

From strategy to street: Can resettlement policy really make a difference?

Helen Ryder is Head of Resettlement and Commissioned Rehabilitative Services within the Probation Reform Programme, Tajinder Singh Matharu is the Senior Responsible Owner for the Offender Management in Custody Recovery Project and Ryan Walker is Executive Assistant at the Howard League. They are interviewed by Dr. Ruth Armstrong.

In early November 2022 Dr Ruth Armstrong (RA) interviewed Helen Ryder (HR), Tajinder Singh Matharu (TSM) and Ryan Walker (RW) about planned changes to resettlement policies and practice under the new One HMPPS structure. This interview took place shortly after His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation issued a report on 'inadequate' probation services in London, and a day before inspectors published a report calling for a root and branch overhaul of the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model. The contents of the OMiC report were not yet known when this interview was recorded, but the conversation transcribed below does reference some of the concerns highlighted in that report which were readily apparent to those working with and being managed under this model. Other relevant contexts for this conversation are the ever-present consequences of recovery from the Covid pandemic, severe shortages in front-line staff in the criminal justice system and beyond in related services, and the move to 'One HMPPS' under the leadership of Amy Rees, as discussed in the interview with her also published in this issue.

Helen Ryder is the Head of Resettlement and Commissioned Rehabilitative Services within the Probation Reform Programme. Prior to taking on this role she worked in the Welsh government, but before that she has a broad range of experience in the prison system, from working in learning and skills focussing on the delivery of purposeful activity, training and employment, to being a deputy governor and then governing several prisons across the estate.

Tajinder Singh Matharu is the Senior Responsible Owner for the Offender Management in Custody Recovery Project. Tajinder has over 18 years of experience in the criminal justice system. He began as a probation officer and has always lived and worked in London. Most of his practice in probation was on the prolific and priority team so he has experience of working in multidisciplinary teams alongside other criminal justice professionals and community partners.

Before moving into a more policy focussed role Tajinder worked with partners to set up one of the first Community Hubs. He has been part of the Probation Service throughout several systems changes over the years, he has worked as Head of Performance and Quality in the National Probation Service (NPS) London and the Youth Custody Service and most recently as Head of Assurance, Risk Management and Governance for HMPPS. He brings to this role an understanding of front-line probation work, inter-agency work, but also a sense of how the service can try to work together to deliver a better-quality service.

Ryan Walker is the Executive Assistant at the Howard League and is currently under supervision in the community having completed 15 years in custody. While in prison he gained a first-class social science degree in Criminology and is now studying a Masters in Crime and Justice. Ryan brings many years of personal experience of the criminal justice system to the theoretical knowledge he is developing through his studies. While in prison he was a student, then mentor and finally course facilitator on the University of Cambridge's Learning Together Butler Law Course. His focus now is on building forwards positively in his own life and using his experiences to shape the system to better support people in prison and post-release.

Helen and Tajinder are both relatively new to their roles, having begun only a few months ago, so this conversation was very much setting the scene for their hopes, aspirations, and vision of the way ahead. Between them, Helen, Tajinder and Ryan have nearly 50 years of experience in different facets of the criminal justice system, and during this interview each of them showed a passion for things it can do well, an understanding of its failings, and a commitment to playing their part in system improvements for the benefits of all involved.

RA: Today we want to discuss current realities of resettlement policy and practices, and future-plans, but it would be helpful to start off with some history. You have all been involved in one way or another with the criminal justice system

over the last 15 years or more. There have been many changes in policy over that time. Recent history of Offender Management in Custody and in the Community has certainly been turbulent to say the least. Could you give our readers a brief history of resettlement in England and Wales that will set us up for better understanding the context of the work you are doing at the moment?

TSM: I'd be happy to speak to my experience of that. I left the probation service in 2018 and we were just starting to talk about OMiC at that time, so I wasn't so familiar with it, and then I've been out since then, so in many ways I'm coming to it with fresh eyes, which has been a steep learning curve over the last few months. But, that said, in all my years in probation we have always had some model of end-to-end offender management, whether through the National Offender Management Service or the newer OMiC system they were just bringing in, there has always been a version of trying to bring prisons and probation together in their practice.

