



A proportionate recall system

August 2026

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Summary

- Recall to custody is an important tool to help ensure that people on licence are both incentivised to comply with their licence, and also to manage those who pose the greatest risk of reoffending.
- The number of people recalled to custody has risen by 130% since 2021/22, having been broadly stable between 2016/17 and 2020/21¹. For every ten prison beds freed up by someone being released in 2025/26, there were nine recalls to custody. In the first three months of 2026, there were more recalls than releases for the first time².
- In the first three months of 2017, there was one recall for every 13 people under post-release supervision. By the first three months of 2026, this had risen to one recall for every five people under post-release supervision.
- The recall rate for women is higher, with one recall for every four women under post-release supervision in the first three months of 2026, compared to one recall for every five men.
- Four in five recalls in 2025/26 did not relate to people who were facing a charge for further offending.
- People recalled to prison cost the Government almost £750 million a year – with nearly £590 million of this cost not being related to further charges³. It is counterproductive to be spending this money on recalling people to custody rather than investing in community support to help them reintegrate and reduce the risk of reoffending.
- The Government should use its current sentencing reforms, changes to recall to prison, and wider changes as an opportunity to ensure that everyone released from prison has the right support to reduce their risk of reoffending.
- The new progression model, which will see earlier release dates for most people, is expected to result in around 5,000 additional people being released early between September 2026 and July 2027⁴. There are 9,900 people in prison on recall without further charge at any one time, meaning reducing recall should be a central part of managing prison capacity.

¹ Ministry of Justice (2026) [Offender management statistics quarterly](#)

² Ibid.

³ See Appendix A.

⁴ Institute for Government (2026) [Prison Early Release Scheme](#)

Background

It is rarely the case that someone sentenced to custody will spend the entirety of their sentence in prison. Custody plays a central role but it is only part of the journey that people are sent on at the moment of conviction.

The justice system is designed so that most people receiving custodial sentences will return to the community under supervision during their sentence. The Sentencing Act 2025 means that from October 2026 most people, depending on the nature of their offence, and their behaviour in prison, are likely spend up to two thirds of their sentence in the community, subject to licence conditions.

During the time someone spends in the community on licence, they must comply with a range of conditions. Some of these apply to everyone and some are individualised, ranging from a curfew and being monitored electronically through to a requirement to engage with specified community services.

The Probation Service can impose consequences for breaking these conditions. For example, the Probation Service has the ability to tighten restrictions in cases of non-compliance (or relax them as a reward for good behaviour) but the most significant consequence is the power to recall someone to custody.

Until recently, if a person was recalled, they would be returned to prison either for two or four weeks (known as fixed-term recall), or for the remainder of their sentence or until they successfully reapply for parole (in the case of longer sentences, and known as Standard Recall).

This system has recently changed under the Sentencing Act 2025, with the majority of people recalled now returned to prison for 56 days. In some cases, if someone has a sentence of more than four years or for a limited number of other reasons due to the nature of their offending, they can instead be recalled until the Parole Board agrees to release them or until the end of their sentence.

The power to recall someone to custody is an important tool for public protection. However, as set out below, the numbers of people who are recalled to prison has significantly increased over recent years. Nacro's experience supporting people as they are released from prison suggests that recall is now being used for far more situations than previously, where a different form of support in the community is likely to be far more beneficial for both them and their community, and more cost-effective. There is no clear evidence that the increase in recalls is due to an equivalent increase in risk. The current upward trend in more people being recalled to custody is also unsustainable and ultimately does more harm than good.

The scale of recalls to prison

The number of people recalled to custody has increased exponentially over recent years. Since 2021/22, it has risen by 130%⁵, despite the number of people released falling by over a fifth⁶. This means that, in 2025/26, there were more than 51,000 admissions to prison as a result of someone being recalled. That is higher than the number of people entering prison after sentencing. In the same year, there were over 47,000 admissions to prison following sentencing⁷.

At any one point in the last year, over 12,500 people were in prison on recall⁸. This represents one in seven of the entire prison population⁹.

