



Howard League for **Penal Reform**

**Annual Report
2022-23**



Contents

Reference and administrative information	4
Chair’s welcome, from Professor Fergus McNeill	9
Objectives and activities	10
Achievements and performance	15
Plans for the future from Chief Executive Andrea Coomber	33
Structure, governance and management	36

Reference and administrative information

Company number	898514 registered in the United Kingdom
Charity number	251926 registered in England and Wales
Registered office and operational address	1 Ardleigh Rd London N1 4HS
Board members	<p>Board members, who are also directors under company law and the charity trustees as defined by section 177 of the Charities Act 2011, who served during the year and up to the date of this report were as follows:</p> <p>Professor Ben Bradford Adrian Briggs Zubaida Haque Sally Lewis, Honorary Treasurer Gerry Marshall Professor Fergus McNeill, Chair Professor Pamela Taylor (until January 2023) John Tress Tomas Thurogood-Hyde (from April 2023) Charles Bland (from April 2023) Alexandra Marks CBE</p>
Honorary President	Lord Ken Macdonald KC
Key management personnel	<p>Andrea Coomber KC (Hon.) Chief Executive Euginia Lolomari Director of Finance and Operations Andrew Neilson Director of Campaigns. Anita Dockley Director of Research (until November 2023) Gemma Abbott Legal Director (from March 2023)</p>

Staff

Lee Brown
Dr Helen Churcher
Poppy Cubbage
Amy Dolley

Marie Franklin
Steve Gallant
Leela Jadhav
Dr Tim Kerr
Noor Khan
Katie Logue
Sophie Lumsden
Sinead MacCann
Adriana Matrigiana
Rob Preece
Ana Rosenthal
Claire Salama
Anna Spencer
Ayomide Sotubo
Catryn Yousefi
Ryan Walker

Finance, Audit and Risk committee members

Ben Elger
Lucy Robinson
Delbert Sandiford

Consultant

Gemma Buckland, Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms

Operations Coordinator
Research and Project Officer
Legal and Projects Support Officer
Policy and Public Affairs Officer (from February 2023)
Solicitor (until July 2023)
Development Support Officer
Policy Officer (until September 2023)
Membership Officer
Press and Public Affairs Officer
Communications Coordinator
Development Manager
Managing Solicitor
Trainee Solicitor
Communications Manager
Caseworker
Managing Solicitor
Solicitor
Policy Officer (from September 2023)
Programmes Manager (until January 2023)
Executive Assistant (from October 2022)

**Editor-in-Chief of the Howard Journal of
Crime and Justice**
Professor Ian Loader, University of Oxford

Editors
Professor Rachel Condry University of
Oxford
Dr David Green John Jay College, New
York, USA
Professor Elena Larrauri Universitat
Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain
Professor Simon Mackenzie Victoria
University of Wellington, New Zealand

Managing Editor
Anita Dockley, Howard League for Penal
Reform

Book Review Editor
Dr Mary Rogan Trinity College Dublin, Uni-
versity of Dublin, Ireland

Publishing Editor
Brenda McWilliams





Chair's welcome

Criminal justice in England and Wales remains in turmoil. No fewer than five law-and-order bills were announced in the King's Speech, which sets the direction for the government's programme. The prisons minister most recently appointed is the tenth to take on the role in the last five years. But while they come and go at such speed, the penal system seems to grind to a halt, or worse, to regress. Bedford, where John Howard began his penal reform mission some 250 years ago, has become the fifth prison in a year to be made the subject of an urgent notification because conditions are so dire. All these developments have occurred in the month before I write this foreword, and we can expect many more with a general election looming on the horizon.



For those at the centre of the system, whose fate and future is the responsibility of the state and the system that punishes them, the daily reality is chronic overcrowding, staff shortages, a lack of opportunities for education and employment, glacially slow progression towards release, and even security failures (even including a high-profile escape). The hundreds of letters and calls the Howard League received from people inside, and from their families powerfully attests to the abysmal dysfunction of our so-called justice system. We hear the same message (usually quietly and privately) from the legions of practitioners (in the courts, in prisons, in probation) whose efforts to support positive change — to make reintegration meaningful — are continually frustrated by the absence of brave political leadership that the sector so desperately needs. Instead, all too often, we hear only populist posturing and the evidence-lite policymaking that accompanies it.

Yet, in spite of the many challenges, there is hope to be found in the pages that follow. For years, we have raised awareness about the ineffectiveness of short prison sentences; now, at last, ministers have proposed legislation for a presumption against them. Through our legal work, we have continued to provide advice and support to many children and young adults in custody. We have produced educational resources to help people understand remand and recall. We have supported grassroots campaigns groups, held packed-out events at party conferences, and made a host of recommendations for reform in the final report of our Commission on Crime and Gambling-Related Harms.