So currently everybody has their views about OMiC. People often talk about it being very complex and this may well be something the Inspectorate pick up in their report due out tomorrow, but essentially what I've worked out is if you strip everything back, OMiC is a framework that tries to coordinate a prisoner's journey through custody and back into the community, so that's not a new concept. That's not a new thing. But as a new model of an old thing, I think its main aim was to put rehabilitation at the centre of custodial and post release work, in order to reduce reoffending, to promote community integration and to protect the public, and this should be at the heart of any model. I can sign up to that aim, and that's why I'm here. But we are trying to do that in an incredibly complex system, and that's why it's important to think about our history and identify where we are on that journey, what the challenges are, what the blocks are, what the experiences are, and how we can tackle some of those.

And if I think about where we are currently with the OMiC model, I can identify two main challenges. One is that it was rolled out just before COVID, and we know that COVID had a profound impact on delivery of services across the piece. So, we can't ignore that. And the second challenge here is recruitment and retention. So, I think our biggest challenge remains the national staffing pressures that are impacting on the ability to

reach full staffing in some regions. However, national recruitment campaigns aimed at Probation Service Officers and ongoing new intakes of Professional Qualification in Probation (PQIPs) are underway to help to resolve this situation. So, whatever the model, that's our starting point. And we are on the start of the journey to look at that. So we are asking ourselves questions like, Where are we now? What can we do in the short term, medium term, and long term to make the model work in very challenging circumstances.

HR: And I'd like to add to that with a very specific resettlement focus. The OMiC model sets out when the responsibility for an individual going through custody and heading back into the community is handed over to a Community Offender Manager. And I think for resettlement as in the services that we offer and provide to support that transition between custody and the community, the actual ownership of that process, I think, is an interesting one across probation and prisons. In the past we had resettlement colleagues in a resettlement team based in the prison, made up fundamentally of prison staff. We would have probation colleagues working in prison, with specific activities that probation colleagues would advise on, particularly for those deemed higher risk, such as parole and release on temporary license, but in terms of the kind of ownership

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of the process, it was something that we used to have prison staff delivering. In 2015 (when we did the Transforming Rehabilitation split of the probation service into the public National Probation Service and the private Community Rehabilitation Companies), the responsibility for resettlement fell to our Community Rehabilitation Companies in the form of through the gate teams that were placed into prison. Then we had an enhancement of that because we got some additional funding, so we had enhanced through the gate teams and that led people up to probation supervision post release. Following the re-unification of probation in June 2021, the model for resettlement and how it would be delivered changed, and the responsibility for resettlement very much fell to the probation service. So, the colleagues who are going into prisons now as pre-release teams are working for the probation service. Under the OMiC model people are handed over to their Community Offender Manager before release, and these Community Offender Managers are probation staff. So, we are looking at questions about responsibility with resettlement and

how we measure its success. These are things that as an agency we've never quite established strategically. And the work we are leading to look at the models of how we best support and deliver this resettlement work, and the new approach within One HMPPS where we're very much thinking about the fundamental role of us all as an agency working together to achieve our strategic priorities, really enable us to think about this more seamlessly, hopefully for individuals who are going through that transition from custody into the community.

RA: Thank you. You posed a great question there - 'Who owns resettlement?' And I'm wondering what is the answer now?

HR: I think it's sits across prisons and probation, which is the challenge we are working on together. For me, re-settlement begins on day one in custody or even before then, from the point of the pre-sentence report in court thinking about your immediate needs and your longer term needs to help to prepare you for getting back out into the community. And then obviously people go into the prison system and depending on the length of the sentence, engage in different interventions. Different experiences of education, employment in prison, depending on the length of sentence. It's obviously very different for somebody who's got a long time between the beginning of their sentence and the potential end of their sentence, and somebody who's got short sentence, where we need to think about prioritisation and immediacy of need.

For example, around accommodation, if somebody's out in six months, we really need to start thinking immediately about where they're going to live when they're released. But if you've got a long tariff, then we've got some more time to be planning and thinking about that. But either way, that assessment of needs at the beginning of the sentence and all the different interventions and activities that are coordinated within the prisons ahead of release, those are the responsibility of the prison governor. But the preparations for release and the support with that process comes from probation. So, the pre-release teams are probation staff now, and they are based in

prison. Under OMiC it's become a very jointly owned process.