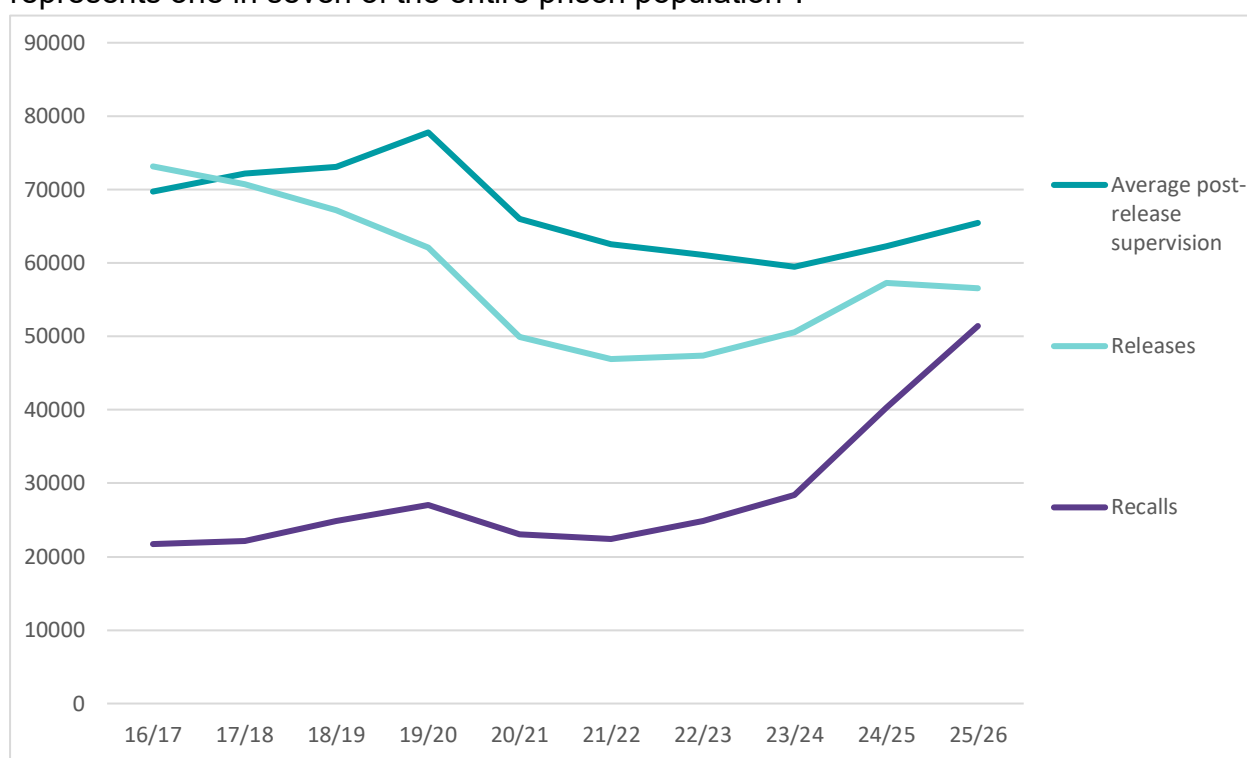


Figure 1: The number of releases from and recalls to custody, along with average post-release supervision caseload, by year

This increase cannot simply be explained by an increase in risk. There is no compelling evidence that someone released from prison is more likely to pose a danger to the public today than they were a decade ago. Higher recall numbers are also not driven by an increasing population of people on licence. In the first three months of 2017, one in thirteen people under post-release supervision was recalled. In the first three months of 2026, this had risen to almost one in five. There must

⁵ Ministry of Justice (2026) [Offender management statistics quarterly](#)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ministry of Justice (2026) Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2025 [Prison population data]

⁹ Ministry of Justice (2026) [Offender management statistics quarterly](#)

therefore be other factors which are contributing to this huge rise in the number of people recalled to prison.

Why are people recalled to prison

Determinate and indeterminate sentenced prisoners who are released into the community subject to licensed supervision are liable to be recalled to custody by the Secretary of State, where (a) they have breached a specific condition of their licence or where (b) the behaviour being exhibited, is sufficiently concerning to indicate that the risk they pose is assessed as no longer safely manageable in the community. – Ministry of Justice Recall Policy¹⁰

At the most serious end, a further criminal charge results in a near-automatic return to custody. In other cases, recalls can be for a failure to follow specific licence conditions such as a curfew or requirement to live at a specified address, or to maintain contact with a probation officer. Recalls can also be for multiple reasons, such as both a failure to reside at a specified address and a failure to attend probation meetings.

