



**Women's networking forum notes
13th November 2018 – Liverpool**

Clinks and Agenda held the ninth networking forum for voluntary sector organisations working with women in contact with the criminal justice system (CJS). The meeting was chaired by Clinks and Laura Seebohm, Operational Director at Changing Lives. Laura is a member of the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3)¹ and will feedback the key issues raised at the forum to RR3 meetings. 21 voluntary sector organisations, including partner organisations, were represented at the meeting. These notes aim to give a brief overview of some of the key points that were discussed at the forum.

1. Policy update

Clinks delivered a presentation highlighting key national policy issues relating to women in contact with the CJS and how delegates can engage with national lobbying and campaign work led by voluntary organisations. The presentation included:

- An update on the Advisory Board of Female Offenders (ABFO)² which refreshed its membership in September. We are pleased to announce that Kate Aldous, Head of Strategic Development at Clinks, secured a place on the board.
- Clinks has published the notes from the previous networking forum where the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) consulted delegates on the residential women's centre pilots announced in the Female Offender Strategy.³ Full notes are available on Clinks' website.⁴
- An update on the follow-on Famer Review⁵ on the importance of maintaining family ties for women in contact with the CJS. Clinks led on the call for evidence and we are pleased to have received more than 350 responses from women in prison and under probation and over 100 responses from families, as well as a further 32 submissions from experts working in this field. Clinks is also a member of the expert group which has met three times so far to provide advice to the review.

2. Discussion on the concordat for women announced in the Female Offender Strategy

The MoJ prepared a presentation for the networking forum on the concordat announced in the Female Offender Strategy which Kate Aldous, Head of Strategic Development at Clinks, presented to the delegates on their behalf. The presentation included the following key points:

- At the national level, the concordat will be a cross-governmental statement of intent to improve outcomes for women in the CJS, keep the interests of women in contact with the CJS (and those at risk of it) at the forefront of policy making and to support joined up working across the government. It will provide an overview of what statutory commitments,

roles and responsibilities every government agency has in relation to vulnerable women and women in the CJS and encourage easier data sharing arrangements between departments.

- The MoJ will be encouraging local areas to voluntarily sign up to the concordat. In signing up, local areas will be asked to create their own local statements of intent in support of women in the CJS. In doing so, local organisations and agencies will outline how they will work together and consider how they will implement the principles of the concordat into their service planning and delivery.
- The document is intended to help local areas get key stakeholders around a table and to provide the basis of local data sharing agreements.
- Local areas will be expected to work in partnership to develop a multi-agency model for identifying and supporting women with complex needs. The model should avoid duplication and gaps in provision to enable women easier access to services.

The presentation was followed by roundtable discussions about the concordat. Clinks has provided the MoJ with detailed information about the issues and questions raised during these discussions. The following provides a summary of the key issues raised by the delegates:

Encouraging sign-up and accountability

Delegates were concerned about the value of the concordat if sign-up is voluntary. They questioned how signatories would be held accountable to its commitments.

- It was widely felt amongst delegates that sign-up to the concordat should be made compulsory.
- There was concern amongst the attendees about a lack of accountability to see the intent of the concordat through to practice. There needs to be an action document with a clear set of expectations or outcomes which is co-developed and based on local needs and priorities. This should include clarification of statutory responsibilities and the minimum standards expected of organisations for women.

Localising the concordat

The discussions raised concerns about how the MoJ will make the concordat applicable to local areas, accounting for the variation across areas in demographic, needs, service provision, and priorities for local statutory bodies.

- The concordat needs to have clear ownership at the local level and local agencies must have sufficient powers to be able to drive it forward and generate action
- The MoJ needs to consult with local communities and local voluntary sector services to ensure the national concordat can be effectively localised and account for the 'postcode lottery' of services which currently exists
- There were concerns about the feasibility of a local concordat for areas which do not already have a strong existing infrastructure in place that could support it.

The role of the voluntary sector

There needs to be more clarity on the content of the concordat, its statement of intent, and the commitments that will be asked of signatories.

- Questions were raised about how the voluntary sector will be reflected in the concordat and whether the concordat will include commitments to the voluntary sector for statutory bodies.

- The concordat needs to recognise the expertise and value of the women’s voluntary sector and see them as key strategic partners in responding to women in contact with the CJS. The concordat should enable them to be more involved in key decision-making and co-design.
- The MoJ needs to engage with women with lived experience of the CJS to ensure their experiences are reflected in the concordat’s commitments.

Funding

Implementing a whole-systems, trauma-informed approach for women requires investment and the voluntary sector, particularly small specialist women’s organisations, are under significant financial pressure.

- For the concordat to be rolled out effectively and to ensure its commitments are followed through at the local level there needs to be additional funding as well as investment in mapping women’s services and developing networks. This is particularly important in areas where there is not a strong, existing infrastructure in place.
- Additional requirements created by the concordat, such as data sharing, has resource implications for the women’s voluntary sector.

Cross-departmental, whole-systems approach

The delegates reiterated the need for a cross-departmental, whole-systems approach that recognises a range of different approaches and specialisms that meet the diverse needs of women in contact with the CJS.

- The concordat needs to bring in organisations who work with women, but do not necessarily have the ‘criminal justice’ label, to get their expertise and ensure women have access to a wide range of specialist support
- The concordat should enable two-way learning so that as well as sharing their expertise, non-women specific services can better understand women’s needs and develop their services accordingly.

Collaboration

The voluntary sector is hopeful that the concordat will encourage more partnership-working within the voluntary sector and better co-ordination with statutory services.