TSM: I think that's right, and from my perspective every person sentenced should have an individualised sentence plan, and they should be familiar with it, and everybody in the service should be working alongside each individual to support their progress against that sentence plan. And the ownership of that sentence plan from an agency perspective sits with one Offender Manager somewhere, whether it's a Prison Offender Manager or a Community Offender Manager, depending on where that individual is in their sentence. But then everybody else in pre-release teams or any other team is playing a supporting role. And therein lies the challenge, it is understanding what role everybody plays in this space and having clear ownership of the plan. So ultimately, it is the individual who owns their plan, but in partnership with the Prison Offender Manager and with the Community Offender Manager and bringing other people in as needed.

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RA: I hear what you are saying there, and I am keen to bring Ryan in to discuss his experiences of sentence planning in prison and post-release, because as I'm listening to you, I am wondering about how you do that power and responsibility sharing in practice. Do people in prison really have the power to own their sentence

plan, to make it their plan, with their goals, and to get the support they need to achieve these goals? And if they don't have the power, can they have the responsibility for not achieving it? Who is the 'last answer' on these issues? For example, what happens if you are getting to the end of your sentence in prison and you are going to be homeless on release and for all the asking you may have done, you haven't got the help you need with setting up any accommodation what happens? Doesn't shared responsibility just mean that everything is pushed to the last person along the line, and might it mean that people are released without adequate support in place, and probation staff in the community are going to struggle to respond resettlement needs if they

haven't been adequately addressed and prepared for during the custodial part of a sentence?

HR: I think that is the logic of having the Community Offender Manager take that responsibility a number of months before the person is released, so that they've got the opportunity to get to know the individual and also to support them in that transition, and to lead that move back into the community. So, it's not last minute – 'you've got released today, goodbye'. We are trying within the system to prevent that from happening by allowing that lead in time, although we have to be really honest and face the main issue at the moment with our resources, which is that we just do not necessarily have the people in post to be able to do that consistently.

RW: I'm happy to reflect on these matters from my experiences. So, when you asked, 'Who owns resettlement?' the first thing I wrote down is that I own resettlement, but we need to think about that in the context of OMiC. Because when you're trying to implement change in the Criminal Justice System, as a recipient of that change, you don't normally buy into it, you don't normally have a purpose within it. So, for example, the system has changed many times throughout the years of my sentence - terminology changed, interactions changed, but because you're just going about your sentence, you're not very invested in it. But OMiC was a bit of a stand-out thing for someone in my situation, because prior to OMiC you had a Community Offender Manager as well as a Prison Offender Manager. Then OMiC came in and the model is basically saying now you're only going to have a Prison Offender Manager and your Community Offender Manager will come later-on in the in the sentence or when you're nearly released. So that change caused a lot of anxiety amongst people doing a long time, because they've established that relationship with their Community Offender Manager, and it felt like that trust, that relationship they had built over many years, was all being taken away. And I think that's the one of the reasons why someone in my situation didn't buy into the OMiC model.

And even though in many ways it's just a change of acronyms and a change of terminology, you have to get used to it, and staff have to get used to it, and it was really difficult to understand when it first was implemented. The staff didn't know what it was,

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everyone was talking about this new model, but no one quite knew what it was, so it took a few years for it actually to get embedded. And some of the concepts within the model are really helpful, like the key worker scheme and the way you can sit down with your Offender Manager and actually discuss your risks and do the stuff you need to do to reduce your risk and to plan for your resettlement, thinking about your needs and what you need to have in place for a successful release. So that element of it is brilliant. But in reality, any potential the model offers is bound by the resources available - by the amount of time your Offender Manager can spend with you.

I was lucky because I was in a prison that really bought into the rehabilitative culture and bought into the enabling environment. So, any new type of change being implemented from the top, the prison bought into it. So, in some ways I was in a good place to benefit from the OMiC model. But even in a prison that was doing things well, there were some real difficulties with the OMiC model in terms of being told you were not going to be given a Community Offender Manager, you're only going to be given a Prison Offender Manager. And that is a problem because when it comes to writing a parole report, the Prison Offender Managers weren't allowed to give a recommendation on the new parole scheme. So, the

schemes didn't work well together, because under OMiC you are working with your Prison Offender Manager to understand your risk factors and the risks you pose, and then all of a sudden, when it comes to parole, your Community Offender Manager is the only one who has a say. The prison offender manager only comments on the progress you've made in prison, so a lot of people found that hard to get their heads around, and the Prison Offender Managers themselves, they just felt helpless, like 'I've done all this work with you but all I can do is give them a bullet point list of what you've been up to in prison'. So, in my situation, I had developed such a good relationship with my prison offender manager and then they weren't able to offer a good reflective report on my progress and that caused a bit of upset.

