

critical friends

**An independent review of voluntary sector
infrastructure in the Criminal Justice System**

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the independent advisory panel that contributed their time and energy to better understanding the role of voluntary sector infrastructure support in the Criminal Justice System.

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Many thanks to the people who gave evidence to our independent advisory panel, gave their time to fill out our questionnaire, and to those that contributed to our workshops, which were facilitated by Carl Reynolds.

Special thanks to Sarah Loader for providing administrative support for the whole process.

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Foreword

Having a strong and effective specialist voluntary sector has never been more important.

The Criminal Justice System is undergoing comprehensive reform. The Transforming Rehabilitation agenda, in particular, is bringing new players from the private sector into the delivery of services. Increasing demands, austerity and public sector cuts are putting pressure on voluntary sector partners, and statutory agencies have little time to devote to the development of partnerships, consultation with and support to voluntary agencies.

Having a strong and effective specialist voluntary sector has never been more important. The Government's ambition for a social market with a diverse and responsive set of providers depends on developing the capacity and scale of the voluntary sector. Prime providers need a simple communication route to those working in their areas, and voluntary sector providers inside and outside the formal supply chain need a source of information and support, and a representative voice. This review, funded by the Ministry of Justice, is therefore timely. It is informed by the views of statutory stakeholders, users of infrastructure services, and representatives of organisations bidding to become prime providers under Transforming Rehabilitation, and we are grateful to all those who put time and thought into it.

It is clear that specialist infrastructure is valued by all sectors, and that there is consensus around its core functions, including those of being a conduit for information to the voluntary sector; collating and representing sector views; providing input into the development of public policy; interpreting and disseminating policy to front-line organisations; providing opportunities for networking and peer learning; and providing a point of communication between policy-makers. Those who took part in this review were clear that much would be lost if infrastructure were lost, and that it would not easily be reproduced. We were particularly struck by the academic researcher we interviewed, who said that she was the envy of peers in mainland Europe and the United States, who wished they had a similar infrastructure in their countries, to provide a route for input and dissemination. Similarly, statutory partners talked about the importance of both Clinks and the sub-sector specialist bodies in providing an accessible source of expertise and being an informed contributor to policy development.

It is equally clear that this set of functions cannot be delivered from a standing start. Expert input, the infrastructure 'voice' function and a sophisticated understanding of policy, practice and the various sectors require a track record of delivery and a set of relationships that engender credibility and trust. Such a track record cannot be picked up in a moment: for infrastructure to be effective it must have a reliable source of income that will provide a level of stability year on year.

All those with an interest in a strong vibrant community of voluntary sector organisations have a role to play in funding: infrastructure member organisations, government departments with a stake in services relating to criminal justice, independent trusts and foundations, and the emerging prime provider sector. If these organisations are unwilling to support specialist infrastructure provision, those in the Criminal Justice System, and wider society, will be the losers.

Debbie Pippard, Barrow Cadbury Trust
Chair of the independent advisory panel



Executive summary

An overwhelming majority of participants expressed support for the role that infrastructure plays in supporting the voluntary sector throughout the Criminal Justice System.

This report summarises the findings of a comprehensive independent review of infrastructure services for the voluntary sector working in the Criminal Justice System. The views of 157 organisations and individuals were collected for this review. An overwhelming majority of those participants expressed support for the role that infrastructure plays in supporting the voluntary sector throughout the Criminal Justice System. Many expressed the view that infrastructure organisations were vital for the future of informed and effective service delivery.

*"In various ways voluntary organisations want, need or are thought to require external expertise of various kinds and at various times. This could be because they or their funders and other stakeholders want to improve their work, develop their services, improve performance, grow their organisation, address organisational weaknesses or vulnerabilities, or survive through crisis."*¹

Whilst the findings showed positive support for infrastructure organisations, it was also clear that in the current climate they could not be complacent and would have to adapt to stay relevant, diversify their income base to be sustainable, and be accountable to keep the trust and support of their members and the wider voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector clearly values the infrastructure support they receive. Infrastructure organisations were thought to have an important role to play in supporting the voluntary sector, even though there was a clear desire for services to be adapted and expanded in a rapidly changing environment.

Government officials, private sector companies, and academics were all able to articulate how infrastructure had helped them achieve positive outcomes and deliver their objectives. They recognised that infrastructure organisations needed to represent the diverse views of a complex voluntary sector, and simultaneously be a 'critical friend' to government. This was thought to require careful negotiation, and required the trust of all parties if infrastructure is to be effective.

Recommendations for government

- 1** A strong criminal justice infrastructure needs to be maintained by government in order to serve the voluntary sector and ensure that departmental priorities are delivered. Government should distinguish between infrastructure and delivery organisations and recognise the distinct roles of each.
- 2** Government needs to ensure a strong relationship with infrastructure in order to maintain clear channels of communications with the voluntary sector. To achieve this departments should allocate staff with clear responsibilities to support dialogue with the sector and assist in resolving operational difficulties.
- 3** Government should develop and sustain a high level strategic dialogue with voluntary sector infrastructure organisations to allow for the co-construction of policy, development of effective practice, and to test innovative approaches.



- 4 Government needs to acknowledge the importance of maintaining the independence of infrastructure organisations, which enables them to be an 'honest broker'.
- 5 Government should support the sustainable development of robust and effective infrastructure organisations to meet the evolving needs of the voluntary sector working in criminal justice. This should include an element of core funding from relevant government departments.