This report also provides information about what we intend to do next. We have devised a new five-year strategy, which focuses on the acute crisis in prisons, with particular emphasis on the growing use of remand, the ongoing imprisonment for public protection (IPP) scandal, joint enterprise and sentencing. That strategy is firmly rooted in the evidence we have gathered from our members and supporters both sides of the prison walls, and from our academic and practice colleagues.

In all of this, therefore, we rely on the support of our members and our funders. As you read this report, please consider what role you might play in our work to build a more humane and effective response to crime.

Professor Fergus McNeill
Chair

Objectives and activities

The Howard League for Penal Reform is the oldest penal reform charity in the world. We were established in 1866 as the Howard Association, named after John Howard, the first English prison reformer. In 1921 we merged with the Penal Reform League, forming the Howard League for Penal Reform.

Purpose and Priorities 2019 - 2023

In July 2023, our Board agreed a new strategy that will take us to 2028. Given that most of the timeframe covered by this Trustees Annual Report was under the earlier Strategy, this report focuses on delivery of its ambition.

Over the period from 2019 to July 2023 the Howard League has focused on three broad strategic priorities.

1. Stemming the flow

The Howard League will focus work on stemming the flow of people into the system, advocating for solutions which as much as possible lie outside of the criminal justice system.

The criminal justice system is not a static repository of people. It is better understood as a flow of individual lives, from point of arrest, through community interventions, all the way to the population in penal custody and beyond.

For several years now, a key activity in respect of 'stemming the flow' has been the work of the Commission on Crime and Gambling Harms, which is run by the Howard League. We have also undertaken significant work in respect of the arrests of women and children which is outlined below.

2. Better justice

The Howard League will focus work on better justice which emphasises rights and remedies. When solutions must be sought from within the system, these should be as non-invasive and flexible as possible. Prison must be a true last resort.

The Howard League's legal team has focused on the quality of justice for children and young people in custody. Through our access to justice service, we have advised hundreds of children and young people each year in advocating for their rights in prison and supporting their return to the community. In the past year we have undertaken several projects that aim to improve and better understand their experience in custody.

Our Campaigns team is committed to share the experiences of people in custody with the public, amplifying key findings from reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and Internal Monitoring Boards. We also respond to government consultations and developments in Parliament, with a view to reducing the prison population and improving conditions in prisons.

3. Strengthening the charity

The Howard League has focused on strengthening the charity which speaks to our vision of being a well-managed, well-governed and sustainable charitable organisation. In particular, we have continued to devote efforts to grow our membership, expand our influence and maintain our independence.

In the past year the Chief Executive – supported by the Senior Management Team – has pursued significant change in respect of the governance and management of the charity, as outlined below.

Values

We have elaborated a Cultural Compass that underpins our approach to our work, to each other and to those we work with. Our key values are excellence, learning, accountability, integrity, collaboration, and courage. We regularly reflect on these behaviours and mindsets, ensuring that our values are alive in our daily work.

We are an anti-racist and an anti-discriminatory organisation. We invest in building an inclusive organisation with diverse members, staff and leadership. We ensure that our staff are equipped to challenge racism and discrimination in all its forms, wherever they see or experience it.

Public benefit

For more than 150 years, the Howard League has been advocating for prisons to be used as a punishment of last resort, and for the better treatment of people in prison. This is not just for the benefit of people in prison but recognises that society is made safer when penal policy is evidence-based and humane.

Direct beneficiaries of our work include: people living in prisons (on remand, post-conviction and post-sentence) and their families, including the children and young people who call our advice line and who have received representation from our legal team; people working in and running prisons; people who come into contact with police officers and who face court; people facing sentences; academics and students specialised in penal policy; practising lawyers, magistrates and judges; those providing support and supervision in the community including probation and community care workers; and members of Parliament across parties and civil servants engaged in penal policy. Direct beneficiaries also include the public at large, including victims of crime, who benefit both from our direct communication about penal policy and the state of prisons, and from a criminal justice system that keeps them safe.

The benefits of our work are demonstrated through: successful outcomes for children and young people who call our advice line and are clients of our legal work; the press and media picking up stories based on our work; the adoption of our recommendations in government penal reform initiatives; the referencing of our contributions to government consultations; the adoption of our suggested amendments to legislation; the acceptance of our arguments in third-party interventions in court judgments; academics positively engaging with the issues on which we are working; and greater understanding among the public and decision-makers of penal policy.

The Board has referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and in planning and elaborating the new Strategy and Theory of Change. The Board has considered how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives that have been set for the organisation. While some activities are available only to members, these are in the minority and the vast majority of our work is available to the public free of charge. The Howard League website provides accessible information on our work to the public at large.

