

RR3

Reducing Reoffending
Third Sector Advisory Group

CLINKS
Supporting the voluntary sector
working in the criminal justice system

**BLACK
MEN** FOR
CHANGE

REDUCING REOFFENDING — THIRD SECTOR ADVISORY GROUP REPORT

'Round Table Host: by Joel Dunn
CEO & Paradigm Project Founder



INTRODUCTION

The Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) provides an important interface between the voluntary sector, and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), to increase mutual understanding and build a strong and effective partnership. The group is made up of senior leaders from the voluntary sector and meets quarterly with civil servants to provide guidance and feedback on MoJ policy developments.

The RR3 convenes Special Interest Groups (SIGs) or Reference Groups to advise on specific areas of policy and practice, as the need arises. This report is drawn from the work of the Reference Group on tackling racial disparities in the criminal justice system, a new forum convened by the RR3 in partnership with Black Men 4 Change (BM4C) and focuses specifically on sentencing disparities. It draws on the expertise of individuals and organisations working across the voluntary sector working in criminal justice and other allied sectors, with 71 participants contributing to a session held in February 2025. The session was facilitated

by Joel Dunn, legacy member of BM4C's Q-SEED Founder and Leaders Programme and CEO and Founder of the Paradigm Project, an organisation dedicated to reshaping education in the UK.

It is important to note that this report marks the start of this Group's work and the beginning of a review of the approach that the RR3 takes, in its race-related work, to its engagement with government and its accountability to the communities it represents. It is the beginning of a more intentional, inclusive, and accountable approach to criminal justice reform, led by those with lived experience of the system and the systemic impacts of the system's failings. This is an approach which will centre the transferring of power to those most affected by systemic racism and the organisations by and for them which Clinks, in its role convening the RR3, and Black Men 4 Change are committed to facilitating.

The report begins by addressing the issue under consideration - racial disparities in sentencing - and sets out the focus of the Group. It then covers an overview of the six breakout groups at the February 2025 session, with each group covering a specific question from the Independent Sentencing Review. Each of the breakout groups developed specific recommendations which follow the summary of each of the group's discussions.

EACH BREAKOUT GROUP WAS ASSIGNED ONE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- 1.** How can sentencing be fairer and more sustainable?
What barriers exist to making sentencing more equitable?
- 2.** How can digital solutions improve sentencing administration and rehabilitation?
- 3.** How can community-based alternatives to custody deliver better outcomes?
- 4.** How can prisons be reformed to prioritise rehabilitation?
- 5.** What changes are needed to ensure effective rehabilitation and reintegration?
- 6.** Victim and Offender Needs – How can sentencing balance justice for victims while addressing offenders' individual needs?

Executive Summary

This Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) report shines a light on the deep-rooted issues within the justice system, with a focus on racial disparities in sentencing. This report is built on the voices of those directly affected, people with lived experience, policymakers, and community advocates, who came together to develop recommendations designed to bring about reform of the system.

KEY ISSUES:

- **Sentencing disparities** – Black and Global Majority individuals receive harsher sentences and fewer rehabilitation opportunities, with non-white defendants receiving longer custodial sentences.
- **Prisons Fail to Rehabilitate** – Short sentences disrupt lives but do little to prevent reoffending.
- **Better Alternatives Exist** – Community-led programmes focused on education and employment are more effective than incarceration.
- **Technology Risks Bias** – AI and digital tools could improve justice but may reinforce discrimination without oversight.
- **Reintegration is Failing** – Many leaving prison struggle to find jobs, housing, and support, leading them back into the system.
- **Trauma Support Lacking** – Black and Global Majority individuals in prison and on release need better mental health support to reduce reoffending.
- **Underused Youth Interventions** – Existing programmes are often overlooked; greater investment is needed in Black and Global Majority-led initiatives.
- **Serious Offences Dominate** – Many cases involve sentences exceeding two years, highlighting the need for reform beyond minor offences.



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- 1. Make Sentencing Fairer** – including through the implementation of reforms that actively challenge discrimination and bias in the justice system. Every case should be judged on its own merit, ensuring punishment fits the crime and accounts for individual circumstances.
- 2. Invest in Rehabilitation** – Redirect resources into community-based programmes that reduce reoffending.
- 3. Clearer data needed** on sentencing types and reoffending rates to inform policy.
- 4. Fix Probation Services** – People leaving prison need real support, not just check-ins.
- 5. Use Technology Responsibly** – Ensure AI and digital tools help rather than harm marginalised communities. AI and social media monitoring play a dual role, helping prevent youth involvement in gangs while also raising concerns about fairness and profiling. Technology should therefore be used to support early intervention, not just criminalisation.
- 6. Engage Communities** – Justice reform must involve the people it impacts the most.
- 7. Addressing crime** must strike a balance between deterrence and rehabilitation.
- 8. Non-violent crimes**, particularly social media-related fraud and gang recruitment, require modern intervention strategies.

