

Clinks' member advisory forum – Terms of reference

Purpose

The member advisory forum ('the forum') provides Clinks with strategic and operational advice from voluntary organisations working in the criminal justice system in England and Wales, to ensure that Clinks is best informed by those organisations that it supports.

Clinks has over 600 voluntary organisations as members, and our members play an essential role at the heart of our criminal justice system and Clinks' work. We are committed to scaling up the involvement of our members across our work to ensure they contribute in a meaningful way to the plans and decisions made about Clinks' future and work. The forum provides a crucial way for the knowledge, skills and expertise amongst our member organisations to be included by Clinks at a strategic level when planning, delivering and reviewing our work. The forum adds to the existing ways that we involve our members in our work, building on our regional and thematic networks, our use of intelligence from our members in our policy work and consultation responses, representation of members on the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group, as well as the involvement we have from member organisations on our trustee board.

By bringing member organisations together to share knowledge, challenges and best practice, Clinks will be able to best understand and support the development of its members to deliver the highest-level impact for the people they exist for. A dynamic and talented forum should be seen as a sign of a healthy Clinks - connected to the community it represents. The forum will be integral to how we measure how we are meeting our strategic objectives, how we understand the current challenges our members face and what the sector needs from its membership body.

Objectives

1. To ensure voluntary organisations are involved in Clinks' planning at a strategic level
2. To provide an opportunity for Clinks to seek structured advice and feedback from voluntary organisations on specific developments and decisions regarding Clinks' strategic direction and activities, via a formal group, which reflects the diverse interests and needs of the sector
3. To help Clinks understand the opportunities and challenges its members are facing
4. To advise on priority areas for development and when to stop or reduce activities in existing areas
5. To advise on partnership and collaboration opportunities through which Clinks can best achieve its goals
6. To provide a forum in which other stakeholders can gain input from a range of voluntary organisations working in the criminal justice system

Membership

Membership of the forum aims to be representative of the sector in terms of the areas and types of work that voluntary organisations working in criminal justice do.

Individuals will be members of the forum on behalf of their organisation. Members will bring enthusiasm, knowledge, skills and expertise from different aspects of the criminal justice voluntary sector. This includes experience running service delivery organisations, working in specific parts of England and Wales and working with particular groups of people.

The forum will be made up of a group of 10-15 openly recruited representatives from the voluntary sector working in the criminal justice system that have specialisms in running or being senior representatives of one or more of the following:

1. Volunteer-led or very small voluntary organisations (under £30k pa)
2. Small voluntary organisations (under £250k pa)
3. Medium-sized voluntary organisations (under £1m pa)
4. Large voluntary organisations (over £1m pa)
5. Voluntary organisations delivering specific work in Wales and across specific parts of England
6. Voluntary organisations delivering specific specialist work and/or with particular groups of people – including people in prison, people on probation, working specifically with women, racially minoritised people, families, working in the arts, lived experience and protected characteristics
7. Voluntary organisations with a specific focus on delivering services in prison and to people on probation
8. Voluntary organisations that are primarily commissioned by central or local government to deliver their work
9. Voluntary organisations that are primarily funded through charitable trusts, foundations and donations to deliver their work
10. Voluntary organisations with a particular focus on advocacy, influencing national and/or local government and research

The chair can invite people and organisations with expertise related to an issue under discussion to attend the relevant meeting. This is intended to respond to gaps in knowledge and expertise amongst the current membership. Voluntary sector representatives who are not members of the forum may also be engaged through time-limited special interest groups.

Recruitment and term

All positions are recruited openly. Positions may be recruited for when a member of the group steps down, where additional need is identified in relation to a specialist area or following a review of members.

Members will be appointed to join the forum initially for a term of two years. Members can have their membership renewed for a further two years if they wish, subject to agreement from the chair. At the end of that period (a total of four years), the position must be openly recruited, in which the incumbent member is free to reapply - should it continue to be a role the chair feels is needed.

The commitment from members of the forum

Membership of the forum should be seen as a valuable appointment and facilitate engagement to representation across the sector and the opportunity to share information.

The forums remit is to represent the interests of all voluntary sector organisations and fostering a dialogue which helps to improve the support that Clinks provides to its members.

Members of the forum need to:

1. Be part of an organisation that is a full member of Clinks (i.e. a voluntary sector organisation that is a member of Clinks) and have agreement from the member organisation to represent it in the forum
2. Follow Clinks' membership Terms and conditions and Code of conduct.
3. Actively engage and provide as much advice and support as they can
4. Represent a range of views from different perspectives
5. Consult, where appropriate, with their organisation and other organisations in their focus area on key discussion agenda items ahead of each meeting
6. Be able to commit to the meeting schedule and make every effort to attend the meetings. Members who miss three consecutive meetings may be asked by the chair to step down from the forum.
7. Keep themselves up to date on Clinks' activities and of developments in the wider voluntary sector and criminal justice system and share these with Clinks
8. Act ethically, possess sound independent judgement and the highest levels of integrity, independence and confidentiality with a demonstrable commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

Members of the forum will also have:

1. Expertise and insight in an area relevant to Clinks' vision and mission
2. A high level of understanding and interest in Clinks' work, and a commitment to our objectives and values
3. Effective communication and interpersonal skills, fostering productive relationships across complex and wide-ranging stakeholder groups

The support Clinks will provide

The forum will have two co-chairs:

1. Nominated Clinks trustee that holds the membership portfolio
2. Emma Kidger, Support and Development Manager

Other members of the Trustee Board, Senior Leadership Team and staff team may attend meetings, depending on the agenda.

The running of the forum is supported by the Clinks' Membership and Events team, which provide support in recruiting members, organising meetings and providing ad hoc support to help the forum achieve its aims.

Accountability

The forum has an advisory function. It is not a decision-making body in its own right. However, members should expect their advice to be properly considered. Advice from the forum will be considered by Clinks' Senior Leadership Team and the Trustee Board where appropriate, as well as staff working specifically on the relevant areas of work.

Ways of working and meetings

There will be four meetings a year – likely to be a mixture of virtual, physical and hybrid meetings. Clinks can cover the travel expenses for attending physical meetings.

An annual calendar of meetings will be set up, and members who miss three consecutive meetings can be asked to step down by the Chair.

Task and finish or special interest groups may also be set up outside of the main meeting schedule, if the need arises and members are willing to participate.

Meetings will take place in a 'discussion' format whereby forum members are asked to share their views and feedback when discussing issues on the agenda. A record of the collective feedback and advice from each meeting will be produced and provided to the Clinks Senior Leadership Team, Clinks' Board, as well as published on the Clinks website.

Communication with the wider sector will be aided through special interest groups which may call for evidence, hold seminars and meetings with representatives from the wider voluntary sector. These groups may also consider publishing the findings and making recommendations on the basis of discussions held. These will be published by Clinks.

The terms of reference of the forum will be reviewed every two years.