The Board considers that the Howard League's activities are of public benefit in at least the following ways:

- provision of independent research and analysis to external bodies, including the senior judiciary, government and politicians across the political spectrum to assist in formulating law, policy and practice related to penal policy matters, which can have significant benefit for people in the UK;
- dissemination of research and information about penal policy directly to Howard League members, the press and media outlets, and others including: people in prison, people working in prison, judges, barristers, solicitors, chartered legal executives, students, advisers to governments and non-governmental organisations, who are then better able to advise public and private bodies about penal policy issues; and
- offering conferences, lectures and other events on penal policy issues that are open to the general public to attend, to inform them about important issues which may affect their daily lives.

Achievements and performance

The charity's main activities in 2022-23 are described below. All its charitable activities focus on reform of the penal system and supporting those within it. These are undertaken to further the Howard League's charitable purposes for the public benefit.

1. Stemming the flow

The Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms

The Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms (formerly the Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling) was set up in 2019 to understand the links between crime and gambling related harm. This work was funded by the Gambling Commission (£1.8million over three years).

The Commission was chaired by Lord Peter Goldsmith KC, alongside 12 other Commissioners:

- Andrew Black, co-founder of Betfair
- Prof Henrietta Bowden-Jones OBE, FRCPsych, BA (Hons), DOccMed, MD (Imperial), Founder and Director of the National Problem Gambling Clinic
- Matt Burton, (Retired) Assistant Chief Constable, Cheshire Police
- Dr John Chisholm CBE, Chair, Medical Ethics Committee, British Medical Association
- Jon Collins, Chief Executive, Prisoners' Education Trust
- Elizabeth Morony, Partner, Clifford Chance LLP
- Andrew Neilson, Director of Campaigns, Howard League for Penal Reform
- Neil Platt, Clinical Director, Beacon Counselling Trust
- Sarah Ramanauskas, Senior Partner, Gambling Integrity
- Gerda Reith, Professor of Social Science, University of Glasgow
- Norma Stephenson OBE, Councillor, Stockton on Tees Borough Council
- Sue Wade OBE

The Commission produced a number of research reports, detailed previously, three of which were published in 2023:

- *‘Holding it all together and picking up the pieces’: Women’s experiences of gambling and crime* (March 2023)
- *Exploring gambling and its role within prison culture: “You can be flying high, then fighting”* (March 2023)
- *Lived experiences of gambling, gambling-related harms, and crime within ethnic minority communities* (April 2023)

The Commission came to a close in April 2023, concluding with a final report and reception at the House of Lords hosted by its Chair, Lord Goldsmith KC. The final report was informed by the Commission’s research and made practical and structural policy recommendations.

The work of the Commission was widely disseminated, including at academic conferences; to the Ministry of Justice; to Local Criminal Justice Boards; to Police and Crime Commissioners; and at political party conferences. The Howard League hosted well attended events at the Labour Party Annual Conference in September 2022 and the Conservative Party Conference in October 2022. Our planned event at the Liberal Democrats annual conference was cancelled, along with the whole conference, due to the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

The work of the Commission was also showcased at the Howard League’s conference ‘Crime, Justice and the Human Condition’, at Keble College, Oxford. The conference was supported by the funds of the Commission and included plenary sessions on gambling related harm; research presentations; bursary places for early career academics in the field; and an exhibition stand.

The Commission garnered media interest, with dedicated radio episodes (File on 4, Woman’s Hour) and newspaper articles.

Although the Commission has come to an end, external parties remain interested in its work and we maintain a light-touch role in monitoring policy recommendations. Activities include a presentation to the Scottish Gambling Education Network (August 2023), an event at the Ministry of Justice Insights festival (October 2023), an invitation by DCMS to discuss their research agenda (attendance TBC), and ad hoc engagement with PCCs (including a meeting in September 2023). To ensure a positive legacy, the Commission also engaged with sector organisations (e.g., GambleAware) and it is hoped that they will take up the baton of the Commission’s work.

Racial disparity in youth justice

In February 2023, we formally launched our three-year project interrogating racial disparities in youth justice, with an event titled ‘What would an anti-racist youth justice system look like?’ Among the speakers at the event, held at the London office of law firm Travers Smith LLP, were Baroness Chakrabarti, Keir Monteith KC, and Aika Stephenson.

In the past year our work has focussed on remand and joint enterprise. Our remand work looks at the causes of disparity in youth custodial remand. According to government policy, youth custodial remand should only be used as a last resort. But with record numbers of children remanded to custody (and with disproportionate numbers of Black children), it is clear that this policy is not being implemented effectively, or evenly.

To understand the reasons behind this, we have spoken to key actors in the decision-making process, including Youth Justice Services, magistrates, legal practitioners, children on, or with experience of, remand, staff in secure settings, and Local Authority placements teams. We will publish a report in 2024 on remand of racially minoritised children.

The report will form part of an evidence base with which to lobby decision makers across government, policy, and the judiciary, in order to reduce the use of remand and improve outcomes for racially minoritised children.

Supporting crime-cutting projects

The Howard League Community Awards celebrate organisations and projects deserving of recognition and praise for their excellent work in the community. The range and diversity of the nominated programmes, each delivering services in difficult circumstances has been remarkable.