But in terms of rehabilitation and resettlement, whose responsibility is it? It is my responsibility or anyone else in my situation. And what you need to be able to do when you've got a responsibility is you need

to be in charge of that responsibility, and then you need an agent to allow or help it to prosper basically, and that's what having good funding in place and good training in place does. It means that when you're in charge of this vehicle, your resettlement vehicle, you need to know that the roads are clear that the traffic's going to assist you when you're driving around. You need to know that the lights are going to protect you when it's time to stop. You need to know that when it's the green light, you've got enough petrol, so you'll be able to go. It's a bit of a crazy analogy, but you just need to know that if I'm in control of this car, everything around me, all the structures around me are going to help me to have a smooth journey in this car and there's not going to be any barriers on this car journey. So yeah, I think people who are serving the sentence are in charge, and should be in charge, but we need to be given the impetus to move forward in a safe and secure manner.

RA: That is a really helpful analogy Ryan, and I want to link it back to something Tajinder said about putting rehabilitation at the centre of what is happening in terms of reducing reoffending, increasing community into integration and protecting the public. With the challenges the service is facing in terms of staff shortages, is it possible to do more than the bare bones of public protection? And if risk management becomes the sole logic of criminal justice practice because there is little capacity for anything else, will rehabilitation and resettlement suffer? To put that more positively, I guess the question could be reframed as what are the current opportunities for resettlement strategy and practice in amongst the huge challenges we are facing, and is the service in a position to take these opportunities?

HR: It's hard for me to say what I want to say here without sounding twee, but I'm going to say it, because I absolutely believe it, and that is that we have some huge advantages as a service, and some huge opportunities, because of the nature of our workforce, because the grand majority of colleagues who I've ever met or worked within HMPPS have a set of shared principles and values underneath everything we do and why we do it. And I think that provides a huge opportunity to build on and to understand how we safeguard that. We've had a lot of reviews and audits and reports lately into the issues that we've got as a

service. But each report has come back saying among our workforce they found colleagues that really care and everybody's trying their best. Everybody's working really hard to make this work, so as a service what we have to do is not so much fix things, but recognise and reflecting that motivation, the principles and the values, and try to support people as we recruit to more optimum levels, so that in the meantime people do not lose heart.

One of the challenges in HMPPS is that everything we do matters. It's not a case of prioritising in the same way other organisations might be able to prioritise because everything we do is so important. There has to be risk management, because it is vital to safety, and I don't see a conflict between security and rehabilitative approaches in prisons because an underpinning of a secure prison where people feel safe when they're unlocked is crucial for rehabilitation. Without safety you just can't do rehabilitative work.

The value of the colleagues we have is absolutely essential, and I think we are seeing it with a lot of the new recruits too. There's a real risk in the fact we have a number of people who are inexperienced coming through. But actually, we still see that sort of passion and that engagement, particularly on the prison side we see it with key workers, because a lot of the people coming through as new officers have done the key worker training and what we see is that they really look forward to that role and actually having the opportunity to build those relationships with the people that they're working with. And I think for probation colleagues, there's a real appreciation for coming back and being in the probation service and being one organisation again, So I also think the move to One HMPPS is an opportunity. In saying this I am in no way trying to hide the fact we also have high levels of people feeling frustrated and the very real risk of burnout many colleagues are facing. I think partly that comes from doing something you feel passionate about and not being able to do it to the highest standards in the current climate. We are engaged in a number of initiatives in several regions to provide some support, understand their staffing issues, and design an interim way of working that will really try and bring out the best in people, and the best of the situation ahead of the cavalry coming through actual resourcing increase. We are trying to ensure the conditions for success are put in place, those underpinnings of what we need in terms of cultural approach, joint working, mutual

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respect. If we can build that into what we're doing in everything we do, then hopefully the new starters that we get to increase our resource will all be in a stronger position to deliver well. I'm not naïve, it will be hard, and it will take time, but I do think we have an opportunity to build forward well from this point.