Addressing Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System

The justice system has long discriminated against Black and Global Majority communities, handing down harsher sentences, increasing incarceration rates, and limited rehabilitation opportunities. Despite bearing the brunt of these injustices, their voices have largely been excluded from shaping solutions. Real change means shifting decision-making power to those directly affected.

To address this, the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) launched a pilot reference group focused on tackling racial disparities in sentencing. Clinks commissioned Black Men 4 Change (BM4C) to lead its first session, ensuring that those with lived experience drove the conversation and shaped the recommendations.

This session brought together individuals impacted by the justice system, alongside policymakers and advocates. Their insights, captured in this report, will be submitted to the Independent Sentencing Review ahead of its final publication in Spring 2025. These recommendations reflect a collective call for justice, informed by real experiences and a demand for meaningful reform. To avoid duplication, repeated points raised across discussions have been streamlined into a clear, actionable framework for change.

BREAKOUT GROUP 1 – REFORMING SENTENCING FOR A FAIRER AND SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM:

Introduction:

This group explored how sentencing structures and processes can inform more effective outcomes, while ensuring a sustainable system. The general theme was that the system overly focuses on punishment rather than rehabilitation, which is often driven by political pressure to ‘look tough on crime’ and does little to reduce reoffending. One participant, who has lived experience of the criminal justice system, commented that ‘decisions made in courtrooms don’t exist in isolation. They shape people’s lives for years, and without understanding the inequalities they face, sentencing will continue to fuel systemic disadvantage.’ Discussion centred on the increased length of custodial sentences, with the average prison sentence having risen from 18.6 months in 2021 to 22.6 months in 2022, double the length in 2007 (Statista, 2023).

Key themes:

Lack of diversity within the judiciary – participants highlighted that there is a lack of diversity within the judiciary, and an over dominance of White men, which can lead to unconscious bias in sentencing outcomes.

Understanding the impact of sentencing on Black and Global Majority communities – with a focus on the fact that many who enter the justice system already face systemic discrimination in education, housing, employment and healthcare which creates a cumulative impact on individuals from these communities.

Alternatives for young adults – young adults’ risk long-term criminalisation when sentenced to custody, with participants agreeing on the need to expand upon non-custodial alternatives.

Restorative Justice and community solutions – participants spoke of the benefits of restorative justice as a more effective way to address harm, by enabling victims and perpetrators to engage in constructive dialogue.

The Group then developed the following recommendations:



**TO MOVE
BEYOND
'PUNISHMENT-DRIVEN'
SENTENCING, BY:**

- Shifting towards evidence-based sentencing policies that incorporate tailored, pre-sentence, rehabilitative options
- Implementing the relevant recommendations from the Lammy Review and the Sewell Report to address systemic disparities and institutional racism
- Expanding preventative and community-based alternatives, including deferred sentencing options for young adults and first-time entrants into the criminal justice system;
- Piloting new, community sentencing models that incorporate job training, mental health support and mentoring. This will need adequate and sustainable resourcing to ensure that the expansion can be delivered by and for organisations.
- The work of 'Kids of Colour' [HOLDING OUR OWN | Liberty](#), a grassroots organisation advocating for rehabilitation-focused alternatives, was highlighted as an example of an approach that should be expanded nationally.
- Actively involving individuals with lived experience in the shaping of sentencing policies
- Creating a system that can track and challenge sentencing disparities, ensuring accountability for disparities



**TO REFORM
JUDICIAL
PROCESSES BY:**

- Recruiting more Black and Global Majority judges to improve judicial diversity
- Increasing public legal education in underrepresented communities
- Establishing advisory panels with individuals who have direct experience of the justice system
- Reviewing the Equal Treatment Bench Book (ETBB), alongside monitoring its implementation and providing clear guidelines that address racial bias in sentencing
- Operation Black Vote's successful MP Shadowing Scheme, launched in 1999, increased minority representation in Parliament by mentoring future leaders like Helen Grant and Clive Lewis. A similar programme for magistrates and judges could open the judiciary, improving diversity and understanding of the justice system. By shadowing legal professionals, participants would gain first-hand insight into balancing justice for victims while considering offenders' individual needs. This approach could shape future judges who reflect society, ensuring fairer sentencing. Policymakers should back initiatives like this to create a more inclusive, representative judiciary.