The ‘Organisation of the Year’ award was shared by two outstanding entries – Willowdene Rehabilitation LTD and Working Chance. The ‘Women’ category was won by Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Liaison and Diversion, Alana House and Thames Valley Police for their Enrich project, aiming to reduce the number of women receiving custodial sentences. The Golden Key was the winner of the ‘racial disparities in youth justice’ category for a project called The Call In. The ‘Policing and children’ category was shared by the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership and Thames Valley Restorative Justice. West Midlands Police & Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner won the top prize in the ‘Policing and adults’ category. The ‘Restorative approaches’ category was won by West Midlands Restorative Justice Project. The ‘Liaison and diversion’ category was won by West Mercia Police for its Steer Clear Project. The winners were announced in November 2022. Our huge thanks to Ben Bradford for chairing the awards.

After reviewing the Community Awards, we have decided to pause for 2023.

Government and public affairs

It has been another busy year in Westminster with political convulsions within the ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice.

In October 2022, Rachel Maclean MP, then a Minister, spoke at our fringe event at the Conservative Party conference. Former Minister Alex Chalk KC MP, at the time on the back benches, also spoke passionately about the need for prison reform; he is now the Secretary of State for Justice. We also held a very well-attended fringe at Labour conference, where Ellie Reeves MP, then the shadow justice minister spoke with Baroness Chakrabarti and Kate Green MP, as she then was. The Liberal Democrats annual conference was cancelled at the last minute due to the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

Despite the difficult public affairs environment, the Howard League has continued to engage with policy consultations. We have made submissions to the mental health and wellbeing plan discussion paper; the Justice Committee's inquiry on public opinion and understanding of sentencing; the SEND review; to the Bill Committee for the draft Mental Health Bill; and to the Welsh Parliament's Equality and Social Justice Committee inquiry on women's experiences in the criminal justice system.

Much of 2023 has seen us engaged on the draft Victims and Prisoner's Bill. The Howard League echoes concerns that the Bill does not go far enough to support victims of crime, and instead takes an unhelpful and overly punitive approach to prisoners' rights. Part III of the Bill has been included without adequate scrutiny – indeed, several of its provisions were not included in the root and branch review. As such, the Howard League proposes that part III, which concerns people in prison, is removed, so that this legislation becomes one focused on victims, as was initially intended.

Following a speech given by the President of the Prison Governors' Association (PGA) at the APPG on Penal Affairs in May 2023, warning that the prison estate was just weeks away from reaching its maximum capacity, we wrote to the Justice Secretary to make suggestions to address overcrowding. We received a detailed and thoughtful response, focussing on the government's plans to build more prison places.



2. Better justice

Advice and legal representation for children and young adults

We are proud that the Howard League runs the country's only dedicated advice line for children and young people in custody, receiving hundreds of requests for legal assistance from or on behalf of children and young people every year.

Children and young people in custody are some of the most vulnerable people in our society, often with limited experience or capacity to advocate for themselves. As a consequence, they are particularly exposed when systems fail them. Current conditions in custody are nothing short of catastrophic. We know from calls to our advice line that time out of cells is woefully short, children and young people lack opportunities to exercise and socialise, and education provision is inadequate. Many report feeling unsafe, with rates of violence and self-harm in some prisons soaring. There are growing trends towards more incidences of solitary confinement, use of force and restraint.

Through our legal service, we inform, advise and advocate for children and young people on a range of issues – including those arising from systemic problems – making sure that they can understand their legal rights, empowering them to take action themselves and acting on their behalf.

In the year ending 31 July 2023, the legal team provided advice and assistance to 327 children and young people aged 21 and under in 494 separate matters, including their treatment in custody, adjudications, transfers, and release planning.

We also pursued 46 cases, funded by legal aid, to help children and young people with treatment issues in custody, adjudications, recall and parole and resettlement.

Notable developments over the past year include the communication of the AB complaint to the European Court of Human Rights, in which it was argued that AB's treatment in solitary confinement as a child was inhuman and degrading treatment in breach of Article 3 rights under the Convention. This year we have also taken legal action on behalf of a child who spent more than three months in segregation at a YOI, during which time he had access to a limited regime and inadequate education. We have supported other young people to be moved off prolonged segregation following intervention from us via our access to justice service.

We have continued to advise and support children and young people with complaints to prisons, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), NHS trusts and local authorities. Successful complaints have included a finding by the PPO that a learning-disabled young adult should have been granted Tarrant representation at an adjudication; and a finding that a YOI's response to a complaint about racial discrimination by a Black child had not been properly investigated.

We continued to hear about the inadequacy of education provision in custody through our advice line, and also from a survey of children and advocates across the children's estate. Key themes include the lack of opportunities to take qualifications, lack of access to laptops to complete independent study, the unequal access to education on enhanced support units and staffing issues impacting on access to education. We have supported one child to challenge the failure to provide them with their statutory entitlement to education and challenged a local authority's failure to update a young adult's Education, Health and Care Plan.