RA: I really hear what you're saying about keeping heart, recruiting people with the right values, and engaging with staff on the frontline about just how you can support them through the current challenges, but I want to push you a little bit to say more about how One HMPPS offers an opportunity to build a culture of joint working and mutual respect. How does that happen?

HR: I think the fact that with OMiC the resettlement work is reliant on both parts of our agency working together so structurally means that regions are generating some of this cooperative work themselves. They are holding many joint events and our approach is not to be top down, but to develop good practice from the ground up, from what is already happening within some teams. We need a clear vision of the outcomes that we're trying to work towards and how best we support each other in achieving them, and then we need to enable the events and to bring people together and to enable and empower regional and local leaders to share best practice. I think this is what will make for healthy change and build that culture of joint working and mutual respect.

TSM: We don't see this as a top-down process. We see that the strategy moving forwards needs to be developed from within teams, so we need to be clear from the centre on what outcomes we are working towards and then we need to establish how best we support each other to achieve these outcomes through enabling and empowering region through local events and communications and strengthening local leaders and practitioner voice through bringing people together. From the centre we need to work on prioritisation, red lines, boundaries, legislation, these central matters, but we don't want it to feel like we are dictating what happens and frontline staff are delivering it – we are in the business of co-design, working with practitioners who are responsible for delivering the models and those who are under supervision to establish systems that actually work in this space given the current constraints.

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We really want to get it right and we are willing to try some different and new approaches working from the ground up. We will of course wrap evaluation around the things we decide to do, and we are always conscious of the risks we manage in this system, as well as managing the expectations of all our stakeholders, but within this there is room for evidence led new ideas to be co-produced at a local level, and our intention is to work in ways that empower and enable these innovations in practice.

RA: Ryan, perhaps you could respond to that by telling us from your perspective when you think resettlement policy and practise should kick in? What would have been helpful to you or what was helpful to you?

RW: I think re-settlement, like Helen said, starts from the minute, or even before, you go to prison, like with the pre-sentence report where they are identifying your needs and identifying some of the problems that led you to go to prison. And I think those problems should start getting worked on almost instantly. Even though I had a long sentence, I wanted to start doing things differently from the beginning. I didn't want to wait years before starting to get the help I needed to do things differently.

I remember going through my 'settlement' period, and although I was 15, I was really eager to change my ways and change my behaviour. But I found there were a lot of barriers in place because I had such a long time. So, for example, I applied for therapy, and I was told 'Oh, you don't need therapy, firstly because your troubles are not big enough – like you've not got that much trauma, and secondly, we've not got the capacity to put you up there because someone's getting out soon and they need that place more than you. You've got a long time left, so we'll push your application back in the queue and reconsider it the future.' So, the lack of space on that therapy unit probably misdiagnosed me because I did need therapy, and it definitely left my treatment needs unmet. That could have been quite detrimental to my future development if I didn't address those core issues that I was really motivated to work on at an early stage, as soon as I got to prison.

And I also think re-settlement is not just about behavioural issues being met. It's about educational aspirations being encouraged and met, and it's about social skills, so all the time out your room, that's all resettlement and you need to be afforded the opportunities to develop those skills during your time in prison within a regime that that allows and encourages

you to develop those skills. And like you say, we'll talk about risk a lot. It runs through everything in prison and post-release, and a lot of the time risk does overshadow resettlement because some prisons are not open to ideas of letting the community in. For example, when I was in prison, I took part in loads of initiatives with the community and they were far more important for my rehabilitation and my resettlement than sitting down on a Thinking Skills Programme, so I think if you want prison regimes that support resettlement and rehabilitation the security risks and risk aversion to broader community involvement just needs to be managed in an appropriate way. It is important to get the balance right. Obviously there's always a need for security, I've been in prison since I was a child and no one wants to be in an unsafe prison, but in my experience, in the good prisons I was in, it was all this good community work that overshadowed the risks, and what I mean by that is that the good work with the community the prison was supporting was reducing the risk of the people in the prison population because we all had meaningful things to engage in, ways to develop our aspirations and our skills, ways to see and feel ourselves as part of community again.