The data collected on the reasons why recall decisions are made categorises decisions into: facing further charge; non-compliance; failed to keep in touch; failed to reside; drugs/alcohol; and other.

Cause	Number (2025/26) ¹¹	Proportion of all cases
Non-compliance	37,751	73.4%
Failure to reside	12,451	24.2%
Failure to keep in touch	19,751	38.4%
Drug or alcohol breach	2,378	4.6%
Further charges	11,004	21.4%

In 2025/26, non-compliance was cited in nearly three quarters of all recall cases during the time period. At the same time, facing further charge was cited in fewer than one in four cases, and 'failure to reside' in a similar number. Over 38% of recall cases cited 'failure to keep in touch' and 5% cited a breach of alcohol or drugs conditions.

Non-compliance: The most common reason given for recall is the broad category of 'non-compliance'¹², which is a failure to follow licence conditions, but the data does not allow for any more detailed understanding of this.

The significant increase in the overall recall numbers has been driven predominantly by the increase in the non-compliance category¹³. It has increased from 10,187 to 37,751 between 2016/17 and 2025/26.

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2026) [Recall, Review and Re-Release of Recalled Prisoners Policy Framework](#)

¹¹ Ministry of Justice (2026) [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#)

¹² Ministry of Justice (2026) [Offender management statistics quarterly](#)

¹³ Ibid.

Facing further charge: Over the last decade, the number of recalls involving further charge due to reoffending has remained broadly steady, and is only 14% higher than the 2016/17.

Failure to reside: There has also been an increase in the number of recalls citing 'failure to reside' from 5,600 to 12,450 by 2025/26, an increase of 155%. This is a breach of the requirement that anyone on licence must live at a specified address, and receive prior permission to spend the night elsewhere.

In many cases, Nacro's services see that recall for this reason is driven by homelessness – whether that is street homelessness or just insecure accommodation – making it largely a reflection of failed community support, rather than explicit wrongdoing on the part of people on probation. People supported by Nacro also tell us that they have chosen to leave specified accommodation in order to get away from others who are violent or using drugs, but are then penalised for this decision.

Failure to keep in touch: This means that people did not abide by the requirements set by their probation officer to attend appointments or otherwise contact them. Since 2016/17 it has doubled, increasing from 7,664 to 19,751.

Breach of alcohol or drugs conditions: The numbers in this category have increased over time, from 1,664 in 2016/17 to 2,378 in 2025/26. The lower numbers in this category shouldn't be taken to mean breaches are less common, as only a subset of people under probation supervision will have a drug or alcohol condition in their licence.