We have advised and assisted young people to get transferred to prisons closer to their home area, or away from prisons where they felt unsafe, or were unable to complete certain offending behaviour programmes. We sent pre-action correspondence on behalf of two young adults at the same prison who had not had face-to-face contact with their families for more than two years, resulting in both being transferred to prisons closer to their home areas.

We continued to represent children and young people in respect of parole, recall and early release, working to ensure young people had appropriate accommodation and support upon leaving prison. Successes include release by the parole board of a young adult who had been recalled for an offence he committed when he was 13 and executive release of an 18-year-old client, avoiding the need for a hearing in front of the parole board.

We continued to advise children and young people about their social care rights. Successes include securing accommodation for a 17-year-old boy who had no accommodation the day before his release; and ensuring children's services sourced suitable accommodation for a 15-year-old boy to enable the court to meaningfully consider the option of a community sentence. We also continued to help young people to access the support they are entitled to as care leavers by virtue of time spent on remand, with successes in this area including establishing care leaver status for a child following the threat of legal action against a local authority, and securing backdated financial support from a local authority for a young person serving a life sentence.

As well as providing a valuable service for those children and young people who contact us, our advice line continues to provide us with a priceless ear to the ground in terms of the state of the custodial estate, both for children and adults. This has supported and enhanced our campaigns and media work, for example in response to the urgent notification issued by HMIP for HMYOI Cookham Wood in April 2023, and also informed discussions on potential priority areas and litigation work for our new Strategy.

Project work on better justice for children and young people

We have pursued several projects aimed at improving the quality of justice for children and young people in custody.

Improving children's understanding of their rights

In May 2019, we were granted four years of funding (including a year of extension funding) by BBC Children in Need to work to improve children's knowledge of their rights and skills at dealing with authority, and to promote their rights through advocacy and intervention on their behalf.

This year we have continued to use this funding to advise children in custody about their legal rights and entitlements through our access to justice service. The funding allowed us to continue to have extended advice line hours. In March 2023 we also delivered workshops on children's rights for Barnardo's advocates across the children's custodial estate.

Empowering young people in custody

In April 2020, we received three years of funding from the Big Lottery Fund to work on empowering young people in custody to understand and use the law to achieve better outcomes for themselves, to embed good practice, and to encourage lasting systems change. The final year of our project focused on using in-cell technology in prison as a platform for new legal educational resources.

We surveyed 130 children across three children's prisons about how they use in-cell technology. Children overwhelmingly told us they preferred video content. We created an animated video, with design studio Ave, explaining what it means to be released on licence and the process of recall to prison if you breach those conditions. Recall is a common issue that young people calling our legal advice line seek advice about and one that they find confusing.

The video has been uploaded to the prison service's intranet, which every prisoner with in-cell technology can access. We have also shared this video widely on our social media networks, as well as with every Director of Children's Services in England. We are continuing to disseminate our video.

We also continued embedding our previous year's work on children on remand. We worked with a youth specialist barrister at Garden Court Chambers and the Youth Justice Legal Centre to develop training materials on bail and remand. These materials are being used by the Youth Justice Legal Centre to train youth justice services, solicitors and barristers who work with children at risk of being remanded.

We presented on the remand work at a conference organised by London Accommodation Pathfinder in March 2023. We also commissioned Transform Justice to produce a podcast episode, published in July 2023, to discuss the law on remand and the impact of the changes in the law on remand for children.

Understanding young adults on remand

In Autumn 2022 we launched a project, supported by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, to better understand the experiences of remanded young adults. The project builds on previous work by the Howard League looking at the specific needs of young adults, including the role of maturity in the sentencing of young adults, sentencing principles for young adults, and issues facing young adults in prison during Covid.

In October 2023 we published a briefing which includes the experiences, voices and lessons to be learned from a group of remanded young adults aged 18 to 20 in a male Category B prison. It is informed by discussions with criminal justice professionals who work with remanded young adults in England and Wales and our work representing individual young adults across the prison estate through its specialist legal advice service. We also published a legal guide for remanded young adults to help them better understand their rights whilst remanded.

Justice and fairness in prison

The grim situation inside prisons became a major topic of interest to politicians, journalists and commentators in the weeks leading up to publication of this report – fuelled by international news headlines about an escape from Wandsworth prison.

We played a key role in this, posting accessible material on social media to explain the background to the incident, giving live broadcast interviews to Sky News and BBC News, and briefing print outlets serving audiences across the political spectrum, from the Guardian to the Daily Express.

This was the most intense period in an already busy year for communications, and we continue to explore ways to make more people aware of the many challenges that exist within the prison system.