Recommendations for infrastructure

- 1 Infrastructure organisations need to be active in developing diverse income streams that include earned income, private sector investment, charitable trusts and foundations, and government funding.
- 2 In order to fulfil its role as a "trusted broker", infrastructure organisations need to be accountable to the full diversity of their membership by representing various perspectives and addressing different needs.
- 3 Specialist infrastructure organisations need to focus on providing high quality two way information between government and voluntary sector. This requires expert staff and a mechanism by which to check that high level policy documents have been correctly interpreted for the sector.
- 4 Infrastructure organisations need to be flexible and able to adapt quickly to the changing needs of the voluntary sector. Collaboration and partnerships should be developed where it is necessary to access relevant expertise.
- 5 Infrastructure organisations need to ensure that they have the appropriate legal and governance arrangements in place to ensure openness, transparency and accountability.

1 / Why the independent review was undertaken

"A review of infrastructure at this time will be a good thing. It will help to identify its role in the new framework that Transforming Rehabilitation has created."

Funded by the Ministry of Justice, this independent review aims to reflect on the purpose, role, and effectiveness of existing infrastructure support for the voluntary sector working with people in the Criminal Justice System, and the families affected by it.

*"Infrastructure needs to be redesigned and creatively resourced to meet the challenges of tomorrow."*²

NAVCA, 2015

This review provides scrutiny into the range and relevance of current infrastructure services provided to the voluntary sector and whether it should change given the extensive reform of criminal justice practices and institutions in recent years. This review collates the views of a range of stakeholders from different sectors in order to make clear recommendations about the way in which infrastructure should support the voluntary sector, and what their relationship with government should look like.

"A review of infrastructure at this time will be a good thing. It will help to identify its role in the new framework that Transforming Rehabilitation has created."

The intention is that this review will provide clarity for infrastructure bodies, and their key stakeholders, as to how support for the voluntary sector should be developed in years to come.

2 / Explaining the role of infrastructure

A good infrastructure body will offer the right mixture of support, challenge, leadership, resource, skills and knowledge.

Infrastructure organisations fulfil a broad range of functions that support the whole of the voluntary sector. These could be organised geographically at a national, regional, or local level. They can also be organised by key areas of policy and delivery such as drugs and alcohol, housing and homelessness, mental health, or minority groups. Some infrastructure organisations deliver to specific types of organisations, such as social enterprises, or grassroots community led groups.

Clinks, National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice, Action for Prisoners and Offenders Families, Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG), and Women's Breakout are all infrastructure organisations whose core charitable objective is to support the voluntary sector in criminal justice and community safety. This review focusses mainly on the role of these infrastructure organisations and the role they might play in supporting the voluntary sector in the Criminal Justice System.

For the purpose of this review we define 'voluntary sector infrastructure' as follows:

Voluntary sector infrastructure provides services, support and advice, and promotes charities, community groups and social enterprises that deliver social action and improve the lives of people experiencing disadvantage and exclusion. A good infrastructure body will offer the right mixture of support, challenge, leadership, resource, skills and knowledge. It will help to foster relationships between the voluntary sector, government, public sector bodies, and the private sector. It promotes social action and makes sure that local and/or marginalised communities have a voice.

Adapted from NAVCA, 2015

3 / How the independent review was undertaken

Clinks created an independent panel to oversee the collection of all the relevant information and evidence, and established an online survey to collect views from a range of stakeholders on the current state of infrastructure support.

This review was managed by Clinks, who were responsible for its progress and organisation. Clinks created an independent panel to oversee the collection of all the relevant information and evidence, and established an online survey to collect views from a range of stakeholders on the current state of infrastructure support. Workshops were facilitated and recorded by independent consultants. Clinks has maintained distance from the process and the data collection so as to ensure the credibility of the review.

The evidence for this review was collected in a number of ways, and from different sources:

- 1 The independent advisory panel received written evidence and conducted interviews with seven representatives from private and charitable organisations, the Cabinet Office, Ministry of Justice, National Offender Management Service, the Home Office and academia. The panel used a question guide to ensure consistency when receiving written and verbal evidence.
- 2 An online survey was conducted with 113 responses.
- 3 Four independently facilitated workshops, attended by a total of 37 people, covering infrastructure support for arts, Black, Asian and minority ethnic organisations, families groups, and generic infrastructure support.
- 4 Collated evidence from a recent review of Women’s Breakout; a national body that supports organisations working with women offenders and women at risk of involvement in the Criminal Justice System.

All the quotes provided in this report, unless otherwise stated, are directly from people who participated in this independent review of infrastructure.



4 / Key findings

The findings from the independent review are summarised below. We have brought together a wealth of information to reflect on the current and future delivery of infrastructure support for the voluntary sector in criminal justice. The findings have been separated into two sections covering, firstly, the combined findings from the online survey and four workshops, and secondly, the evidence heard by the independent advisory panel.

Section One

There was a clear message from the sector that services must be able to equip the voluntary sector for an evolving environment.

4.1 / Evidence from workshops & online survey

With a small number of exceptions, the voluntary sector organisations that completed the survey and attended the workshops clearly value the infrastructure support that they receive. It was clear that infrastructure organisations have an important role to play in supporting the voluntary sector. It was also clear that services should, in some instances, continue to address existing need, and that others should be developed to address new and emerging need. Stakeholders acknowledged that many of the services and activities that they want are already provided. However, there was a clear message from the sector that services must be able to equip the voluntary sector for an evolving environment.

