The Community Justice Coalition (CJC) is focused on providing computers in cells to prisoners as we believe this is an essential way to engage the most important people affected by prison reform - the prisoners themselves. This development using secure technology has now been accepted in NSW Australia as necessary for the safety and benefit of the whole community. Our compelling analysis around domestic violence could not be ignored.

Computers in cells would provide UK prisoners the opportunity to safely use existing mainstream resources to deal with their problems rather than passively waiting for time to pass in their cells with little access to services. It would address all the Terms of Reference (ToR) of this Inquiry. Providing prisoners with access to computers in cells would allow them to fully engage with probation staff, Community Rehabilitation Centres (CRC’s), and the courts. It would enable prisoners to communicate with family and service providers, access information, and give feedback on the quality of services provided. With access to appropriate whitelisted websites, prisoners would be able to engage directly with the voluntary sector, give feedback on service delivery, and communicate their needs to probationary services and Parliamentary Committees.

The CJC believes that prisoners’ voices should be heard by the Justice Committee in order to transform rehabilitation generally as well to assist their own resettlement. Prisoner engagement is essential to ensuring successful reintegration into the community upon release. Rehabilitating prisoners is the key to reducing prison populations and ensuring they are able to successfully reintegrate upon release.

Our submission addresses ToR 2(b)(c), 5, 6, and 7.

The NSW Australian Government has recently decided to accept the concept of computers in cells and to proceed towards implementing this decision. We marked this development with a celebratory event in Sydney. The government letter here describes the changes.

The compelling argument that convinced the NSW Government can be seen in the letter below which was sent to all judicial officers in NSW and parliamentarians. The arguments set out would apply equally to the UK context. Essentially, the implementation of Computers in Cells can benefit the whole community and reduce the social and financial costs of violence and recidivism.

Online support services provided through in cell computers will produce six key benefits: 1) detainees can properly use up to eighteen hours a day they spend in isolation; 2) external service providers enable choice and foster trust; 3) stability of service providers through the detention and post release; 4) empowerment through self-management; 5) research indicates that online counselling can be more effective than face-to-face counselling; and 6) it is relatively inexpensive. View our Cost of Inaction paper for a detailed analysis Annexure “C”. View our “Domestic Violence Prevention Online Services for Prisoners” paper Annexure “B”.

Written evidence from the Community Justice Coalition (TRH0120)
For example, it is pointed out that the **UK cost of inaction** would result each year in over 3,200 women and children unnecessarily experiencing domestic violence, and £397 million in unnecessary Government expenditure.

In the Australian Capital Territory, *Computers in Cells* has been operating for 8 years and is safe, effective and cost efficient. See [ACT Computer in Cells Report](#).

Access to e-mail services would allow people in prison and their family and friends to remain in regular contact, ensuring easier re-integration into community life following a person’s release from corrective services. Furthermore, people should also have access to whitelisted counselling, education and legal websites. There is also a lack of adequate therapeutic programs available in detention centers in the UK. Online counselling can fill this gap.

We urgently request that *Computers in Cells* be implemented in the UK.

**Letter to all NSW Judges and Members of parliament**

*Community Justice Coalition*

Dear Judge/MP (by name),

**NSW Government must support Computers in Cells**

The Community Justice Coalition (CJC) is writing to ask you to support our proposal that Computers in Cells be provided to deliver online counselling services.

Education, legal and communication services would also become available with such a program to lessen the isolation of imprisonment, to assist rehabilitation, and thus to lower recidivism. The proven technology is safe, cheap and easily available.

Unfortunately, the government has so far been dismissive of the Computers in Cells proposal, but a Public Inquiry could establish these facts beyond question.

This rejection comes at a serious human and financial cost. Our Report “Counting the Cost of Inaction[1]” (see attached media release) shows that over 500 women and children could potentially have been spared domestic violence and $110 million saved over the past year.