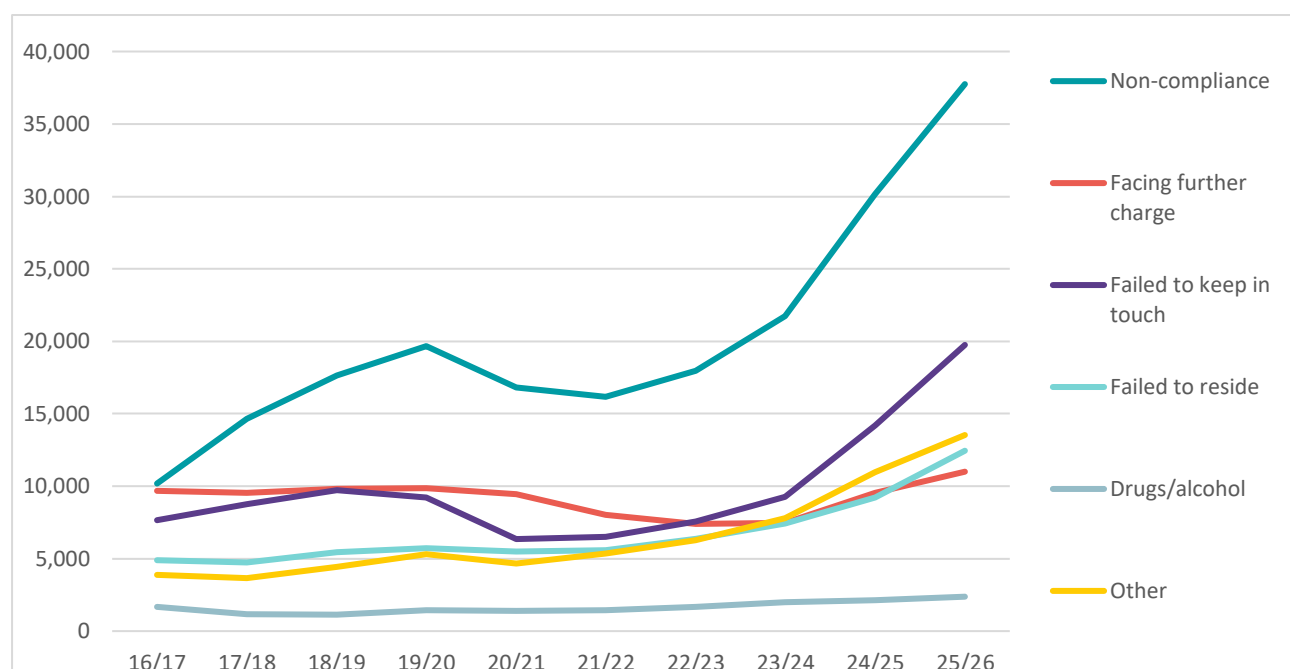


Figure 2: Number of recalls with given reasons (totals will not sum due to multiple reasons for each recall)¹⁴

¹⁴ Nacro analysis of Ministry of Justice (2026) [Offender management statistics quarterly](#)

Explaining the increase in recalls to prison

To establish exactly what is driving the rise in recalls, more granular data is required. At the moment, official statistics do not distinguish between someone who misses a single probation appointment due to a problem with transport or illness, and someone who routinely fails to engage over a number of months.

In the services that Nacro runs, we regularly see and hear different causes of recall to prison. These can be anything from a failure to attend probation appointments, or using illegal substances, through to minor breaches such as being late home due to public transport failures, therefore breaching curfew. Staff in our services find that decisions at times seem arbitrary. For example, two people will have displayed similar behaviours in breaching their licence conditions, but only one of them will be recalled. This inconsistency appears to be a feature of the system, as has been noted by HM Inspectorate of Probation¹⁵.

The rise in 'failure to reside' also suggests that homelessness and unsuitable accommodation could be a major driver of recall. In Nacro's services, we see that stable accommodation is a necessary foundation to accessing other support and establishing and maintaining a routine. Given the importance of these to complying with licence conditions, any efforts to reduce the rate of recall must consider the importance of ensuring people are not released into homelessness, insecure or inappropriate accommodation.

The Government has set a welcome ambition to halve the proportion of people leaving prison homeless, with a longer-term aim of ending this altogether¹⁶. Delivering on this commitment will help people avoid some situations in which they are at risk of recall. As Nacro has previously called for, more clarity is needed on how the Ministry of Justice will work with other government departments to meet this target¹⁷.

In practice, at Nacro our services find that recalls are often initiated in part because community support has either broken down or not been provided. Sometimes this is within the control of the person being supervised by probation, but in others it is a result of the right support not being in place. At the starkest end, someone who is released without stable housing is unlikely to be able to meet requirements to regularly be in a specified place at a given time or adhere to other licence conditions, and will likely struggle to actively engage with services. Rather than recalling them to prison, this could and should be addressed in the first instance by providing that community support, such as commissioned housing, to give them the best chance of complying with their licence conditions.

¹⁵ [HMI Probation \(2020\)](#) A thematic review of probation recall culture and practice

¹⁶ MHCLG (2025) [National Plan to End Homelessness](#)

¹⁷ Nacro (2026) Reducing deaths among prison leavers

The Probation Service has been under significant strain for a number of years, with high levels of staff shortages and high caseloads. Even between March 2025 and March 2026 post-supervision caseloads increased by 9%¹⁸.

