

# How facilities management can unlock prisoner potential and drive social value

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*Mitie Care & Custody's Director of Business Development, Ben Saunders, shares insights on FM's role in prisoner rehabilitation and how smart data and FM skills can be used to drive positive change.*

The days of transactional facilities management (FM) in prisons are long gone.

Prisoner-focused delivery is shaping the sector, with reduction in reoffending one of the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) three priority outcomes. The most recent MoJ figures put reoffending costs at approximately £18.1bn per year demonstrating the size of the problem, and the opportunity to reduce return prison visits, reform lives and ease the strain on the public purse.

As the MoJ's latest whitepaper states, prisons cannot support rehabilitation unless they are safe, stable and secure. The link between the prison environment and reducing the likelihood of offenders returning is clear and this is where the FM industry can make an impact and add real social value.

Whether delivering services in prisons, or running them on behalf of the MoJ, facilities management organisations must recognise the role they can play in realising Government strategy and enhance their support for prisoner rehabilitation – there are a number of ways we can do this.

The full potential of smart technology has yet to be fully harnessed in prisons – and FM should lead on its implementation to ensure the comfort, health and wellbeing of prisoners and to harvest useful data to make prisons work better.

Using tech and data for positive change

On a practical level, the remote monitoring of assets such as boilers can ensure a more efficient process. With alerts generated for performance anomalies to prevent downtime, reduced repair costs and extended asset lifetimes, FM can make sure prisoners comfort is not compromised to contribute to their wellbeing.

Meanwhile issuing prison officers and FM colleagues with connected handheld devices can put data at their fingertips, with biometric technology having huge potential to facilitate positive change. Handheld devices can be used to streamline processes and access work rosters, prisoner sentences, learning and resettlement plans, adjudications, record job completions and essential fabric checks, making data more readily available and faster to action.

Under prison regulations, every room must be assessed daily to ensure they remain in good repair. Such checks can be recorded on handheld devices, eliminating the traditional paper trail, reducing the chance of human error, while hosting data on a single, easy-to-use platform. This reduces time-zapping admin, leaving prison colleagues free to devote more time to those in their care.

But it's not just about streamlining processes. Fingerprint readers can now capture whether individuals with protected characteristics have difficulty accessing amenities that should be open to all. This is often seen in prison gyms, where certain prisoners are not enjoying as much access as others. The resulting data means that appropriate interventions can be taken if necessary to make sure prisons remain accommodating to the entire prison population and plans can be put in place to drive accessibility.

#### Upskilling through FM to reduce reoffending

As well as the data opportunity, FM organisations have an untapped wealth of practical skills that can be shared with prisoners to reduce their chance of reoffending when leaving the gates.

Often prisoners struggle with numeracy and literacy. Addressing this requires a joined-up approach, with input from prison learning and skills departments and charities working best when in partnership with future employers, like FM organisations. The MoJ is focused on establishing individual prisoner learning plans, which may include tutoring or assistance with professional skills, such as CV writing, job applications and interviews.

We know that serving a prison sentence can negatively impact confidence. Many prisoners are sensitive to the negative stereotypes associated with a conviction and just 17% of ex-offenders manage to get a job within a year of their release.

This is where FM can make a real difference. By investing time in upskilling prisoners, FM businesses can train candidates to complete work experience within the prison estate in areas such as painting, decorating, cleaning and landscaping to improve their prospects in the outside world. FM partners could also actively support the opportunity of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) work experience in the community, further enhancing employability. The scale of the sector means guaranteed job interviews can be offered to promising individuals, with posts lined up to be started upon release and a new start from day one of civilian life.

The [Mitie Foundation](#) already exists to break down barriers and help a diverse range of participants into fulfilling employment and the charity's *Ready2Work Beyond Bars* scheme is helping prisoners to upskill and realise their potential. These initiatives are so important for smoothing the transition for inmates. 86% of employers rate ex-offenders as good at their job, which shows the scale of the opportunity for the labour

market for prisons and FM companies to get this right.

Prisoner-focused delivery yields psychological, financial and social benefits for the individual, as well as considerable social value for the wider community. Organisations also have much to gain from the skills and dedication prison leavers bring to the workplace with over 80% of employers of ex-offenders positively rating their reliability, motivation, attendance and performance.

Some businesses may be reluctant to welcome people with convictions. However, working with a facilities management partner, which remains responsible for former offenders' performance and wellbeing, means the negligible risk of problems is borne by the FM provider.

The growing social value component of MoJ tenders means there is sound business rationale behind tailoring FM delivery in prisons to new and purposeful lives beyond bars. So let's foster that component to keep making a difference, investing in prisoner skills and driving social value through FM.

*Ben is a former social worker with 25 years' experience in Justice and Immigration. He is passionate about improving lives and public services delivery.*

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