4.1.1 / The infrastructure people use

Voluntary sector organisations (n=113) were asked where they get their infrastructure support from. The majority of respondents (81.3%) said that they received their infrastructure support from Clinks. The other two answers that scored highest were the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) with 43.8%, and local infrastructure organisations with 38.8% of respondents saying they got their support from these sources. Of the more specialist services the National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice scored highest with 22.5% of respondents stating that they got their infrastructure support from that source. It should be noted that Women's Breakout members were separately surveyed as part of their evaluation; 52% (n=25) of their members replied to an independent survey, providing their views on the infrastructure services provided to women offender services.

4.1.2 / The value of infrastructure

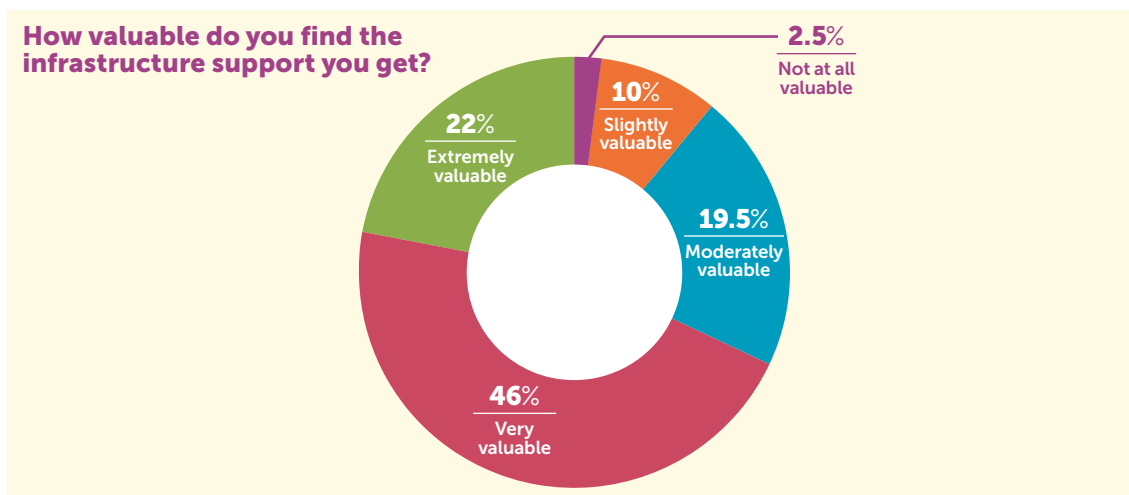
Respondents were asked whether they thought it was necessary to have criminal justice specific infrastructure support. The survey results showed that 97% of respondents said that it was. The voluntary sector valued, and felt their infrastructure support needed to have, sector specific knowledge and expertise in order to represent their issues and meet their needs.

"We need specific criminal justice infrastructure because there are policy-specific responses that only an organisation with a deep understanding of the criminal justice sector can co-ordinate."

Secondly, they were asked how much organisations value the infrastructure support they receive. The question provided a scale of 1-5 where 1 = not at all valuable to 5 = extremely valuable. Of the 82 people who responded to this question, 18 (22%) found it extremely

“It is an enormous sector with continuous changes in legislation, best practice and research. Without specialist infrastructure support we would never keep on top of it.”

valuable, and 38 (46%) found the support very valuable. A further 16 (19.5%) respondents found the support moderately valuable, 8 (10%) found it slightly valuable and 2 (2.5%) found it not at all valuable. The average rating of the support respondents received was 3.76.



As this relates to a generic view of infrastructure support there is no correlation between the organisation that they get their support from and the rating given for the support they received. For that reason the average rating must be taken as an average rating of all infrastructure services combined, and not a reflection on any one organisation.

“It is an enormous sector with continuous changes in legislation, best practice and research. Without specialist infrastructure support we would never keep on top of it.”

The value of infrastructure organisations was generally reflected in the focus groups. Infrastructure was viewed as useful, and most services provided were considered to be of good quality. In some instances, however, it was felt that there needed to be more advocacy, to create “a louder more effective voice” for the voluntary sector. Participants were of the opinion that without a strong and united voluntary sector presence, policy and influencing activity would have less impact on government and other stakeholders.

4.1.3 / What support do organisations find most valuable?

In order to assess what existing support was most valued by the voluntary sector, organisations were asked what support they get and how valuable it is to them. An analysis of the data allowed us to identify six key themes.

a. Events and workshops

“Our staff really benefit when attending conferences and good practice exchange workshops organised by national umbrella organisations.”

Access to conferences and workshops, at a low cost to make them accessible to small and medium sized organisations, were seen as invaluable. It was frequently commented



“It is so critical to keep up to date with policy changes, trends and so on, and to be able to assess the implication.”

that events should be delivered across England and Wales to make them more accessible to small locally based organisations. The review of Women’s Breakout services provided similar feedback, with a large proportion of the respondents stating that events were useful, but that they needed to be low cost, and be delivered at different locations.

b. Information sharing

“The dissemination of information, research and funding opportunities are invaluable in gaining local knowledge of service provision outside public sector provision.”

There was also a large proportion of examples that focus on information sharing through e-bulletins and other web based tools. This was reported to be particularly valuable during the implementation of the Transforming Rehabilitation reform, when organisations had found it vital to keep abreast of developments.

c. Fundraising support and procurement

“Funding opportunities have been circulated that we wouldn’t have been aware of, and successful bids submitted as a result.”