In that prison, all these opportunities for goodness were just making the risks less and less, and then the prison could put less effort and resources into risk management and security and could focus its resources on increasing the budget for reducing reoffending. I think if resettlement work starts early on, you can imagine how the budget for security across the whole estate might be able to be reduced and the budget for reducing reoffending might be really increased, and if used appropriately it would reduce the spending needed on security.

So, I think re-settlement should start early on. And I think as well as your core behavioural needs, the other parts of the regime also helped and there is a real need for them all to work collaboratively. Although I say yeah, it's up to me to take control of my resettlement, like if I'm doing the Thinking Skills Programme, I have to actually put everything into it and do it, but it's also about working with the professionals who might say to you, 'Well, actually, you don't need therapy. What you need is Resolve (anger management) or Thinking Skills' or whatever it needs to be. And I think that communication with your offender manager and with psychology needs to happen early on and regularly

throughout your sentence and that will all help your resettlement massively. But normally what happens, like in my case, is that you are coming to being released after 13 years and its like 'Oh, you're coming up for release, let's do a psychological risk assessment on you' and it comes back that you've actually got some underlying issues that you need to work on. Then you're going over tariff [serving more time in prison than the minimum time recommended by the judge before you can be considered for release] and stuff like that, and that causes frustration. So yeah, for me, resettlement needs to start from the initial point and should be led by the person in prison but working closely with appropriate professionals taking care of them and working with them to make informed decisions.

RA: One of the things I wanted to pick up on is that we are here speaking with Ryan, who is a young man who spent a lot of years in prison, and we know that our prison system is mainly made-up of a lot of young men. But is also made-up of other people. It is made-up of women. It is made-up of children and listening to Ryan I was wondering whether your resettlement strategy would look the same across all of the different people that we have in prison, or does it need to look a bit different, and if so how does it need to be different? Is it possible to take account of the individual

when you are building an overarching strategy?

HR: That's a very hard question because resettlement is a complicated process, isn't it? In terms of the factors that all feed in to enabling the best chances of successfully coming back into the community and settling in the community when we think of all of the different areas around accommodation, employment, education, self-identity, family relationships, health, mental health, substance misuse. My take on that is to some extent we design our models and processes according to the prison type. So, the fact that we have different types of prison, so prisons for women, prisons that are for resettlement, others that are long term, high security, trainer prisons etc., we design our work and our models according to those prison types and thinking about how we can best direct resources according to that point in a person's journey. So presumably Ryan you would have spent some time in the long-term high security estate and then progressed and eventually ended up in open conditions? So, the resourcing and the modelling, and

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hopefully the interventions or the services that you had access to will have changed as you went through your sentence. So, to some extent we are trying, I think, to support individuals in their individual needs according to their sentence.

But we know there are challenges in that. We know COVID has thrown some of this planning off course. We know that a number of people are not in the right prison for the point of their journey, so we are releasing people from different types of prisons that we haven't prepared for. We have a separate directorate for women that thinks about women's policy very separately in terms of knowing that women have different needs. And we also know that sadly women's outcomes are not great, so we're trying to address that. We've got our strategy for women and their resettlement. And another important issue for women's resettlement is that because there are fewer women's prisons, more often than not women are quite far from home when it comes to their resettlement, which presents extra challenges.

And I think perhaps the number one thing that we're trying to achieve is clarity. Ryan has spoken really clearly about his sense of responsibility and accountability for himself and what he needed from us in terms of the services we provide and how we might design those to support people. And I think there are different roles for us as a service in that process and we need to ensure there is clarity and understanding of these different roles. Sometimes this will include supporting people to get to the place where they are ready to take that responsibility, because there are lots of people that are not there yet.

RA: Would that be a bit of a shift for staff in prison and in probation to understand their role as being to scaffold and come alongside people where they are in order to support them to move forwards? Earlier you discussed the main purposes of resettlement as reducing reoffending and supporting community integration to protect the public, and I wonder what it feels like to be an offender supervisor in prison or in the community working out the relationships between managing risk and promoting resettlement. How do you give criminal justice professionals the freedom to

use their professional discretion to support resettlement in a risk averse culture. Do you think there is a conflict and is there work to do in the service about giving frontline staff the trust and freedom to use their professional discretion?