**TO PURSUE
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TO JUSTICE AND
COMMUNITY-LED
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BREAKOUT GROUP 2 – REFORMING COMMUNITY SENTENCES AND ALTERNATIVES TO CUSTODY:

Introduction:

This session explored how to reform community sentences and alternatives to custody, to improve justice outcomes for everyone impacted. The overarching theme was of a cycle of reoffending, and how prison often fails to break the cycle, which is often exacerbated by a lack of support, post-release. The result, participants agreed, is increased reoffending, linked to feelings of societal rejection following a person's release from prison.

Key themes:

Probation –the challenges faced by probation were covered, with one posing the question: 'how can we reform sentencing without overwhelming an already stretched probation system? It was noted that probation officers continue to struggle with high caseloads, which limits their ability to provide meaningful supervision. Though acknowledging the challenges faced by probation, one participant commented that 'probation is just a tick-box exercise. Why not turn it into a real 12-month education programme?' A separate participant asked, 'where are the spaces for reformed individuals to rebuild their lives?'

Barriers to reintegration – it was highlighted that stigma can prevent people leaving prison from securing jobs and housing and is therefore a key barrier to successful reintegration. One participant with lived experience of the CJS, described how employment rejection had pushed them back into crime. Initiatives such as **Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)** were highlighted as successful examples of helping people to reintegrate back into society. A member of Q-Seed, InsideOut support Wales (IOSW) was also highlighted given its work providing tailored support for people with convictions.


Further, the difficulty of accessing the prison estate for organisations, along with the lack of easily accessible and sustainable funding for these organisations were also raised as challenges.

Mental health and trauma – participants noted that crime often stems from untreated trauma and mental health issues and emphasised the importance of addressing identity and emotional resilience.

Unfair sentencing and public perception – participants noted that racial and economic disparities in sentencing persist, with one commenting that ‘the system responds to political pressure, not fairness.’

The need for alternative sentencing models - Participants advocated for skills training, restorative justice, and community-led initiatives to reduce reoffending, as well as the use of problem-solving courts to tackle the root causes of crime such as addiction and mental health issues.

Restorative justice – participants highlighted the need to bring together victims and perpetrators to address harm



THE GROUP THEN DEVELOPED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

To focus on community-led solutions by:

- Investing in community support hubs, with Coffee Afrik CIC raised as a specific example, providing safe spaces for people on community sentences to access mental health support, education and job opportunities

To invest in early intervention programmes by:

- Supporting at-risk young people through preventative programmes in schools

To reform probation by:

- Increasing diversity within the probation service at Senior, decision maker level
- Reducing caseloads for probation officers to enable meaningful support as opposed to monitoring

To invest in psychological and trauma support by:

- Integrating counselling, trauma care and resilience training into sentencing options

To expand employment and training opportunities by:

- Partnering with businesses to create job pathways for people leaving prison

To change public perceptions by:

- Running awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of rehabilitation over punishment

BREAKOUT GROUP 3 – USING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SENTENCING AND OFFENDER MANAGEMENT:

Introduction:

This session explored how technology can enhance sentencing, improve justice administration, and support effective offender management in the community. Participants included legal professionals, community advocates, and individuals with lived experience, all sharing insights on how innovation can create a fairer justice system.

There were several areas that participants agreed required reform, including digital literacy, the fairer use of social media evidence, stronger protection against online exploitation and the elimination of AI bias in sentencing. The discussion reinforced the need for technology to create a fairer justice system rather than deepen existing inequalities, with innovation targeted at rehabilitation, fairness, and inclusivity, with strong safeguards to prevent misuse.

Key themes:

AI in Sentencing – participants noted that the use of AI, if used appropriately, could standardise sentencing and reduce bias. This was presented with the caveat that if ‘AI’ were to be trained using biased data, then there is the risk that it could reinforce existing disparities. Accordingly, strong oversight and diverse representation in AI development were both considered to be essential.

Electronic monitoring– participants agreed that electronic tagging offers an alternative to prison, but that privacy concerns – especially in over-policed communities, must be addressed. In addition, any monitoring should be geared towards rehabilitation. The Black Equity Organisation (BEO) won a legal challenge against MOPAC and the MoJ over racial bias in the knife crime tagging programme. Black people were 87% more likely to be tagged than white people, prompting BEO to act. [New settlement discrimination in tagging system - BEO](#)

Social media and predictive policing – participants highlighted that social media evidence is often used out of context in court, and that predictive policing disproportionately targets Black and Global majority communities (often misidentifying ethnic minorities) while risking the reinforcement of systemic biases.