A large number of organisations focussed on fundraising support, either through direct consultation support or arm’s length advice and guidance. Many organisations wanted infrastructure to be providing support on these issues, and a number of them were seeking support to better understand and compete in large and complex commissioning processes. It is notable that in the review of Women’s Breakout services, members also reported that fundraising was amongst their most important issues.

d. Policy briefings

“It is so critical to keep up to date with policy changes, trends and so on, and to be able to assess the implication.”

It was clear that many of the survey respondents valued the policy briefings, responses to government consultations, and discussion papers provided by infrastructure organisations. Many noted that they valued being consulted on developing government policy, and recognised the role of infrastructure organisations in bringing together a broad range of opinions and perspectives. For many organisations the policy function of infrastructure enabled them to keep up to date with current issues affecting their organisation, the agencies they partner with, and the service users they work with.

e. Sub-sector support

The importance of a strong link between the voluntary sector and government was repeatedly made. Some sub-sector infrastructure organisations were mentioned as providing that role for organisations that work with particular specialist providers, but it was felt that there is often inadequate representation of sub-sector issues. This highlights the need for an increase in support for appropriate sub-sector infrastructure services.

f. Networking opportunities

“Our staff are working in a specialist field where they rarely have the opportunity to network and share good practice with people doing similar work. They really benefit when attending conferences, training and good practice exchange workshops.”

“Infrastructure organisations need to be able to demonstrate that they add leverage and value to frontline organisations, otherwise there is no point to them.”

Voluntary sector organisations were keen to see an increase in the number of professional networking opportunities. The reasons given were to keep up to date with policy and practice in the Criminal Justice System, and to build on the lessons and experiences of other organisations. It was also felt that an increase in networking opportunities would allow for more in depth discussion about the challenges of working with people in the Criminal Justice System, and the opportunity to discuss solutions.

4.1.4 / Improving infrastructure support

Based on their experience, voluntary sector organisations were asked how infrastructure support could be improved to meet the existing, new, and emerging needs of the voluntary sector. There was a high level of support for existing infrastructure services, but also a call for new services to be developed in the future.

a. Communication

“Infrastructure organisations need to be able to demonstrate that they add leverage and value to the frontline organisations, otherwise there is no point to them.”

There was a consistent call for better targeted communications and more understanding about how the information gathered from the voluntary sector is put to good use. There was lack of clarity about how information was used, which led many organisations to ask that infrastructure organisations be more open about this. Voluntary sector organisations were asking for a more genuine two way dialogue that was transparent and allowed the members of infrastructure organisations to better understand what had been done, or achieved, with the information they provide through surveys and consultations.

b. Collaboration

“I do think it would be useful to have more co-ordinated information campaigns to avoid duplication. Equally, better co-ordination between infrastructure bodies could ensure more effective influencing and lobbying of government policy.”

A large number of voluntary sector organisations called for better co-ordination and joint-working relations between relevant infrastructure bodies. Examples were given of where this was felt to be beneficial both at a local and national level. A more collaborative approach was perceived to be a more effective and efficient use of resources and expertise that was likely to lead to better outcomes.

c. Outreach and locally delivered support

“Travel (often to London) and staff cover costs are expensive when on a tight budget; these additional costs make it difficult to release staff to training even if it’s free.”

Many organisations struggled to attend meetings or training held far away from their base of operation, this was also true of Women’s Breakout members. This led many to request more local support across England and Wales. Again, organisations called for more collaboration with other infrastructure organisations, especially local or regional bodies to improve the reach of national organisations that tend to be located in London.

“I would like more tailored support to meet the individual needs of organisations.”

d. Voice and advocacy

Participants in the workshops were asked if they felt their voice was heard. There was a feeling that infrastructure organisations had been effective in keeping a range of voluntary sector issues on the agenda, and that the sector’s voice was being heard within government by both ministers and civil servants.

However, a minority of voluntary sector organisations were concerned that some issues were seen as “too awkward” and that there needed to be more robust criticism of government policy whilst recognising that campaigning openly could undermine access to government departments.

e. Tailored support

“I would like more tailored support to meet the individual needs of organisations – although I know this would be costly!”

The voluntary sector is keen to receive more tailored support that meets the individual needs of their organisation. There is a recognition that this is a costly service to deliver, yet more one-to-one support on specific issues was often called for. This included, but was not limited to, direct support around income generation and sustainability.

f. Making organisations stronger

“At the moment it feels very difficult to fund work for long-term prisoners ... Our target for fundraising from trusts and foundations this year was £143,000; of this, we have so far raised £17,000.”