In response, the Government said, “The online counselling proposal would not be appropriate without adequate support and engagement with mental health staff.”

However, at present, the mental health staff employed by the Corrective Services for counselling has an ethical conflict of interest in also reporting for release decisions. Under these circumstances, prisoners need to conceal their problems to avoid disadvantaging themselves, and are thus denied the confidential support and counselling that might be of some benefit to them. In contrast, external suppliers add choice, trust and availability at low cost.

The Government also disputed the Report’s estimate of the amount of time prisoners spend in cells, but our point is that prisoners should be encouraged to make the best use of this time.
Corrective Services has failed to recognise the rehabilitative benefit of these services. The Commonwealth Report on Government Services 2017 shows that NSW has the highest rate of return to prison of any state at 50.7%, least time out of cells, highest incidence of prisoner-prisoner assaults, greatest level of overcrowding and the least money spent per prisoner per day. The State Plan to reduce recidivism by 5% in 4 years has become, in fact, an increase of 8% over that period.

Former NSW Inspector of Custodial Services John Paget recently noted[2] that the “$3.8 billion expansion of the New South Wales prison estate by 7000 beds represents a manifest and very expensive failure of public policy;” and that this reflects the “NSW government’s lack of commitment to evidence-based criminal justice policy”.

Furthermore, a report[3] by the Auditor General of NSW found that 75% of prisoners are not receiving access to therapeutic programs before their earliest release date. The Full House Report[4] by the Inspector of Custodial Services noted, “The state treats inmates in a way that denies them a modicum of dignity and humanity.”

The prison system’s failures need a public and accountable reset as would be provided by a Public Inquiry. We ask for your support for Computers in Cells as a first step in reforming a prison system in great need of positive change.

The Hon John Dowd AO QC
President
Community Justice Coalition
Wednesday, 2 August 2017

Media Release July 17, 2017
Cost of Inaction - Prisoner Domestic Violence Online Counselling

“Today we launch a paper ‘Counting the Cost of Inaction: Failure to Deliver Prisoner Domestic Violence Counselling’ estimating that over 500 women and children could have been spared the traumatic effects of domestic violence if the NSW Government had accepted the free offer of online counselling for prisoners in their cells. Additionally $110 million dollars could have been saved over the past twelve months,” stated CJC President, the Hon John Dowd AO QC.

“While access to counselling programs is vital to prisoner rehabilitation, the NSW Auditor General recently found that 75% of prisoners are unable to gain entry. Online services delivered to prisoners in cells where they spend 18 hours in isolation would solve the problem of access. Such online services could provide trusted counsellors through external providers; would allow stability of service providers throughout the sentence and after release and would empower former perpetrators in self-management. These services are relatively cheap and research indicates that they can be as effective and sometimes more effective than face-to-face counselling,” stated Mr. Dowd.

“This service should be available to all prisoners providing them with the social skills to deal with the disturbances of family and partner relationships after imprisonment. The financial cost of opening up these services is minimal considering the social impact it could have reducing domestic violence recidivism by up to 30%,” said former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia the Hon Elizabeth Evatt AC.
Our Submission.

Our submission addresses ToR 2(b)(c), 5, 6, and 7. Specifically we aim to address online counselling, education, and prisoner screening through the use of computers.

Benefits from Computers in Cells for CRC’s

In 2015, CRC’s were given responsibility over assisting offenders in the 12 weeks before their release from prison and in the short period after. The aims of Computers in Cells can help improve these provisions for prisoners to get the right help during their release period, relating to Question 5 of the Terms of Reference (see below).

One way in which this campaign can be effective for the UK relates to the screenings used for CRC’s to create resettlement plans for prisoners. In most cases, officers entered information directly onto a computer during a brief interview with the prisoner, but time restraints did not allow an in depth and effective screening to take place. Access to computers inside the cells of the prisoner can allow them a proper screening and understanding of the plan for their post-release.