We have issued 30 press releases since the beginning of September 2022. We speak regularly to the media in response to reports of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons and Independent Monitoring Boards, as well as providing journalists with contextual analysis of statistical bulletins from the Ministry of Justice.

We gave interviews about urgent notifications for Bristol prison and Cookham Wood prison, to LBC and Channel 4 News respectively. Our response to an inspection of Werrington prison was reported by the BBC, Metro and local media. In July 2023, our analysis of quarterly safety in custody statistics, which revealed a worrying rise in self-harm in women's prisons, was covered by 16 publications across England and Wales.

We contributed to two long-read articles in the Guardian – one on remand, the other on conditions inside Nottingham prison – and we supported the Observer in delivering a special front-page report on overcrowding and staff shortages inside prisons.

special front-page report on overcrowding and staff shortages inside prisons.

Our presence on social media continues to grow. At 22 August 2023, our social media accounts were followed by more than 45,800 users: 34,638 on X (formerly Twitter); 5,667 on Facebook, 3,978 on LinkedIn; 1,085 on Instagram; 339 on YouTube; and 127 on Threads.

We saw continued interest in the research conducted for the Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms, with several specialist industry outlets referring to the Commission's work.

We have submitted monthly articles for the prison newspaper Converse, and shared our strategy with people in prison and asked for feedback. We have also spoken about the political implications of recent changes to open conditions moves for life sentenced prisoners. We have received hundreds of letters and remain in regular contact with those who write to us.

Consolidating the research base

Our deep and long-standing connections to academic research in the criminal justice field is unparalleled.

The Crime, Justice and the Human Condition conference was held in October 2022, exploring perspectives on penal reform from diverse perspectives including academic, practitioner, opinion formers, activists and those with experience of the criminal justice system both in the domestic and international arena. We welcomed more than 230 delegates in person, and 20 more online, each day. We accepted more than 160 individual papers for presentation, 12 plenary and participatory plenary sessions comprised a mix of international and domestic academics, practitioners, activists and people with lived experience, from a range of disciplines. We also welcomed a journalist from the Economist, and two filmmakers. About 20 per cent of attendees joined as members following the conference. About 58 per cent of attendees indicated they were from the academic sector; 10 per cent practitioners; five per cent with lived experience; three per cent from the private sector; four per cent from the statutory sector; and 15 per cent from the voluntary sector. About 12 per cent indicated that they were postgraduate students or early career researchers.

Over the past year, the Howard Journal has continued to publish high-quality and challenging articles. We continue our strategy to increase the reach and influence of the journal through video abstracts and online events.

The Early Career Academic's Network (ECAN) bulletin was published at the beginning of the year. This included contributions from people who attended our conference in Oxford and had a strong focus on the role of lived experience in developing criminological and criminal justice practices. We will continue to liaise and work with the early career members of the Research Advisory Group (RAG) to identify how new thinkers and researchers can best support and help develop the our priorities.

Race consciousness and the law by Dr Alexandra Cox of the University of Essex, a Howard League RAG member. This research grew out of our work to develop a guide for anti-racist lawyers and is based on focus groups with 30 legal practitioners. It found that legal authorities' demands, both explicit and implied, that lawyers be 'race neutral' pose barriers in highlighting or addressing racial disparities. Practitioners spoke about the opposition they faced in the courts when highlighting the roles that race and ethnicity may have played in key decision-making by legal authorities, particularly the police. A successful online event launched the research.

A person wearing a light blue t-shirt and grey sweatpants is walking down a blue and yellow staircase. The person is seen from the back, and their right hand is slightly extended. The staircase has blue railings and yellow steps.

3. Strengthening the charity

Membership

Membership distinguishes the Howard League from other charities in the sector and has two primary functions. As a fundraising stream, it offers dependable unrestricted income to support our work. Its other function is to facilitate engagement with our work and enhance the strength and authority of our voice.

We aim to double our membership over the next five years, bring our members closer to our work and improve our membership offer.

We have made a concerted effort to increase our membership numbers within prisons and have almost 200 members in prisons across the country. We have engaged with them through word of mouth, prison newspaper columns, mailings, and prison visits. These methods will continue to be used, whilst the utility of other potential avenues of engagement, such as prison radio, are to be investigated.

To ascertain the interests and experiences of our members in prison, we ask our members to tell us what our priorities should be, in addition to any other interests they might have. We gain their written consent to use this feedback in our work. While communicating with members within prisons can be logistically challenging, this process has been optimised through recently acquired technical solutions in Raisers Edge (membership database) and Email a Prisoner.

It is also important to us to work with the families of people in prison, to ensure that their voices and experiences are part of our work, we currently have 1,600 members who have a family member in prison.

Our members outside of prison are key to our aims of persuading the public of the need for penal reform. The communications team has improved the digital offerings to both members and supporters, with monthly email updates, a greatly expanded social media presence, and a series of events to engage our members and supporters.