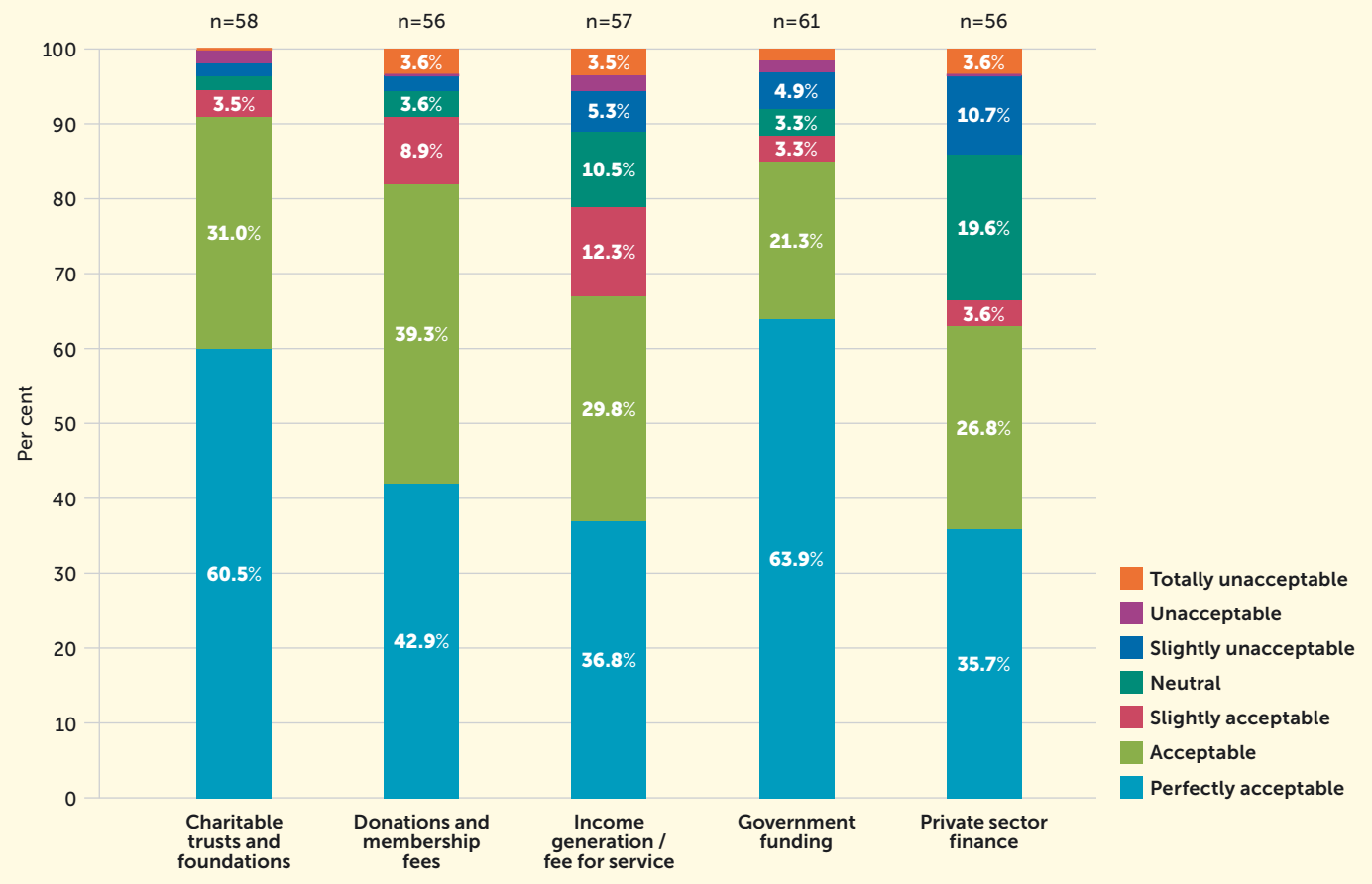
There was strong endorsement of specific services that address financial and organisational resilience, which was also reflected in the Women’s Breakout review. Many of these services are being provided by criminal justice infrastructure and were highly valued. The services that are more commonly available include access to grants and contract information, regular bulletins highlighting funding opportunities, guides and toolkits on sustainability and fundraising, policy information on recent reforms, and training provision to support sustainability.

There was a vast range of services that were less frequently requested, these included mentoring and coaching, consortia development, quality assurance (kite marks), legal advice, specific advice on the impact of policy changes, and access to marketing and publicity advice. It was clear that different organisations require diverse support that is often unique to their operating environment and organisational needs.

4.1.5 / Funding of infrastructure

The majority of voluntary sector organisations felt it was appropriate for infrastructure organisations to generate income from a wide range of sources, and thought they should have a diverse funding portfolio. This includes charitable trusts and foundations, donation and membership fees, income generation and fees for service, government funding, and private sector finance.

How appropriate do you think it is that infrastructure organisations are funded by...



Organisations were twice as likely to rate government funding for infrastructure as 'perfectly acceptable' than they were for private sector funding.

There was a difference of opinion as to what funding sources were more readily acceptable to the voluntary sector. Organisations were twice as likely to rate government funding for infrastructure as 'perfectly acceptable' than they were for private sector funding. In descending order of preference the organisations we surveyed said infrastructure should be funded by government, then charitable trusts and foundations, donations and membership fees, income generation (and fee for service), and finally private sector finance.

The workshop participants expressed a greater level of apprehension about infrastructure organisations being funded by private sector providers. A number of people thought that this could lead to a potential conflict of interest, making it difficult for infrastructure organisations to maintain their independence. Other organisations did offer a different opinion, stating that private sector finance would show a degree of positive investment in the voluntary sector and its continued role in delivering services both in custody and the community.

Organisations were asked whether they would be willing to pay for services from their infrastructure partners. Many responded that they would pay for a number of existing services, such as information and communications, policy briefings, support and training. However, they made it clear that this was seen as a contributory fee, and not one based on full cost recovery. In many cases organisations were keen to stress that services should be accessible to all where possible, and that payment for services could mean that smaller organisations, or those with low resources, would not be able to get the support they need.



Section Two

The people who spoke to the panel were all strongly supportive of infrastructure and able to give examples of where infrastructure had helped them achieve material aims and, where applicable, deliver their departmental objectives.

4.2 / Evidence from the panel sessions

This section brings together evidence from the stakeholders who met the independent panel. These consisted of representatives from government departments, a range of voluntary sector organisations, and a private sector provider.