AI bias and systemic discrimination in sentencing – one participant noted how AI sentencing tools can reinforce racial bias, highlighting one case in which an AI system labelled a Black defendant as ‘high risk’ while a white defendant with a longer criminal record was deemed ‘low risk.’

Digital inclusion and rehabilitation – it was agreed that many people leaving prison often struggle with digital exclusion. One participant, who had lived experience of the CJS, described the struggle of re-entering society without digital skills, commenting on the overwhelming nature of perceived, simple tasks such as setting up online banking or applying for jobs.

Social Media Surveillance and Digital Criminalisation – one participant, a youth worker, shared a case where a 16-year-old was arrested after appearing in a Snapchat video. Though he had no criminal record, he was added to a police watchlist due to perceived associations, underscoring the dangers of unregulated digital surveillance.

Online grooming and criminal exploitation of children in care – one participant, a foster carer, recounted how a 14-year-old boy was groomed via social media into drug trafficking, highlighting the need for stronger digital safeguards and early intervention tools to protect vulnerable children.

THE GROUP THEN DEVELOPED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

To improve social media protections by:

- Strengthening and building on existing online protections

To improve digital literacy training in prison by:

- Ensuring that people in prison can develop essential digital and tech skills, ahead of release

To ensure the safe usage of AI by:

- Involving marginalised communities in AI justice reforms, with transparency and fairness placed at the centre of all AI development
- Ensuring that AI tools do not reinforce systemic bias
- Enabling greater oversight for AI-based law enforcement tools

BREAKOUT GROUP 4 – REFORMING CUSTODIAL SENTENCES FOR BETTER OUTCOMES:

Introduction:

This session highlighted the need for sentencing reform to prioritise rehabilitation over punishment, ensuring justice for offenders, victims, and communities. Participants stressed that poverty and systemic racism fuel violent crime, making investment in affected communities essential. Adopting a public health approach, expanding restorative justice, abolishing short custodial sentences, improving rehabilitation in prisons, and strengthening post-release support were key recommendations. Recognising that “it takes a village to raise a child,” the group urged policymakers to invest in the village, challenging outdated narratives and building a justice system that addresses root causes rather than simply punishing individuals.

Key themes:

Knife crime and sentencing gaps - one participant highlighted how sentencing fails to address youth knife crime effectively. They cited cases where young offenders were released on bail despite being caught with dangerous weapons, only to reoffend fatally. Another participant shared how a restorative justice programme changed their perspective on knife crime and helped them leave violence behind. Participants agreed that first-time knife offenders need intervention, not simply punishment, and that restorative justice can deter young people from reoffending. In addition, it was argued that better post-bail support is crucial to prevent further violence.

Tailored rehabilitation in prison - one participant highlighted the stark difference between short- and long-term prison experiences. While people serving long-term sentences often access rehabilitative programmes, those serving short terms receive little support. Another participant who had

served multiple short sentences shared their frustration at being repeatedly released without education, employment pathways, or support to break the cycle of reoffending. To rectify this, participants called for targeted rehabilitative programmes, alongside early education on criminal records, and structured rehabilitation for people serving long sentences.

Abolition of short custodial sentences - participants strongly advocated for the ending of custodial sentences under six months, arguing they do more harm than good. One participant described how their six-month sentence disrupted their life but offered no support for reintegration, leaving them worse off than before. Participants called for an alternative approach that replaces short custodial sentences with community rehabilitation, and prison regimes that prioritise meaningful intervention as opposed to the current situation of ‘warehousing’.

Post-release support and probation failures - one participant criticised probation services for their lack of meaningful support, citing a case where a young person, after serving eight years, was released with minimal guidance and struggled to reintegrate. Another participant described probation as “just checking in” rather than providing real help. Participants agreed that probation services must actively assist in securing housing, jobs, and mental health care, alongside a renewed focus on youth intervention programmes that are engaging and impactful.

Systemic inequalities and sentencing disparities - one participant emphasised the systemic issues within sentencing, from racial disparities to socio-economic barriers. Another participant shared how their Black son received a harsher sentence than white peers for the same offence, highlighting the racial injustices still present in the system. Participants called for sentencing and rehabilitation that is trauma-informed, with greater support for those diagnosed as neurodivergent and those presenting with mental health issues. This should be in addition to a public health approach that addresses the root causes of crime.