Probation officers are very committed but remain under significant pressure. In our services and from what we hear from the people we support, this has led to an increased risk-averseness amongst probation staff due to their limited capacity¹⁹. Probation officers have told HM Inspector of Probation that there is a 'culture of blame' around further offending²⁰, which may drive risk aversion.

Research by the charity Switchback has highlighted that, rather than being a last resort, recall is now sometimes the first lever that is reached for²¹. People on licence often report feeling that, even were they do their best to comply with their licence, they may be recalled due to factors beyond their control, or a probation officer over indexing the risk that they pose. Because of these concerns, Nacro and others, including HM Inspectorate of Probation, have recommended that a clearer decision-making framework be introduced governing when someone is recalled²².

Due to the high turnover and staffing challenges within the Probation Service, the people Nacro support often work with a number of different probation officers. This impacts the ability to develop meaningful relationships between the probation officer and person they are supervising. Our services hear how frustrating this can be for people in cases where referrals have not been followed through, or people's needs and key information is not being recorded or shared appropriately. In cases where people have multiple probation officers, they may find it challenging to rebuild relationships with their supervising officers and retell their backgrounds, challenges and needs.

Many of the people Nacro supports recognise the strain and workload challenges probation officers face. There is no doubt that there are many positive experiences and good relationships with probation staff. However, too often our services come across examples of support not being followed through, multiple changes of probation officer, and a tendency to move quickly to the threat of recall for minor breaches or for reasons beyond their control, even where support hasn't been put in place.

The impact of recalls to prison

While recall is an important tool, it can also lead to poorer long-term outcomes for the people involved²³, increasing the chances of reoffending. Research has shown

¹⁸ Ministry of Justice (2026) [Offender management statistics quarterly](#)

¹⁹ HMI Probation (2025) [Hope and Probation](#)

²⁰ HMI Probation (2026) [Serious Further Offence Reviews](#)

²¹ [Switchback \(2025\) Prison recall report](#)

²² [HMI Probation \(2020\)](#) A thematic review of probation recall culture and practice

²³ Howard, F. (2019) [The experience of prison recall in England and Wales](#)

recall is likely to disrupt accommodation, engagement with health services, and attempts to enter employment²⁴.

Women in the criminal justice system who experienced short term recalls are at higher risk of having poor resettlement outcomes. Under the previous recall framework, HM Inspectorate of Prisons found that women who had been recalled to prison on short 14-day recalls were more likely than the general prison population to be released homeless; released again with ongoing addiction and mental health issues; and unable to access help with finances, benefits, and obtaining identification documents²⁵.

Through the justice services that Nacro runs, the impact that frequent recalls have on people is very clear. Rather than supporting them to improve their outcomes, it can put additional barriers in place. Accommodation can be lost, people can lose jobs, and it can put additional strain on their support networks. These are the foundations that we know are vital to reduce reoffending. There can also be a lack of meaningful support in the few weeks someone is recalled to prison to tackle any of the issues which may have contributed to their recall. Rather than reducing reoffending, this risks people being caught in a revolving door and may also mean people are driven towards higher risk behaviours²⁶.

From April 2026, the recall system has changed so that the majority of recalls are for a fixed term of 56 days – replacing shorter fixed-term recalls, and a group of ‘standard determinate sentence’ recalls which lasted for the remainder of the person’s sentence or until they were released by the Parole Board. In 2025, around two thirds of recalls were fixed at either 14 or 28 days – meaning that thousands of people will be spending longer in prison when they are recalled. The Ministry of Justice has stated that this increased time for many gives probation officers time to implement risk management plans and set appropriate licence conditions, reducing the risk of further recall²⁷.

However, Nacro staff working with prisons find that this shift is inconsistent. Some prisons are using this change to improve planning, and thus reduce the number of people stuck in a cycle of release and recall, but others responding to this as a capacity management problem due to the increased pressure on prison places, rather than using it as an opportunity to improve their provision of support.