The people who spoke to the panel were all strongly supportive of infrastructure and able to give examples of where infrastructure had helped them achieve material aims and, where applicable, deliver their departmental objectives. They recognised that infrastructure organisations need to balance a number of different views and demands, but saw their role as a critical friend rather than a campaigning organisation. Infrastructure was often thought of as a 'trusted broker', and many saw this as the key role infrastructure organisations should play.

There was strong recognition of the need to represent the diverse nature of the voluntary sector and ensure that the issues of sub-sector groups (for example, families, BAME communities, and women) are heard by government. All of the attendees agreed that there should be a healthy diversity of funding for infrastructure organisations, and the vast majority said that government funding should form part of this.

4.2.1 / Valuing the role of infrastructure

The verbal evidence showed that both the voluntary and statutory sector place a high value on the infrastructure support they receive with a shared view about the importance of specific criminal justice expertise and specialism.

Most of the people who spoke to the panel were positive about how statutory partners see infrastructure, with the exception of one contributor who thought it unlikely that any further government funding would be made available to infrastructure organisations: they reported that the Government was solely focussed on delivery of policy priorities and that, since it was [claimed to be] difficult to identify the tangible difference made by infrastructure organisations, government would not make funding for infrastructure a priority.

Those giving evidence to the panel were asked what would happen if infrastructure bodies were not there to perform their role in the future. The feeling was that government and other stakeholders would have to get their intelligence on the voluntary sector directly from frontline organisations. It was widely acknowledged that this would either be gathered at great expense, or strategic and operational knowledge on the role of the voluntary sector would be lost. In addition, many valued the overview that voluntary sector infrastructure organisations were able to provide, which other providers would most likely find difficult to achieve.

4.2.2 / The unique strategic role of infrastructure

The role of infrastructure organisations was described by several participants as "an interlocutor"; a gatherer, collator and communicator of the views of provider organisations. Infrastructure bodies were seen as having a unique strategic role in bringing together varied and relevant expertise to share knowledge and inform criminal justice policy and practice.

Statutory representatives saw infrastructure as a source of credible and trusted information.



There was acknowledgement that the voluntary sector working in criminal justice is broad and wide ranging. It includes many small or unstaffed groups delivering their work with few staff and little time to think about the impact of policy changes on their organisations. Infrastructure organisations were seen as fulfilling that role and keeping voluntary sector organisations informed about and engaged in the development of criminal justice policy.

They were also seen as a conduit to consult with the sector in a structured and consistent way, making sense of the different voices in the sector, who are not always in agreement.

4.2.3 / A trusted broker

Statutory representatives saw infrastructure as a source of credible and trusted information. It offered them valuable support to help bring organisational expertise together, support networking, disseminate information, and provide a range of guidance, deliver advice, and provide comment in the form of discussion papers, policy responses, and through social media. Several respondents talked about the value that had been added by infrastructure organisations in relation to specialist areas of work (for example, women, or people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities), especially in advising on the development of policy and services at an early stage.

Both the voluntary sector and government want infrastructure organisations to be trusted and honest brokers between a range of stakeholders from all sectors, and felt that in most circumstances they were. In addition to this, the voluntary sector want infrastructure organisations to provide representation for the whole sector, ensuring that they are able to articulate the often differing concerns of large, medium and small organisations.

4.2.4 / Communicating with the sector

Infrastructure provides a two way communication between government and the sector, currently vital for new policy initiatives, for example Transforming Rehabilitation. There was also recognition that many organisations are outside of the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms and it is vital that they continue to have access to information.

“Infrastructure bodies demonstrated their value through the consultation on the TR programme. They could bring people together in a room at short notice to participate in the consultation.”

Communicating information to the sector, providing regular updates on developments through digests and bulletins, and having the best possible reach was seen as vital. Keeping the sector informed of, and prepared for small and large-scale changes in the Criminal Justice System was reported to be an important role for infrastructure bodies. It was also clear that this information needed to be delivered in a timely fashion, as many organisations were working in a fast-paced and pressured environment.

“Infrastructure bodies demonstrated their value through the consultation on the TR programme. They could bring people together in a room at short notice to participate in the consultation. As a consequence the process worked well, despite its tight time scales.”

The findings showed the importance of keeping voluntary sector organisations informed about, and engaged with, the development of criminal justice policy. These functions often support government departments by providing easy access to knowledgeable service providers, and creative feedback on policy.

Government officials were positive about their communication through infrastructure bodies to the voluntary sector. However, some voluntary sector organisations were concerned that they often did not know how the information they provide is used, and wanted greater clarity, transparency, and feedback on this.

4.2.5 / Campaigning and voice

“Infrastructure has been valuable in providing a voice for the voluntary sector, facilitating engagement, reaching out and working as an intermediary.”

There was a consistent view that infrastructure provides an evidence-based and balanced voice that was different from some campaigning approaches in the voluntary sector. The role of infrastructure was frequently expressed as providing accurate and up to date information and knowledge of the voluntary sector. Infrastructure is often viewed as a conduit for informing and influencing best practice in both policy and practice, by accessing the knowledge and expertise in the voluntary sector.

A number of the contributors to the panel addressed the issue of voice, recognising the delicate balance that infrastructure organisations have to reach between being a conduit for the voluntary sector’s voice on issues that matter to their members. There was a general view expressed that infrastructure is about influencing policy and not direct campaigning. The evidence given to the panel repeatedly stressed that effective infrastructure organisations needed to be independent with no conflicts of interest or vested interests.

There was recognition that it is difficult for an infrastructure organisation to speak with one voice because of the diversity of the sector, but an infrastructure organisation should have an independent role to broker the voice of the sector.