TSM: I don't think there is necessarily conflict, but it can play out like that, so I accept that there is work to be done around that and the first thing is we must take a data and evidence led approach to all of this right? We need to understand who we're working with. And that is really important for me, and I think if we strip it all back and look at the evidence, we can put out long or short policy documents that clarify roles and responsibilities and budgets and everything else we can do that, and that's needed, but what the evidence shows is that doing this work well is all about relationships any individual has with any professional they come into contact with at any point in their sentence. Our role in the centre here is to create the space and capacity and have the right people forming those relationships and then give them the tools they need to help the people that they are working with, whether that's access to accommodation, employment, training opportunities, whatever it might be. That's the infrastructure we want to build here because relationships help us to manage risk and help us to provide the right support in resettlement.

RW: I just want to say that when you were asking the questions about what might be the most important thing for different people whether men, or women or children, that's exactly what I was thinking, that no matter who you are it is about building that relationship, it's having that time and creating that space where you can say to a professional, 'I'm struggling in this area, I need help in that area' and I think that's consistent whatever demographic you're in, and I think that is the central point. If you can do that then resettlement is just ten times easier, so that is the most important part for me.

RA: If this is one of the central goals of resettlement strategy in One HMPPS, how do you grow that as a central culture across all of the different agencies working together in resettlement? How do you support interagency

Our role in the centre here is to create the space and capacity and have the right people forming those relationships and then give them the tools they need to help the people that they are working with, whether that's access to accommodation, employment, training opportunities

transparency, communication and cooperation putting strong relationships with those you're working with at its heart? So I'm thinking here about the key relationships between probation, third sector, prisons and the security forces, including police, and perhaps specialist counter-terrorism forces and even MI5. How do you ensure that culture of transparency and cooperation to support resettlement and keep the public safe?

TSM: I can speak to that because I have worked for many years in multi-agency teams, and it's not easy, and there can be tensions in the system, but I think it's about creating healthy tensions.

In a multidisciplinary setting everybody represents a part of the system and they bring diversity of thought and experience to the table and it's about creating the environment in which this expertise is equally valued. And once again it's about relationships, and realising we are all on the same side and bringing our expertise to develop collective views, rather than certain agencies having the last say. It's not an easy thing to do.

HR: It's very much about building those relationships at a local level but with that overarching understanding of the purpose of bringing people together. And that is one of the clear goals of One HMPPS, to have a more locally and regionally led service where colleagues are plugged into the local systems, local government and Police Crime Commissioner structures, and the other agencies within those areas so they are better able to utilise the benefits of those things, together.

RA: So it sounds like a big part of the resettlement strategy is going to be empowering regional teams to build local relationships, but at the risk of sounding sceptical, I have to ask how convinced you are that such a resettlement strategy actually makes much of a difference to what happens on the frontline in terms empowering relationally focussed practises and better service user experiences when the reality is that we have seen a hollowing out of public services within and beyond the criminal justice system, in accommodation, employment, education, mental health and addiction provision? Can any resettlement strategy really make a difference on the ground in those realities?

In a multidisciplinary setting everybody represents a part of the system and they bring diversity of thought and experience to the table and it's about creating the environment in which this expertise is equally valued.

TSM: We both think it can, otherwise we wouldn't do this work, and we have to be realistic but also aspirational in what we do. In lots of ways, post Covid, some of the important links have actually been strengthened. There are now really strong links and engagement across probation teams and accommodation services with local authority relationships. These have definitely improved. And I think there have also been improvements in employment. The Department of Work and Pensions are working well with us and we've got lots of different initiatives in place that I think really give us the opportunity to build on some of that. Which is not to deny that undoubtedly at the moment we're in a difficult time, as a country. But within those challenges we are clear about what we need to do, and we are doing it, starting with a big focus on recruiting new colleagues to come and be part of this work.

With building relationships, clarity of purpose and understanding as the basis of what we are doing, I think it's absolutely possible to make a real difference, even in such difficult times. It's got to really, because the need is not going to disappear, so we have to step up and do our best to support people.

RA: I think what I'm hearing is that a key element of the resettlement strategy moving forward is to empower regions to make the necessary connections with local services to provide support that can reduce risks and meet needs. You've talked about the need for a clarity of purpose and the fact relationships are key with people under supervision, between key agencies and with other service providers. But one thing I want to ask is how are you going to empower local teams to deliver on this, because my sense is that there is a nervousness of independent thought and action within the criminal justice system, and especially in probation and a sense of quite close central oversight. How will you achieve this sense of devolved freedom?