- The concordat should promote more partnership-working in the women’s sector including opportunities for consortia. It was suggested that the concordat have a commitment for organisations to pool resources and funding.
- The concordat should encourage engagement with specialist voluntary sector organisations that work with women who have protected characteristics or particular vulnerabilities that can exclude them from more mainstream services.
- There should be commitments in the concordat for better co-ordination and communication between the statutory and voluntary sector, including better recording systems, data sharing and referral mechanisms.
- There needs to be better understanding amongst statutory agencies and commissioners of having outcome measures that reflect the holistic way women’s services operate rather than volume-driven targets.

3. Towards shared purpose commissioning, Clare Jones, Independent consultant

Following the discussions on the concordat, Clare Jones, an independent consultant, gave a presentation on shared purpose commissioning for women's organisations.

The importance of integrated commissioning

Clare discussed why integrated commissioning is suited to specialist women's voluntary organisations. Integrated commissioning enables holistic, gendered, person-centred approaches which reflect the way that women's centres and women-specific services operate, enabling them to more effectively meet a range of complex needs. This approach can enable organisations to achieve multiple outcomes required by a wide range of commissioners and can reduce the demand placed on other services such as statutory health or criminal justice services.

Barriers to integrated commissioning

The group discussed the barriers to integrated commissioning. This included:

- The top-down design and siloed approach typical of current funding models.
- Target and outcomes-based commissioning that relies on volume and does not reflect the rich and holistic support provided by women's services.
- Public sector cuts which restrict resources and do not incentivise commissioners to try something new.
- Further barriers are created by the lack of gendered data gathered to help inform commissioning decisions and the lack of an effective feedback loop for commissioners to understand the impact or consequences of a particular approach. For example that single cohort commissioning can leave unintended consequences for other cohorts out of scope of the commissioning.

Opportunities on the horizon for integrated commissioning

The public commitment from David Gauke MP, the Secretary of State for Justice, to reduce the use of imprisonment for women, and the emphasis placed on community-based solutions, could provide the opportunity for new thinking in commissioning. The department's Female Offender Strategy is underpinned by three core implementation principles: to be locally-led, partnership-focused, and evidence-based. These principles marry well with the principles and approach of integrated commissioning and if implemented effectively could signify a new direction for commissioning based on shared purpose and partnership working.

The presentation also highlighted opportunities identified in a report by Collaborate for Social Change on funding and commissioning for complexity, *A Whole New World*⁶, which is based on research with charitable foundations and public sector commissioners. It identifies key principles and processes for a more human and systemic approach to commissioning that will enable organisations to better meet people's complex needs. If applied to the women's sector, the lessons learnt could help shape a new, integrated approach to commissioning that better meets women's complex needs.

Gender-informed systems change

Clare also referenced research on *Making Places Work for Women*⁷ by Agenda and the importance of gender-informed, place-based system change in order to ensure that services are accessible to women. Clare identified some principles for systems change that could make a difference for women, including:

- Data that enables a shared understanding of the diversity of women facing multiple disadvantage
- Outcomes for the system, not a single service, that are defined by women themselves
- Shared resources and responsibilities to achieve jointly-owned outcomes
- Recognising the value of those playing ‘system leader’ roles who are not necessarily in positions of seniority
- Building a culture of learning and reflection to build trust between services and commissioners and enable them to explore issues together.

If implemented, shared purpose commissioning then becomes the natural result of these principles. This is because providers and commissioners have all been involved in a process of finding out together what local women want and need. They therefore develop a purpose and set of outcomes that they share.

4. What next?

Clinks will reflect the women’s sector’s feedback to the MoJ on behalf of our members and seek further clarification on the concordat. The issues will also be fed back to the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group.

If you wish to get in touch with Clinks about the issues raised at this forum, please contact lauren.nickolls@clinks.org

The next meeting of the women’s networking forum will take place on 19th March 2019 in Manchester.

¹ The Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) group is made up of senior experts from the voluntary sector. It comes together with civil servants each quarter to provide guidance and feedback on MoJ policy developments. It was set up by the Ministry of Justice, in partnership with Clinks, with the aim of building a strong and effective partnership between the voluntary sector and the MoJ. The group is chaired by Clinks’ Chief Executive Officer Anne Fox and Clinks’ policy team provides the secretariat.

² The Advisory Board for Female Offenders is a group made up of representatives from government departments, criminal justice agencies and other key stakeholders including voluntary sector representatives. The board is chaired by Edward Argar MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Ministry of Justice). The group meets four times a year and provides expert advice and challenge to the government. It is responsible for the oversight of delivery of the government’s Female Offender Strategy. For more information visit the government’s website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/advisory-board-for-female-offenders> [accessed 23rd January 2019].

³ Ministry of Justice (2018) *Female Offender Strategy*. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy> [last accessed 23rd January 2019].

⁴ Clinks (2018) *Notes from RR3 women’s networking forum meeting, September 2018 Bristol*. Available from: <https://www.clinks.org/taxonomy/term/12> [accessed 23rd January 2018].

⁵ Clinks website, (2018) *Families of people in the criminal justice system: work with Lord Farmer*. [online] Available at: <https://www.clinks.org/our-work/families-people-criminal-justice-system> [last accessed 23rd January 2019].

⁶ Collaborate for Social Change (2017) *A Whole New World — Funding and Commissioning in Complexity*. Available from: <https://collaboratecic.com/a-whole-new-world-funding-and-commissioning-in-complexity-12b6bdc2abd8> [last accessed 23rd January 2019].

⁷ Agenda (2018) *Making Places Work for Women: Gender and Systems Change*. Available from: <https://weareagenda.org/place-based-systems-change/> [last accessed 23rd January 2019].