With these measures now in place, we will be assessing and improving the membership package in the coming months, both to ensure the membership's fundraising potential, and to have passionate advocates to fulfil our goal of a societal shift in thinking on punishment.

Fundraising

We are immensely grateful to all the individuals, trusts and foundations that have supported our work.

This year, we have continued to strengthen our development function by building relationships with trusts and foundations, generating a pipeline of funders, and creating a development board.

We have received grants or donations from a number of trusts and foundations: Allen & Overy Foundation; Barrow Cadbury; Constance Faulds Crawford Trust; Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; Big Lottery Fund; Children in Need; Gilbert & Eileen Edgar Foundation; Hanley Trust; Legal Education Foundation; Jolanta and Max Neufeld Charitable Trust; Millward Trust; Oakdale Trust; Tolkien Trust; WF Trust; William A Cadbury Trust, and William P Bancroft Charitable Trust.

Events

- Crime, Justice and Human Condition Conference, September 2022.
- Fringe event at the 2022 Labour Party Conference, September 2022.
- Fringe event at the 2022 Conservative Party Conference, October 2022.
- Annual General Meeting, November 2022.
- Howard League Community Awards, November 2022.
- Children Act case: 20 years on, February 2023.
- Race consciousness and the law, March 2023.
- Howard Journal event: Why is criminal justice reform so difficult? Lessons from historical and international comparative research, May 2023.
- Spotlights: The Persistence of Victorian Prisons, May 2023.
- Reducing the prison population: Using research to develop and support reform agendas, May 2023.
- Spotlights: The History of John Howard and the Howard, June 2023.
- Dr Martin Wright: A torchbearer for penal reform and restorative justice, July 2023.
- Spotlights: Criminal justice lessons from across the globe, July 2023.

Transition to new strategy

Over the past year, the Chief Executive, staff and Board have been working to set the Howard League up for a more impactful future. To this end, we have elaborated a Theory of Change, and a new Strategy, which was adopted by the Board at its meeting in June 2023.

Our overriding ambition is to move the dial on punishment away from cruelty and towards building a more humane and effective response to crime that provides justice and helps to lower levels of reoffending.

We understand that our current systems of punishment are often unjust, cruel and counter-productive; and that they make our communities less, rather than more, safe. We want to see a reduction in the use of punishment, specifically a very significant reduction in the use of prison and much better conditions and opportunities for those who remain there. With numbers projected to rise to more than 106,000 by 2027, our work over the next five years will focus on the acute crisis in prisons. However, we will continue to recognise the challenges presented by the overuse of community supervision and the harms that it can cause to individuals and society. We understand that 100 years of ‘alternatives’ have ultimately fed more people into, rather than out of, prison.

Over the five-year period covered by this strategy, we will focus on:

- Public-facing campaigning to challenge the reliance on prison as the answer to crime, both in general and for particular crimes/cohorts of people in prison.
- Working with politicians across parties to build their understanding of the evidence base and of the economic, human and social costs of prison. We will encourage political courage across parties to pursue policy that works.
- Blending strategic litigation with policy work and communications to highlight the problems with the overuse of prison and to challenge injustices and human rights violations in prison.
- Working with judges, parole board members, and the justice professions to bring a better understanding of the impact of sentencing, release and recall decisions and the realities of prison.
- Improving the quality of public information and dialogue around punishment, including by building a community of people who are interested in and engaged with prisons, people in prison, prison leavers and their families. We will mobilise this community to advocate for better policy.

Across all our work we will address racial disparity and include consideration of experiences of women, children and young people and other vulnerable people in the system. People from racialised minorities are significantly over-represented in prison. We will pursue work to challenge laws, policies and procedures that result in the over-incarceration of young Black men.

Phased thematic priorities over the coming five years will include:

- Campaigning on the failure of prison as the answer to crime.
- A resolution to the ongoing incarceration and recall of people serving the abolished IPP sentence.
- The injustices wrought by joint enterprise, particularly on people from racialised minorities.
- The overuse of remand and experiences of people on remand.
- The challenges around sentencing, including incarceration for non-violent, lower-level offending, and combating sentence inflation across offence-types, but particularly for serious offences.

Introducing the Council

Reflecting our values of accountability, integrity, courage, collaboration, learning and excellence, the Board of the Howard League has established an advisory council (the Council) to guide and support the work of the organisation.

The Council is an active, working group (rather than a set of patrons-on-letterhead). Members bring weighty expertise of various aspects of the criminal justice and penal system.

The Council will provide advice, support and challenge to the Board and staff of the Howard League, including on:

- emerging challenges, issues, players and approaches;
- helping to evaluate the organisation's work and providing suggestions for the future direction of work;
- where appropriate, advocating and promoting the Howard League's vision and work in different fora;
- assisting the staff by providing contacts, for example, for the purposes of advancing policy work, fundraising and profile raising; and
- being part of a network of support for the Howard League and its staff.