Participants thought that infrastructure organisations had an important role to play in capturing the voice of service users, and those with lived experience of the Criminal Justice System. Many felt that the voice of service users should form an essential part of how infrastructure organisations influence policy and practice. It was recommended that this practice became more commonplace amongst infrastructure providers.

There was strong endorsement from statutory bodies about the role of the voluntary sector in delivering innovation, and the need for infrastructure bodies to help with piloting a range of new approaches.



4.2.6 / Delivering innovation

There was strong endorsement from statutory bodies about the role of the voluntary sector in delivering innovation, and the need for infrastructure bodies to help with piloting a range of new approaches.

An enabling role was identified for infrastructure organisations where they might have some capacity to test out new policies alongside voluntary sector partners. A role for co-designing policy was highlighted, and many placed value in the ability of voluntary sector infrastructure organisations to develop solutions in an independent and impartial way.

Offender health was given as an example of where market development was seen as a major challenge. NHS England was identified as “doing a great deal to broaden the range of providers and encouraging smaller organisations and partnerships to be involved”. Infrastructure organisations were seen as providing a solution to this issue by identifying a range of voluntary sector organisations, and working with them to engage at a strategic and operational level.

4.2.7 / Market development

Several of those interviewed, including civil servants, private and voluntary sector representatives, talked about the importance of infrastructure in supporting the development of a healthy and diverse market for criminal justice services. This was seen as particularly important given the current and previous government’s policy to reshape the way public services are delivered through competitive commissioning of services; including to the voluntary sector. Infrastructure has an important role in identifying opportunities, providing constructive criticism of commissioning practices, sharing best practice, and enabling the sector to develop so that it can increasingly take part in the delivery of public services.

There was a strong feeling that this must be balanced with support for organisations that are unlikely to be able to engage with large scale contracting through commissioning exercises. Many small organisations struggle to enter supply chains for larger contracts because of their size, specialisation, function, or organisational expertise. Yet they have an important role to play in supporting local and/or minority communities.

The voluntary sector brings something unique to public services in the Criminal Justice System, as they have a different relationship with service users (often voluntarily engaged) and the local community.

There were concerns raised about sustainability of funding for (particularly smaller) voluntary sector organisations. This could be problematic for market development, especially if a large number of organisations had to close, leading to a reduction in the number of potential providers. Infrastructure was recognised as playing a key role in identifying a wide range of options for organisations facing problems in securing ongoing funding.

4.2.8 / The diversity of the sector

Representing the diverse voluntary sector, reflecting the range of voices and engaging the sector in all its diversity was an important expectation. There was recognition that some sub-sectors for example women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic, young adults and older prisoners, have been marginalised or not included in strategic discussions, but that infrastructure organisations work hard to keep these issues on the agenda, and consistently lobby for their views to be heard.

Infrastructure should be encouraged to continue to work with specialist organisations that support people with protected characteristics, and to promote these issues to government at a senior level.

Providing opportunities for the voluntary sector through Transforming Rehabilitation was recognised as an important part of the reforms, with many highlighting the significant role that the sector is being asked to play. Active stewardship from infrastructure organisations to ensure greater diversity in the provision of resettlement and rehabilitation services was seen as vital to the success of Transforming Rehabilitation.

4.2.9 / Support at a local level

A few of the contributors identified the need for a more “community-oriented Criminal Justice System”, with a fully engaged voluntary sector that was better able to deliver flexible services needed to support rehabilitation and reduce crime in local areas.

There was recognition that rehabilitation happens in wider society, often at a neighbourhood level. It was felt that criminal justice agencies (such as the courts, probation, and prisons) need to focus more on building the capacity of voluntary sector organisations and community groups to deliver better rehabilitation and resettlement services. The panel participants thought that this would be best achieved by actively developing community engagement at a local level, by utilising infrastructure organisations to reach a wider range of voluntary sector organisations.

It was acknowledged that the voluntary sector brings something unique to public services in the Criminal Justice System, as they have a different relationship with service users (often voluntarily engaged) and the local community (regularly set up by local people to address identified needs).

Involving the sector by engaging the right organisations at a local level was seen as a key role for infrastructure, as they can often offer a solution to the challenges that public services face when seeking to engage local communities.

“There is often a tendency for statutory organisations to work in silos, seeing each step in the Criminal Justice System in isolation, rather than sharing accountability for the overall outcomes.”



4.2.10 / Gaps in provision

The panel heard about a number of areas where provision in the Criminal Justice System was felt to be lacking, such as mental health and those with learning disabilities. Several other areas of service development were identified, such as increasing sports based provision, stable housing, and supporting older prisoners. In many of these areas, agencies like NOMS expressed a desire to increase their engagement with the voluntary sector.

Organisations in a local area are often able to identify where there are gaps in provision. As one person commented: “There is often a tendency for statutory organisations to work in silos, seeing each step in the Criminal Justice System in isolation, rather than sharing accountability for the overall outcomes.” Statutory partners were clear that they need a mechanism to work with community groups, and enable them to feed into national policy developments. It was felt that this is where infrastructure organisations can (and often do) play an important role.

A commitment to the development of effective services and a longer-term, more systematic, financial support for infrastructure is required if the Criminal Justice System is to realise a more strategic approach to engaging the voluntary sector.

4.2.11 / The funding of infrastructure

There was a shared view from the contributors to the panel and the workshops about the need for a mix of funders of infrastructure organisations, and that all sectors (public, private, voluntary sector and academia) had a potential role in supporting infrastructure.

