

Notes from the Special Interest Group meeting on the commissioning of families services

19th July 2017

Attendees

Richard Booty, *HMPPS*

Phil Creighton, *HMPPS*

Diane Curry, *POPS*

Lynn Kelly, *POPS*

Mark Proctor, *Ormiston Families*

Alison Goddard *Lincolnshire Action Trust*

Eugene Pinnock, *Jigsaw*

Polly Wright, *Barnardo's*

Helen Attewell, *NEPACS*

Maxine Myatt, *Thames Valley Partnership*

Ryan Harman, *Prison Reform Trust (for item 1)*

Dali Kaur, *Pact (for item 1)*

Nicola Drinkwater, *Clinks*

Richard Nicholls, *Clinks*

Apologies

Andy Keens-Down, *Pact*

Joanna McIntosh, *HACRO*

1. Assisted Prison Visit Units

- 1.1. Booking APVU visits is now an online system. The new online booking system has caused a lot of challenges for some families of people in prison and the organisations supporting them. The new booking system was changed very quickly and took place without consultation with specialist families organisations.
- 1.2. Officials accepted that many challenges had taken place and highlighted that the booking system is still in a transitional period. They recognised that they did not engage effectively with specialist family organisations before or during the roll out of the new booking system, but were keen to work with the organisations going forward. They recognised that doing this would help to mitigate against any future problems. Organisations welcomed this.

Action 1: Clinks to circulate the contact details of Phil Creighton to enable organisations to contact him directly if they, or their service users, experience any further problems with APVU booking system.

- 1.3. Officials estimate that 80% of the people who need to book a prison visit are able to use the new system. 20% of people experience barriers to this including lack of confidence using IT or being unable to access a computer, which means that they still need to book their visits manually using a written form. If someone needs to access a manual form they need to go through a triage system on the phone, where the operator will try and support them to get online before sending out the form.
- 1.4. Organisations said there are barriers preventing people from accessing the manual form, including: all the information about the manual form is online; the guidance document doesn't give clear information about alternative ways to book visits outside of booking them online; the information posters do not have a phone number on them, which is preventing people who are unable to access the internet from getting additional information.
- 1.5. Nepacs has developed its own posters, which they shared, and encouraged other organisations to use this as a template poster, which they can distribute to their own service users.
- 1.6. In some cases, organisations were getting inconsistent information from APVU case workers, which was unhelpful.

1.7. The APVU will provide a detailed briefing for families organisations about the new booking system, which the organisations can then use to inform families. Clinks can also circulate this information out to voluntary sector organisations.

Action 2: APVU to send information about the new booking system to Clinks, who can circulate it to specialist families organisations and others in the voluntary sector.

2. The commissioning of families services

- 2.1. The commissioning of families services is now complete and the successful organisations have been informed.
- 2.2. The organisations worked to improve the commissioning process through an RR3 Special Interest Group, which they valued. Organisations fed back their experiences of the commissioning process- what went well, what could improve and what they recommend as good practice for future commissioning processes. This information will inform a briefing paper from the RR3 group about good commissioning.
- 2.3. A summary of the discussion is as follows.

Theme	Challenge	Solution
N/a		Overall suggestion: Continued engagement with specialist voluntary sector organisations throughout any commissioning process to facilitate the use of their expertise.
Timescale	There was a delay in the commissioning process and the deadline for organisations to submit bids was moved forward.	Realistic and reasonable time needs to be allowed for commissioning processes. It is important for commissioning and procurement teams to stay true to the timescales they have published, as far as is possible for them. If anything does need to change, it is important that this is communicated as early as possible, and the time organisations have for submitting bids remains the same.
Communication	Organisations did not receive clarification on all the questions they asked on the portal until after the closing date for bids. The information organisations received wasn't consistent.	All information needs to be given at the beginning of the process, with clear and consistent communication throughout. One point of contact for all queries.
Quality control	There was of a lack of consistency with the information that prisons were sharing. Lack of briefing for prison staff about the commissioning process, and there were some instances of prisons releasing blank specifications. There was a disjoint between the top level specifications shared centrally	Prison governors and staff need additional support and training to help them develop the skills to commission services. Time needs to be invested in this process to ensure prison staff have the skills they need before undertaking future commissioning processes. Commissioning and procurement teams need adequate resource to enable them to lead commissioning processes.

	and the specifications prisons released.	Commissioners need to encourage market diversity at the pre-qualification question (PQQ) stage. Separating the lots into clusters or individual establishment during this commissioning process was welcomed, especially for small organisations.
Working with prisons	<p>Some organisations were required to have multiple visits on the same day, which wasn't achievable due to the time it would take to travel between prisons.</p> <p>There was a lack of information for prison staff, and in some cases organisations struggled to get in contact with the main contact in the prison as there was no email address or phone number available for them to book in a visit.</p> <p>As some prisons were not prepared for prison visits, one organisation said they witnessed a family in a stressful situation with the incumbent provider, which they found inappropriate.</p>	<p>Site visits were really valuable.</p> <p>It is important that prisons are supported and prepared in advance of future commissioning processes.</p> <p>It is useful to have a single point of contact centrally in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).</p> <p>Every commissioning process needs to have a 'check and balance' system, to ensure all the information circulated during the processes is robust and accurate.</p>

2.4. **Mobilisation phase:** each successful provider should have the contact details of the lead contact in each establishment. Some organisations did not have this information.

Action 3: Richard Booty will share a list of contact details with the families organisations

- 2.5. Organisations asked when they can start to communicate with external stakeholders if they were successful in bidding for services. They will need to start recruiting new staff, so will need to do this soon. They also asked if the incumbent providers had been informed about the results of the commissioning process.
- 2.6. Organisations said they did not have a contract and would need one before they start delivering. They asked when they can expect one
- 2.7. Organisations asked if the intention is for them to be paid upfront for their services. They highlighted that it will be particularly challenging for small organisations if there is a delay in them getting payments.
- 2.8. Organisations were not clear about the process of raising Purchase Order numbers and asked for clarity.

Action 4: Richard Booty will get clarification about these issues and will share the information with the group.

- 2.9. Barnardo's are having someone seconded to them from the communications team at HMPPS. They will be mapping the current providers of family services for each prison, which will be published on Barnardo's website.

Action 5: Clinks to circulate the mapping process when it is complete.