This is particularly important given that 56 days may be long enough that people lose rented accommodation, benefits or employment they have secured. HM Prisons and Probation Service should set out guidance on the regime which should be in place during a 56-day recall, building on best practice identified across the prison estate.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ [HM Inspectorate of Prisons \(2025\) Recall, release, repeat](#)

²⁶ Switchback (2025) Op. Cit.

²⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025) [Sentencing Act Factsheet](#)

This should cover both activity within the prison, and the provision of post-release support.

The cost of recalls to prison

The effect of being recalled to prison on individuals is considerable, but it is also putting massive strain on the prisons system. Recalled prisoners cost the taxpayer almost £750 million a year in the cost of imprisonment. Even excluding those who have been recalled due to facing further charge, recalled prisoners occupy around 10,000 prison places at a cost of almost £590 million a year²⁸. While some of this cost can be justified as necessary for public protection and enforcement of licence conditions, a significant proportion of this would be better spent on improving community support to address the individual needs people have which drives their offending and therefore reduce the risk of recall.

As well as the monetary cost, it is not clear that the significant rise in the number of people recalled to custody is a good use of prison places. This is at a time when the prisons capacity crisis has brought the system close to the brink and already led to significant changes to release provisions in order to reduce overcrowding in prisons.

Future trends

We are in a period of major change in the justice system which will likely have an impact on the number of people recalled to prison in the future. The abolition of post-sentence supervision for most people serving shorter sentences, the introduction of a new 'progression' model which will see most people serving more of their sentence in the community, as well as the new presumption to suspend short custodial sentences, will change the makeup of the probation caseload. At the same time, the Probation Service is currently implementing a reform which will change their approach to assessment and supervision, and could lead to less supervision for those considered lower risk.

For many people, a reduction in supervision levels may be welcome. However, if it is accompanied by a withdrawal of important support then it may increase the risk that they breach their licence. Given the importance of relationships between prison leavers and probation officers in avoiding recall, it is also important that a reduction in face-to-face contact does not effectively lead to an increase in the assessment of risk that someone poses due to low levels of familiarity with the person being supervised.

From September 2026, there will also be a significant expansion of electronic monitoring of people released from prison on licence. Electronic monitoring can bring benefits, but there are also many challenges. This includes minor breaches of conditions (such as failure to be home by a specified time), or faulty equipment leading to recall. Conditions and restrictions imposed by electronic monitoring have

²⁸ See Appendix A.

also led to some people not being able to access or take up opportunities and support which are proven to help rehabilitation – such as employment or family support.²⁹

Adhering to licence conditions is important for people under probation supervision, but if these changes result in more people being recalled for minor breaches caused by a lack of support rather than because they pose a genuine risk, then it will put further strain on our prison system and undermine the principle of rehabilitation.

Reducing recalls to prison

There will always be cases where recall is necessary to ensure public protection. Any reforms must ensure this continues to be available, while ensuring that the system does not simply default to recall as an alternative to tackling the root causes of any risk.

The role of the Probation Service in supervising people on licence is to ensure both that they are able to reintegrate into society, and to manage the risk to the public. In reality, these are inextricably linked. Someone who has successfully reintegrated into society, and established a stable life in the community, is far less likely to go on and reoffend than someone who remains in a chaotic situation.

The primary objective should not be to cut recalls by an arbitrary number, but to combine appropriate community support with a clearer decision-making process. This process should recognise the role this support can play in reducing risk so that the number of occasions on which recall is needed or justified falls substantially. The evidence from Nacro's services is that wraparound support – covering everything from help accessing mental health or substance misuse services, reconnecting with family to providing stable accommodation and help with employment or skills – being in place as soon as someone walks out of prison helps put people back on the road to reintegration. This should be the default to reduce the risk of reoffending.

For those who are recalled and with the move to 56 day recalls as the default, there is an opportunity to rethink how time back in custody is used. To avoid people being trapped in a cycle of recall, the time back in custody must be used to put in place comprehensive support to ensure people do not fall back into old habits. If this does not happen, then it is likely that the current reforms will simply serve to drive up the prison population with the likelihood of another prison capacity crisis in the not-too-distant future.

At a time of significant focus on addressing the prison capacity crisis, tackling the drivers of recall is pivotal to reducing the strain on prisons. In light of the impact on the number of people in prison at any one time, it should be as much of a focus as any provisions to release people early.