While the membership is still developing, Council Members include:

- Andrea Albutt
- Peter Atherton
- Sir Nicholas Blake
- Andi Brierley
- Professor Neil Chakraborti
- Baroness Shami Chakrabarti CBE
- Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe
- Lord Peter Goldsmith KC
- Nick Hardwick CBE
- Angela Kirwin
- Professor Ian Loader
- Lord Macdonald of River Glaven KC
- Professor Shadd Maruna
- Stephen O'Connell
- Michael O'Kane
- Dame Anne Owers DBE
- Professor Nicola Padfield KC (Hon.)
- Olivia Pinkney CBE QPM DL
- Sir John Saunders
- Natalia Schiffrin
- Professor Pamela Taylor, CBE, FRCPsych, FMedSci



Plans for the future, from Chief Executive Andrea Coomber KC (Hon.)



The past year has continued to be one of transition for the Howard League. Two big projects, a conference in Oxford and the Commission on Crime and Gambling-related Harm have come to an end, and we have focused on the future. We have elaborated a Theory of Change, and in June the Board adopted a new Strategy that will take us to 2028.

The Theory of Change sets out strategies, activities and outcomes for work over the life of the Strategy. My huge thanks to our staff and the very many people – including our members in prison – for their various contribution to the elaboration of both documents. In the end, there was widespread agreement on where the challenges lie and how the Howard League can best approach dealing with them.

Our new Strategy will see us focus on the crisis in prison, given the political commitment to build more than 20,000 new prison places over the next few years. Importantly, while we will maintain our advice line for children and young people in custody, we will pivot our legal work from providing representation of children and young people to pursuing strategic litigation across the estate. My first two years at the Howard League have opened my eyes to systemic human rights violations occurring behind prison gates across the country; daily indecencies and indignities that are so widespread that they have been normalised. We will be launching legal action to challenge such violations, sharing stories with the public to bring a better understanding of life behind bars.

The Howard League has always had a critical role in lifting the lid on life in prison and explaining to the public what the politicians already know but refuse to acknowledge: that prison doesn't cut crime. It follows that we have to support politicians to develop the courage required to make evidence informed policy, and to this end, to improve the quality of the public's understanding of prison and the harm it causes. The Strategy will see us engage in a public-facing campaign on the realities of prison and the fact that it doesn't work, alongside four thematic priorities. These are remand, IPPs, joint enterprise and sentencing practice, including sentence inflation.

Our membership has grown over the past year, and I am keen to make more of our membership, using members to shape and advocate for our work. They are a unique and vital resource for us in advocating for change, and a key part of our role is in

capturing and amplifying their experiences.

The abiding challenge for the coming year will be to secure a solid financial footing for the organisation, with diverse income streams supporting our Strategy. The past year has seen us move to a new database, which allows us to hold and process fundraising information reliably; and has supported the development of a pipeline of trusts and foundations for us to approach. We are also keen to consolidate our relationships with existing major donors and to build new funding relationships.

I continue to be blown away by the huge amounts of good will for the Howard League and our mission to combat the excesses of punishment. The lead up to a general election is a challenging time for our messages, but that just makes them all the more important. I would like to thank our members, donors, funders, and staff for their support during this period of transition. I expect that the coming year will bring a lot of change for the Howard League, and hopefully, in a positive way, for the cause of penal reform.



Structure, governance and management

Staffing

There have been staff movements during the year. We are grateful to Anita Dockley, Catryn Yousefi, Marie Frankin and Leela Jadhav for years of service and their contribution to the work of the charity.

We were joined by Amy Dolley, Public Affairs and Policy Officer, Gemma Abbott, Legal Director; and Ayomide Sotubo, Policy Officer during the year.

The nature of the Howard League's work can be challenging and upsetting. To support staff, and to nurture a healthy organisation, we have engaged an experienced clinical practitioner, Patrick Mandikate to work with staff on a fortnightly basis.

We are hugely grateful to Nina Williams, Charles Russell Speechlys, for her advice and guidance to our human resources function.

Governance

We are a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, incorporated in England and Wales. As our constitutional documents were adopted in 1967, the Board is in the process of updating them to ensure that they both reflect our core activities and best contemporary governance practice. To this end, the Board has reviewed the charitable objects, and secured permission from the Charity Commission to update them. The new objects – which much better reflect our values and aspirations, while being faithful to our history – will be adopted by the Board at its AGM in December.

As part of the governance review, all policies and procedures are being checked and updated. We are grateful to Erica Handling and to Dechert LLP for their support with this process.



Howard League for Penal Reform

Company limited by guarantee
No. 898514
Registered charity
No. 251926

The Howard League
1 Ardleigh Road
London
N1 4HS

t 020 7249 737
e info@howardleague.org
w www.howardleague.org
@TheHowardLeague

ISBN 978-1-911114-81-9

Photography by Andy Aitchison - www.andyaitchison.uk