out by the final report of the Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harm (2023). This report recommended that more needed to be done in England and Wales in relation to: 1) developing a strategic approach in response to gambling-related crime; 2) enhancing the role of criminal justice agencies; 3) integrating gambling-related crime into broader government action on gambling harms; and 4) commissioning further research. We endorse these recommendations and below make our own, which range from the general to specific suggestions related to specific probation processes or practices, plus recommendations for further research.

8.1 General

A clear national strategy is needed that addresses gambling harms in justice-involved people, ensuring greater resource is dedicated to these harms and that there is consistency in approach across England and Wales.

There is a need for greater awareness and recognition of justice-involved people's experiences of gambling harms among probation services, and the other agencies with whom they work (i.e. courts, police, prisons, CRSs, housing services etc.).

The need is urgent for better screening of all justice-involved people to identify not only those convicted of a gambling-related offence, but also all those who are experiencing gambling harms caused by their own gambling or that of someone else.

PPs and CRS staff need to have more confidence to ask PoP how they may be gambling or experiencing gambling harms while under supervision.

The breadth and depth of gambling behaviours and harms mean that questions on gambling should feature in multiple places (drop-down PSR menus, OASys etc.), with varied context-specific wording designed to capture as many positive responses as possible. Given the barriers to disclosing a gambling addiction or gambling harms, it is important that repeated attempts are made to ask justice-involved people about their past and present involvement with gambling.

Where gambling harms are disclosed, this needs to be clearly and consistently recorded in databases such as OASys, ARNS, and RAM, so that practitioners are aware of those harms and can act upon them.

Where gambling harms are identified, clearer opportunities for signposting and formal referral pathways are urgently needed.

Mandatory, consistent training about gambling behaviour, risks, associated harms, and sources of support is needed, with people with lived experience of gambling harms and the CJS involved in the design and delivery of this training.

8.2 Courts

There is a need for a review of sentencing experiences of people who have committed gambling-related offences, with a view to recommendations for new sentencing guidelines.

PSRs are an ideal opportunity for the early identification of gambling harms and the PRS menu and process should explicitly provide for the questioning of defendants about any gambling harms they may be experiencing, whether related to their offence or not.

Greater thought needs to be given to the impact of CJS decisions on those affected by the gambling of others, for example the impact on vulnerable family members of a custodial sentence and the long-term impact of the use of POCAs on families.

8.3 Prisons

Improved access to gambling harms support in custody is urgent. This could be achieved through drug and alcohol services taking on the gambling brief, greater use of peer support in prisons, and/or the contracting of specialist gambling harms support services into prisons.

There is a need for better through the gate support for people leaving prison, some of whom may have accumulated gambling debts in prison. Support provision in the community should be put in place at this stage.

PPs need improved awareness of the links between gambling and domestic abuse in order to assess whether people can safely be released from custody into the home. Home assessments should also consider other risks to recovery from gambling harms within the domestic environment.

8.4 Community

Where gambling harms are disclosed, clear and consistent referral pathways are needed to address support needs. Where gambling support is offered to PoP, but not part of their sentence/supervision plan (e.g. as part of RAR), mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that PPs (or other CRS staff) are following up with PoP to ensure that the support offered is being used and is effective. If it is not, they need to explore and identify alternative avenues of support.

Support pathways to CRS should be established, with those services taking on the gambling harms brief, especially in the light of the new contracting system to start in 2027.

PPs and other CRS staff need to develop a greater awareness of services locally available to support PoP and their families with gambling harms.

Additionally, PPs and CRS staff could helpfully advise PoP more clearly about prevention strategies to support their recovery from gambling. This includes physical bans, blocking software, changes to banking apps, and more.

There should be a review of how AP residents are impacted by gambling harms and how they can be better protected from them.

8.5 Research

Further research is needed with people under probation supervision, especially those who may not have been convicted of an offence related to gambling, to develop a better understanding of the complex relationship between gambling and crime, and of the needs relating to gambling harms among justice involved people.

The cost of gambling-related crime to society is likely to be large and the calculation of this cost could form compelling evidence of the need for greater investment by HMPPS in identifying and addressing gambling harms.

There is a need for further research on gambling behaviours, gambling cultures, and gambling harms in APs and other supported housing for PoP.

The independent evaluation of any gambling harms programmes in the CJS system is essential in order to ensure their maximum efficacy and reach, including any future interventions provided by CRSs (such as short online courses).

Finally, there should be a commitment to, and proper resourcing, of, the meaningful involvement of people with lived experience of gambling harms and the CJS in all stages of research, including the design of research funding streams and programmes.

9. Acronyms and abbreviations

AP	Approved Premises
ARNS	Assess Risks, Needs, Strengths
ATR	Alcohol Treatment Requirement
CJA	Criminal Justice Act 1991 and 2003
CJS	Criminal Justice System
COM	Community Offender Manager
CRS	Commissioned Rehabilitative Service
CSTR	Community Sentence Treatment Requirement
DRR	Drug Rehabilitation Requirement
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
EPOP	Engaging People on Probation
EQuIP	Excellence Quality in Probation Practice
HDC	home detention curfew
HMPPS	HM Prison and Probation Service
GA	Gamblers Anonymous
LEAG	Lived Experience Advisory Group
MHTR	Mental Health Treatment Requirement
MOSES	Multi-Operator Self-Exclusion Scheme
NOMIS	National Offender Management Information System
NRC	negative recovery capital
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OMU	Offender Management Unit
PDU	Probation Delivery Unit
PO	Probation Officer
POCA	Proceeds of Crime Act
PoP	people on probation
POM	Prisoner Offender Manager
PP	probation practitioner
PQiP	Professional Qualification in Probation
PRC	positive recovery capital
PSO	Probation Services Officer
PSR	Pre-Sentence Report
RAM	Refer and Monitor
RAR	Rehabilitation Activity Requirement
ROTL	Release on Temporary Licence
RSO	Registered Sex Offender
SPO	Senior Probation Officer
TR	Transforming Rehabilitation

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