Further, not enough support pre-release was provided for prisoners who had no place of residence after release and assistance to help them resolve debts. There are many important skills necessary for prisoners to re-learn upon release, and not enough links were made with activities to prepare offenders for training or employment.

Computers in cells would exceedingly help in furthering this cause, as support could be targeted to helping prisoners set up bank accounts, preparing resumes, and conducting online job searches which they could continue to work on by themselves.

Individual computers can help prisoners gain a sense of independence after the dependency of prison life, allowing them to advance their personal skills, giving them the targeted assistance they need.

Online Counselling

Online counselling is a key concept when used with cognitive behaviourial therapy (CBT) programmes that support aggressive and violent prisoners overcome their issues. CBT is designed to alter criminogenic thinking patterns into a pattern of reasoning to combat the trigger of deviant behaviour. Online counselling in this space can be utilised through programmes that prisoners must complete prior to their release, provide that they have a say of their own plan for the completion of their programme. This improves prisoners’ participation when they are empowered to take control of what they want out of the programme and what they seek to improve (i.e. behaviour, self-control), than face-to-face counselling treatments.

Online counselling is an effective tool with domestic violent offenders to develop parenting skills and others skills that would improve their relationships with their current—or former—partners. There are approximately 200,000 children with incarcerated parents across the United Kingdom, and Kaslow (2007) stated, “given that prisoners are likely to return to living in some form of a family context, planning and treatment should include significant family members”. As a result, this would improve the individual’s confidence, empowerment as parents, and overall improves family dynamics.

**Education**

The Through-the-Gate provision can be improved through the implementation of educational programs using computers pre-release. Our campaign, Computers in Cells, will enable prisoners to receive the right help before and after release. Educational programs using computers would be beneficial for detainees pre-release, since many offenders may have below average education and skill levels (which affects their employment status and ability to find housing). New methods need to be implemented to successfully integrate prisoners back into society and prevent them from reoffending, as there are concerns that prison sentences may actually have the opposite effect of its purpose.¹

Not enough help is given to prisoners who have nowhere to live upon release and who do not have assistance to resolve debts. Additionally, not enough links are made with other prison activities to prepare prisoners to enter employment or training on release. Online education programs targeting important life and work skills will enable prisoners to find employment more quickly. Skills that are relevant to preventing re-offences include:

- Resume and cover letter writing
- Online job searching strategies
- Online banking assistance
- Access to information about health and housing services
- Tertiary preparation courses and VET (Vocational education and training) programs

This type of education will provide detainees with digital literacy skills that they will need to find employment after post-release, or to do further study. They will also be better equipped with tools that help them make smarter choices in the future and be productive members of society. Prisoners also believe that educational programs such as VET training not only enhance their technical skills, but also their communication and organization skills, all of which would help them find employment and reintegrate into the community.² - [https://aic.gov.au/publications/crm/crm065](https://aic.gov.au/publications/crm/crm065)

**Screening**


⁶ Susan Dawe, ‘Vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia’ (Research Report, 2007)
In an aim to better align the needs of prisoners and their subsequent resettlement, there need be a review of the current UK model of screening of prisoners as a pre-release strategy. The current screening process administered by community rehabilitation centres (CRCs) is not given adequate priority and is not suitably incentivised in addressing the needs of short sentence serving offenders.\(^7\) The likely rise in the prison population has reduced screening time of prisoners to a mere twenty minutes,\(^8\) with prison officers having to make the process a quick one rather than one of quality.\(^9\) Current screening processes are offsetting the need for adequate continuity between the initial screening and the following resettlement outlook.