²⁹ Nacro (2025) [Enhancing the rehabilitative impact of electronic monitoring](#)

Recommendations

There are six steps that should be taken immediately to ensure that fewer people are recalled – not by setting arbitrary targets, but by building a system where fewer people leave prison without the support they need to avoid recall.

- 1) **HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) should ensure probation officers are given a clear target to make referrals to all relevant services twelve weeks before a person is released** – or immediately following a fixed term recall. This should not just cover housing, but the other services which people rely on when they leave prison, whether that is substance misuse, mental health, or welfare advice. By making these referrals prior to release, continuity of care can be improved.
- 2) **The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government should set out a joint plan to meet their target of halving the proportion of people leaving prison homeless this Parliament** and ending it in the longer term. This should include specific cross-Departmental work, and funding mechanisms to ensure appropriate support is provided, both to tackle immediate homelessness and ensure long-term pathways are in place.
- 3) **Along with establishing risk of further offending, HMPPS should assess individuals' risk of being recalled to custody, and commission tailored support for those considered to be at highest risk.** With a lack of housing being a major contributor to recall, both through failure to reside and other technical breaches, housing support can play a major role in reducing recall. Alongside more help to engage with community health services, manage finances, and reestablish relationships, this would ensure people are supported in securing stable housing, developing independent living skills, and developing healthier behaviours.
- 4) **HMPPS should introduce a clear framework for decision-making for probation practitioners.** As recommended by the Inspectorate of Probation, this would create a shared and consistent understanding of when and why someone might be recalled – enabling both people leaving prison and those supporting them to better address factors which might lead to this outcome. This should also make clear that support providers should be able to input into recall decisions, as they may have continuous engagement where other relationships have broken down. Alongside this, the MoJ should publish more granular data on the reasons for recalls, identifying precisely what forms of non-compliance are driving the current increase.
- 5) **HMPPS should set out a clear ladder of interventions for people who commit minor breaches of their licence, with recall used as a last resort or in cases of further offending.** The current system lacks clarity on the

support which should be provided to someone before they are recalled. A ladder of interventions would make clear that probation should first seek to address the causes of riskier behaviour, whether that is through changing accommodation, referral to community services, or more intensive support. This would mean that technical breaches only lead to recall after all reasonable steps have been taken to mitigate risk in the community.

- 6) **HMPPS should issue guidance to prisons on the regime which should be in place during a 56-day recall**, building on best practice identified across the prison estate. This should cover both activity within the prison, and the provision of post-release support. As part of this, HMPPS should require probation services to ensure that nobody is leaving prison from recall without an address to stay in, or without referrals to relevant community support services. Where necessary, this should mean that extra capacity is commissioned from community support providers to meet higher levels of demand.

Appendix A: Methodology

- For FY 24-25, cost per prison place was estimated at £59,026³⁰.
- Average recall population for 2025/26 was 12,674.
- At an average cost of £59,026 this brings the cost of keeping prison places for those on recall at £748,095,524.
- 78.5% of those on recall were not facing further charges³¹, equivalent to 9,959 people.
- Given the average cost of £59,026, the cost of recall places for those who not facing further charges whilst on licence would approximately be £587,254,986, or close to £590m.

About Nacro

At Nacro, we see people's future whatever the past. That's why our housing, education, justice and health and wellbeing services work alongside people to give them the support and skills they need to succeed. It's also why we fight for their voices to be heard and campaign together to create lasting change.

We deliver services across the criminal justice system, including personal wellbeing services and accommodation advice and support for people under probation supervision, the national Community Accommodation Service Tier 2 on behalf of the Ministry of Justice, housing prison leavers and those bailed from court in need of an address.

We also provide substance misuse services for both people leaving prison and others across the country, including in Yorkshire and the Humber, and the West Midlands. Throughout this report, we have drawn on the experience and expertise of these services, and are grateful to them for their support.

³⁰ Ministry of Justice, 2026: [Costs per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison, HM Prison & Probation Service Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25 Management Information Addendum](#), p. 3

³¹ [MoJ and HMPPS, 2026: Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2025](#)