TSM: I recognise what you are saying, but the way we are thinking is that we have to simplify things and empower the regions to respond to their local population, their local needs and have more control over what happens locally.

HR: This is exactly the change we are hoping to bring about through the move to One HMPPS, to move to a more regional approach rather than central. We're hoping to learn from areas like Manchester with their different commissioning relationships and from Wales because they have a different system with their devolved administration. We want to learn from areas where they have more regional processes and autonomy and support the rest of the system in learning from those areas as well. Hopefully empowerment will lead to better outcomes.

RA: Ryan, can I give you the opportunity to give a last thought - if you had one wish for resettlement strategy what would it be?

RW: Everyone's resettlement journey is different. Some people take charge of theirs. Other people sit back and let the system do it for them. If I had just one wish, I would want everyone to have equal access and equal access to information and support, to know what's out there. For example, because I'm quite proactive, I get on the internet to see what's out there. I'll ring people. I do things. I speak to my probation about everything, and it turns out when you do the digging, you find the gold. And I say that because I've had untold levels of support from probation, and from the third sector. I've just had all kinds of support and it had helped me get where I am in this short amount of time after a long prison sentence. And then I look at the other people in the hostel I was in and none of that support is available to them because they're not digging.

In my opinion, if we want to really support resettlement, people shouldn't need to dig. If the support can be there for one person, it should be there for another person as well. So, I think centralising the support and increasing its access through awareness that this stuff is out there.

Technology has moved on a lot since I went to prison, but I'm not sure the use of technology to support resettlement has kept pace. I think using technology could provide one way forwards. When I came out, all I was thinking throughout the time I was digging to find support, was how come there's no centralised app, like a prison leavers app, that could show everyone the different kinds of support they can have access to? Why don't you try this? Why don't you try that? I'm in the process of working out what the potential is to do this type of app, because I think it'll be so beneficial to have a centralised piece of technology that just guides people to the support, because my experience tells me it is out there, all you need to do is make people aware that it's out there.

Post-script: This was a broad ranging interview, beginning with some fundamental questions about

who owns resettlement, acknowledging the challenges of recovering from the pandemic and its consequences, the current staffing crisis, and the need for clarity about the way forwards. Some clear themes emerged, and some questions remained. The move to One HMPPS is being seen as an opportunity to establish, or re-establish, a coherent and cohesive vision and purpose across criminal justice professionals. Within this, the heart and values of criminal justice professionals, existing and new, are celebrated. In many ways the central strategy seems to be that once staffing levels are recovered, within a clear purpose of building strong relationships throughout the service, local teams will be empowered to deliver local services to achieve this purpose. The vision of building a culture of responsive resettlement with relationally based risk management led by understanding each individual's situation and needs and providing appropriate professional input to help people meet these needs, reduce their risks and access the resources available is compelling. But quite how we get there still feels unclear, especially considering the overhaul of OMiC called for in the report released the day after this interview, and the fact local teams might struggle to create this relationally based responsive service when many local services have been hollowed out over recent years and we are facing more years of austerity.

The crucial voice we all acknowledged was missing from this discussion was that of the frontline professional, but there does seem to be a new focus on hearing from and listening to those on the frontline, and empowering criminal justice professionals to achieve criminal justice outcomes through finding local solutions to local problems. How this works in practice is yet to be determined, but it is a shift in tone, which many frontline staff will no doubt be hoping is accompanied by a shift in resources. Perhaps in our next edition we can interview some of our frontline criminal justice professionals to see if they feel that prioritising relationally based connections to better understand risks and challenges and effectively support success is something they can expect from the service as employees as well as deliver to those they supervise, and how easy it is for everyone involved in our criminal justice system to be honest about their struggles and their needs. If this kind of dialogue can be instilled throughout HMPPS, it gives me some hope the use of penal power will become more legitimate for all involved in our criminal justice system. We know that more legitimately used power is likely to be more effective, so if the new resettlement strategy can help to achieve this, then it is possible it could make a difference 'on the street', resulting in better outcomes for us all.