- In general, the voluntary sector felt they should be making a contribution to the funding of infrastructure but believed that primarily this needed to be funded by government.
- A contribution from government was thought to be necessary if it is to recognise the value of the voluntary sector and invest in its development.
- The private sector was also seen as benefiting from infrastructure, particularly as a “trusted broker” in developing collaboration, and as an “early warning system” for addressing problems in delivery; and should therefore be considered as a potential source of funding for voluntary sector infrastructure. The panel heard that private sector providers should be informed of, and consulted with, on the development of criminal justice infrastructure support. This would assist in the development of more effective support that meets the needs of new stakeholders in the Criminal Justice System as well as existing ones.

One participant gave a different perspective to the panel; stating that infrastructure bodies should not be trying to persuade government to fund them. Instead, infrastructure organisations should be self-supporting through its one to one transactions, “selling things that people want.”

The view was expressed that infrastructure support is at the core of maintaining and developing the delivery of services from the voluntary sector. A commitment to the development of effective services and a longer-term, more systematic, financial support for infrastructure is required if the Criminal Justice System is to realise a more strategic approach to engaging the voluntary sector.

4.2.12 / Independence of the sector

There was recognition that infrastructure organisations have to tread carefully if they are to retain their independence and influence in government. Contributors to the panel agreed that there is a need for infrastructure to build relationships with key civil servants so they understand the importance of infrastructure organisations having an independent voice in order to represent the voluntary sector.

5 / Conclusion

Infrastructure organisations were seen as critical for the future of informed and effective service delivery.

The views of 157 organisations and individuals were collected for this report and an overwhelming majority of participants expressed support for the role that infrastructure plays. Infrastructure support was felt to be useful and of value by delivery organisations who see it as a vital component of the commissioning, procurement and delivery ecosystem. In addition, the private and statutory sectors were able to clearly articulate the value of infrastructure in progressing effective policy and delivering better services.

Infrastructure organisations were seen as critical for the future of informed and effective service delivery. This was seen as particularly important when set within the context of the significant changes within the Criminal Justice System over the last two years, and the inevitability of further change ahead.

Infrastructure organisations were seen as having an important role to play in enabling voluntary sector organisations to stay informed, but also to understand the fundamental operational and strategic changes so that they may take advantage of new opportunities as well as recognise the risks involved.

Well-organised infrastructure support with clear lines of communication, dialogue and accountability was thought to be particularly important, especially to allow for a credible voice and advocacy role for the voluntary sector. Both voluntary sector and government wanted and needed a trusted voice, or broker, to enable this to happen.

There was strong support for the idea of closer collaboration between different infrastructure organisations, particularly at a local level, thereby combining their knowledge and expertise in different fields.

There was a clear recognition that infrastructure needs to be securely funded. Statutory sector partners were clear that criminal justice voluntary sector infrastructure has a vital role to play in both supporting and challenging government strategy. Respondents were equally clear that infrastructure organisations provide an essential conduit to a large and diverse voluntary sector, which could not be easily replaced. Funding of these services cannot solely be the role of independent funders: the statutory sector, private sector, and earned income all have a role to play in ensuring that the essential functions of infrastructure – support, representation, challenge, and cooperation – are to be sustained.

6 / Recommendations

In order to advance the development and sustainability of voluntary sector infrastructure support throughout the Criminal Justice System, the independent review has made the following long-term recommendations for government and for infrastructure organisations.

6.1 / Recommendations for government

- 1 A strong criminal justice infrastructure needs to be maintained by government in order to serve the voluntary sector and ensure that departmental priorities are delivered. Government should distinguish between infrastructure and delivery organisations and recognise the distinct roles of each.
- 2 Government needs to ensure a strong relationship with infrastructure in order to maintain clear channels of communications with the voluntary sector. To achieve this departments should allocate staff with clear responsibilities to support dialogue with the sector and assist in resolving operational difficulties.
- 3 Government should develop and sustain a high level strategic dialogue with voluntary sector infrastructure organisations to allow for the co-construction of policy, development of effective practice, and to test innovative approaches.
- 4 Government needs to acknowledge the importance of maintaining the independence of infrastructure organisations, which enables them to be an “honest broker”.
- 5 Government should support the sustainable development of robust and effective infrastructure organisations to meet the evolving needs of the voluntary sector working in criminal justice. This should include an element of core funding from relevant government departments.

6.2 / Recommendations for infrastructure

- 1 Infrastructure organisations need to be active in developing diverse income streams that include earned income, private sector investment, charitable trusts and foundations, and government funding.
- 2 In order to fulfil its role as a “trusted broker”, infrastructure organisations need to be accountable to the full diversity of their membership by representing various perspectives and addressing different needs.
- 3 Specialist infrastructure organisations need to focus on providing high quality two way information between government and voluntary sector. This requires expert staff and a mechanism by which to check that high level policy documents have been correctly interpreted for the sector.
- 4 Infrastructure organisations need to be flexible and able to adapt quickly to the changing needs of the voluntary sector. Collaboration and partnerships should be developed where it is necessary to access relevant expertise.
- 5 Infrastructure organisations need to ensure that they have the appropriate legal and governance arrangements in place to ensure openness, transparency and accountability.

End notes

- 1 Walton and MacMillan (2014) A brave new world for voluntary sector infrastructure? Vouchers, markets and demand led capacity building, Online: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/working-paper-118.pdf> (last accessed 22/12/2014)
- 2 The independent commission on the future of local infrastructure (NAVCA, 2015), 'Change for good'



supporting voluntary organisations that
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