Through-the-gate provision – one participant advocated for structured ‘through-the-gate’ support to ensure a smooth transition from custody to community life, particularly for those on short sentences or in the female estate. They also called for tailored interventions for neurodivergent individuals, recognising that traditional custodial services often fail them.

THE GROUP THEN DEVELOPED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

To abolish short custodial sentences by:

- Replacing ineffective short sentences with community-based rehabilitation, structured employment training, and psychological support

To create a bespoke sentencing framework:

- With a particular focus on neurodiverse individuals

To improve rehabilitative interventions in prison through:

- Expanded education and mental health service, and a renewed focus on vocational training to prepare people for their release

To strengthen post-release support by:

- Reducing the demands on probation
- Introducing mentorship schemes, creating viable employment pathways and ensuring the provision of secure, stable housing for people leaving prison

To adopt a public health approach, including through:

- Investing in early intervention, integrating social services and funding youth programmes and youth diversion services

BREAKOUT GROUP 5 – REFORMING PROGRESSION THROUGH CUSTODIAL SENTENCES:

Introduction:

This session explored how improvements could be made in progression through custodial sentences, to improve outcomes for people in prison, as well as victims and communities.

The discussion identified inefficiencies in the system and proposed solutions to support rehabilitation, promote accountability, and ease reintegration into society.

This session underscored the need for a justice system that actively prepares people leaving prisons for reintegration. Reforming sentence progression, expanding education and employment pathways, improving mental health support, and creating meaningful incentives were all proposed as solutions to reducing reoffending and building safer communities.

Key themes:

Personalised sentence planning - current standardised sentence plans fail to consider individual needs and progress. One participant with lived experience described their frustration with rigid sentencing structures that ignored their efforts to improve. A dynamic approach would have encouraged engagement.

Expanding education and employment pathways - education and job training significantly reduce reoffending, yet access remains inconsistent. One participant recalled their experience of struggling to find work after prison due to a lack of practical training, stating that targeted job preparation would have supported them in their resettlement.

Mental health and wellbeing support - many people in prison

have untreated mental health issues, making rehabilitation difficult. One participant with lived experience, who is now a mental health advocate, described their experience of struggling to access therapy despite repeated requests, highlighting the urgent need for integrated support.

For example, **Switchback** organisation helps young prison leavers rebuild their lives through work, mentorship, and mental health support. Participants get job training, career coaching, and therapy, with former members becoming mentors and advocates for change.

91% of Switchback Trainees do not reoffend within a year of release. Nationally, 45% of prison-leavers reoffend within a year of release – for Switchback Trainees, the figure is just 9%.
What We Do - Switchback

Incentivising rehabilitation and good behaviour – participants discussed how many people in prison feel that their rehabilitation efforts go unrecognised, leading to disengagement. One participant with lived experience described how their efforts towards self-improvement were ignored, reinforcing the need for a system that recognises positive change.

Strengthening parole and release processes – participants discussed how inconsistent parole procedures and poor post-release support contribute to reoffending. One participant described their release as chaotic, lacking clear guidance on housing, employment, or community support. Better planning could have prevented their reoffending.

THE GROUP THEN DEVELOPED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

To create tailored sentence plans by:

- Considering education, skills, mental health, and rehabilitation potential.
- Conducting regular multidisciplinary reviews to adjust plans based on progress.
- Involve people in their own rehabilitation planning to encourage responsibility and ownership

To improve the education and employment offer in prisons by:

- Ensuring all prisons offer accredited education programmes from literary to vocational training
- Building strong prison-to-employment pipelines with employers offering training that leads not just to job offers, but to job starts
- Increasing funding for digital learning, allowing people in prison to continue education, post-release
- Introducing an earned-release framework for those who engage in rehabilitation, and by ensuring that rehabilitation efforts are reflected in parole decisions

To embed trauma-informed care into the prison system by:

- Providing consistent access to mental health professionals, addiction recovery services, and peer mentors
- Including mental health assessments in sentence reviews

To improve the parole process by:

- Ensuring that rehabilitation efforts are reflected in parole decisions
- Clarifying parole requirements so that people understand what is required for release

BREAKOUT GROUP 6 – REFORMING SENTENCING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS:

Introduction:

This session explored how sentencing can better address the needs of both victims and offenders while improving justice outcomes. The Group explored the merits of individualised sentencing, as well the enhancement of victim participation, improving transparency in sentencing decisions and investing in specialist support services.