Information necessary to be obtained for resettlement is primarily based upon what prisoners have said in the initial screening interview with the prisoner officer and few further enquiries are ever instigated.\(^10\) As a consequence, an estimated 60% of the needs of prisoners are missed due to failure to follow routine checks of previous prisoner conduct as well as any prior recorded convictions.\(^11\) The initial phase of the screening process is therefore not adequate in assessing the urgent individual needs of the prisoner. Furthermore, the IT screening system prevents overriding of any initial information recorded, therefore preventing CRC staff who have identified additional needs from modifying the resettlement document.\(^12\) Such information may only be added to the end of the document and as a result, there becomes two contradictory pieces of information of the needs of the offender.\(^13\) This ultimately leads to a lack of transparency between the needs of the prisoner and what may be done in assistance to their resettlement.

Screening is an important step toward proper prisoner resettlement, however there is little prisoner interaction with their individual prospective resettlement program. Prisoners receive minimal to no update of the consequence of the initial screenings and their flow on effect.\(^14\) Individual resettlement plans conjured from initial screenings are not adequately discussed with prisoners and there is no evidence to suggest that the objectives of resettlement are ever discussed with the offenders themselves.\(^15\) There is little involvement of offenders in their resettlement plans past the initial screening, causing disparity between the outstanding needs of the offender and initial listed needs.

As such, the provision of computers in cells may be used to allow for offenders to keep updated information as to their outstanding needs which may be accessed by CRC staff in modifying their resettlement program. Prisoners should be able to receive a copy of their resettlement plan and through the use of computers in cells, modify existing outcomes to meet their needs more sufficiently. Computers in cells may be an accessible option for CRC staff and prison officers to keep a prisoner updated as to their resettlement program, reducing the need for scheduling appointments between prisoners and staff to discuss updates. A more collaborative framework between the prisoners and prisoner officers in initial screening processes would need to be adapted to promote individual needs.

In the providing a long term model for Transforming Rehabilitation and the delivery of probation services, a review into initial screening practices of prisoners may result in a reduced rate of recidivism through adequate addressing of prisoner resettlement needs. The operation of such probative service, pre-release, would ultimately help in the adequate reintegration of the offender.

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\(^7\) HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectrate of Prisons, 'An Inspection of Through the Gate Resettlement Services for Short-Term Prisoners' (Joint Inspection, Justice Incorporates, October 2016) 3.

\(^8\) Ibid 17.

\(^9\) Ibid 18.

\(^10\) Ibid 7.

\(^11\) Ibid 17.

\(^12\) Ibid 18.

\(^13\) Ibid.

\(^14\) Ibid 7.

\(^15\) Ibid.
back into society. Computers in cells would thus be an adequate scheme to improve the “Through-the-Gate” provision to allow prisoners greater certainty and transparency as to their resettlement both pre and post release.

**Annexure. A**

Terms of reference

The Committee welcomes written evidence on the following topics:

**Government measures**

1. To what extent do the steps taken by the Government address the issues facing probation services?
   
   (a) What contractual, financial and administrative changes did the Government introduce for CRCs in July 2017 as a result of their internal review of Transforming Rehabilitation? What has been the effect of these changes on the delivery of probation services?

   (b) Are strengthening inspection standards and creating joint performance measures (between probation services and prisons) the best ways of improving performance?

   (c) What should be the Government’s priorities to improve work between departments on the delivery of services needed for effective rehabilitation?

2. What impact have the reforms had on: i) sentencing behaviour, ii) recalls to prison, and iii) serious further offences?

3. How effective have Government measures been in addressing issues arising from the division of responsibility between the NPS and CRCs in the delivery of probation services?

4. What else should the Government do to address the issues facing probation services?

**Short-term changes**

5. How can the Through-the-Gate provision be improved so that prisoners get the right help before their release from prison and afterwards?

6. What can be done to increase voluntary sector involvement in the delivery of probation services?

**The future of probation services**

7. When should there be a review of the future of the Transforming Rehabilitation model and the long-term plan for delivering probation services?

**Annexure B.**

*Domestic Violence Prevention Online Services for Prisoners*

**Annexure C.**

*Counting the Cost of Inaction: Failure to Deliver Prisoner Domestic Violence Counselling*

June 2018