Key themes:

Tailored sentencing approaches - the current system applies rigid guidelines that overlook key factors including trauma, mental health, and rehabilitation potential. One participant shared how their sentence did not factor in their mental health struggles, and that a more rehabilitative approach could have led to therapy rather than imprisonment.

Prioritising victim voices - Sentences should balance punishment with victim support and recovery. One participant, a victim of assault, described feeling excluded from the sentencing process and called for a system that prioritises victim recovery alongside justice.

Reducing over-reliance on prison – participants discussed how, for many non-violent offenders, alternatives to prison are more effective. One participant with lived experience explained how a prison sentence exposed them to hardened criminals instead of offering support. A rehabilitative

programme could have led to a better outcome.

Tackling racial and socioeconomic disparities - Black and Global Majority individuals and those from deprived backgrounds often face harsher sentences. One participant, a legal professional, [Problem solving courts pilots in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill: Equalities Impact Assessment - GOV.UK](#) showing persistent racial disparities in sentencing.

Expanding restorative justice - this approach can improve victim satisfaction and reduce reoffending. One participant, who had been a victim of a burglary, described how meeting the perpetrator helped them find closure, and had a stronger impact than a prison sentence alone.

Increasing sentencing transparency – participants discussed how public confidence in the justice system is undermined when sentencing decisions seem inconsistent or unclear.

Expanding specialised courts – participants discussed how targeted interventions can reduce reoffending by addressing the root causes of crime.

THE GROUP THEN DEVELOPED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

To implement individualised sentencing assessments that:

- Consider personal circumstances
- Benefit from an expansion in the use of pre-sentence reports

More investment is needed in support services outside prison.

Where possible, these services should be culturally appropriate and led by those they aim to support. To improve access to essential services, efforts should focus on:

- Expanding mental health diversion schemes that prioritise treatment over imprisonment
- Funding specialist courts for drug-related and mental health cases
- Supporting domestic abuse courts that focus on behaviour change and victim protection

To increase the role of victims by:

- Ensuring their voices shape sentencing
- Increasing access to victim support service
- Training specialist facilitators to ensure safe, victim-led processes

To expand legal aid to ensure fair representation

To embed restorative practice in youth justice to prevent early criminalisation

Conclusion:

Racial disparities are embedded in every stage of the criminal justice system, even before a crime is committed. This isn't just a justice issue; it's a societal failure. The systemic inequalities in criminal justice mirror the deep-rooted racial biases in education, from school exclusions to the school-to-prison pipeline. More must be done to implement much needed prevention and early intervention. This must change. Policymakers cannot ignore the urgent need for systemic reform.

Participants affirmed more investment is needed in support services outside prison. Where possible, these services should be culturally appropriate and led by those they aim to support. Currently, probation services are overstretched and do not work seamlessly with community-led organisations, limiting their effectiveness in rehabilitation. Meanwhile, "by and for" organisations lack the resources to play an active role in supporting people to rebuild their lives.

Punishment alone does not stop reoffending. If we want a fairer, more effective justice system, we must prioritise rehabilitation, fairness, and community-driven solutions. Too many people remain trapped in a cycle of crime and punishment, and without urgent action, nothing will change. To improve access to essential services and break this cycle, investment should focus on (this is not an exhaustive list and reflect recommendations made throughout the report):

- Expanding mental health diversion schemes that prioritise treatment over imprisonment
- Funding specialist courts for drug-related and mental health cases
- Supporting domestic abuse courts that focus on behaviour change and victim protection

**THE
SYSTEM
ISN'T JUST
FAILING
THEM, IT'S
FAILING
ALL OF US.**

There is an alternative approach that can mitigate the significant social and societal costs of crime. This would move away from the 'penal populism' highlighted by David Gauke, towards an approach that focuses on rehabilitation over punishment. Within the current context, Black and Global Majority communities continue to face harsher punishment, fewer opportunities for rehabilitation, and greater obstacles to rebuilding their lives. The recommendations set out in this report, informed by the experiences of all those who contributed, provide a more effective alternative – one that invests in local communities, and one that holds the system accountable to tackle entrenched racial disparities.

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The Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3), Clinks and Black Men 4 Change (BM4C) are incredibly grateful to everyone who contributed to this work. Their insights, lived experiences, and dedication made this possible. By bringing in those most affected, we ensured that real experiences shaped the conversation.

This document belongs to everyone who contributed. Each person involved is recognised as a co-contributor and co-owner, reflecting the collective effort behind these findings.

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