

## Response to Reducing Re-Offending in London and NOMS Regional Commissioning

Clinks welcomes the opportunity to respond to *Reducing Re-offending in London: Partnerships and NOMS Regional Commissioning*. Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations working with offenders and their families. Our strategic priorities are to promote collaboration, support and develop the role of small voluntary sector organisations, promote service user involvement in the operations and policy of the criminal justice system, and to tackle racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system.

As noted in the consultation document, Clinks has worked closely with the voluntary sector, prison, probation and NOMS in London over the past 3 years, and we welcome the acknowledgment of our previous contribution and potential for further engagement over the next 3 years. We also endorse the strong statements supporting the role of the third sector in delivering services to offenders and contributing to reducing re-offending. In our response we will address specifically the questions identified in the document and then add some additional comments relating to two specific issues.

### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

#### Question 3a and 3b

We agree with the three cross-cutting strategic priorities, in particular that relating to the need for constructive engagement with the Third Sector. This engagement will help to achieve the other two priorities as effective deployment of voluntary sector resources will help to deliver more efficient delivery to offenders and a well-supported sector can provide the kind of market best suited for investment in co-commissioned services.

There is clearly a need for rationalisation of the governance arrangements overseeing the reducing re-offending strategic effort and identifying the Local Criminal Justice Board as having the lead strategic role ensures that there is a 'whole systems approach' to this work. The Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) exploits the advantages gained by the incorporation of prisons, probation and courts in the recently formed Ministry of Justice but also ensures that Home Office priorities for the police are integrated with the courts and sentence delivery processes. We would hope that the work of the LCJB in this respect is made as transparent as possible and that some mechanisms be created to enable Third Sector voice and influence to be facilitated.

## Question 4a

The commissioning priorities are generally positive. We would support the potential for enhanced quality and consistency of third sector service delivery through the use of the Alliance Proposal form, but there is a need to ensure that the sector is supported in engaging with this process, especially small organisations that may not have the capacity to immediately comply with some of the requirements.

The development of a training programme for staff with third sector responsibilities is welcome and Clinks, along with others in the sector could have a role in contributing to the design and delivery of this initiative.

The proposal to explore the options for a regional approach to recruiting, training and accrediting volunteers raises some concerns for us. It is not clear what accreditation would involve and how onerous it may be for small organisations providing volunteers to work with offenders. It is also not apparent how this might be managed and resourced; would the DOM resource this and would there be an in-house arrangement, or would it be tendered? Clinks is currently funded by the Criminal Justice Group to deliver a range of strategic objectives in relation to volunteering and we will be working together with the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation who have a track record in implementing quality standards for volunteering and mentoring. There may well be scope for the DOM and HMPS to work with our organisation on this initiative.

Clinks welcomes the expectation that the winning bidder for HMP Belmarsh West will work closely with the VCS and Faith groups to provide services for prisoners. There is potential for Clinks to provide a brokerage role in this area.

## Community

The priority given to the implementation of the Impact project is welcome, as it could deliver a significant reduction in the numbers received into custody in London. However, there is no mention of the role of the Third Sector and its potential for delivering services to help offenders remain in the community. We would recommend that this is given further consideration.

There is no reference to the implementation of the Best Value Framework for probation which has been extensively consulted upon, with the final version due to be published in the New Year. This has replaced the 10% target for out-sourcing to the voluntary and private sectors, and the assumption is that it is likely to lead to future investment in the Third Sector. It is also envisaged that the DOM will have a strong role in overseeing the proper implementation of the framework.

There is a clear structure in London prisons for engagement with the voluntary sector (Alliance Co-ordinator), but no identified parallel arrangement for probation. Clinks has worked with London Probation's Southwark Pathfinder project to engage with the third sector and would recommend that this model is spread across the rest of London.

**Question 4b**

Commissioning to meet the needs of offenders has to break down the silos that currently constrain the delivery of services to this group. Clinks, together with Homeless Link, Drugscope, and Mind have formed a coalition to influence the way in which commissioning to meet the needs of vulnerable adults is developed. The Make Every Adult Matter coalition launched its report *'In From the Margins'* in December 2008 and the appointment of a Project Director (early 2009) will facilitate research to provide evidence of what works with adults with complex needs. The DOM's commissioning priorities should include developing models of commissioning which better links the pathways, developing services that can meet the aspirations of offenders who have been unable or unwilling to access mainstream services.

**Local Partnership Delivery**

Clinks welcomes the focus on developing the relationship with local authorities and has undertaken work in this area in relation to the Third Sector engagement with the local agenda. The London Diamond Initiative has considerable potential and the Third Sector is well placed to deliver services to the offenders targeted by this scheme.

**Question 5a**

There is considerable scope for asking local offenders themselves what would make a difference to them in reducing their offending. Earlier this year, Clinks launched its report, *'Unlocking Potential'*, which identified the contribution that service users could make to improving outcomes in the criminal justice system. Undertaking user surveys and focus groups at the local level could produce valuable information to inform commissioning and delivery of services.

**Question 5b**

The actual costs of re-offending at a local level could be calculated to show that investment in services to prevent re-offending would be cost effective. There may also be benefit in identifying the costs of consuming expensive correctional resources (i.e. custodial provision) by a relatively small group of individuals in high crime boroughs, and seeking to 'reinvest' this expenditure in local services, including those delivered by the VCS.

**Question 5c**

We have supported the London Resettlement Forum programme of show-casing best practice and would like to see it expand. Our London VCS Development Project has recently published research into effective commissioning practice, which highlights case studies across a range of pathways (employment, housing, mental health, substance misuse) at local level, and will be launching the report in the New Year. All the services featured in this publication are delivered by Third Sector organisations and demonstrate the flexibility and innovation necessary to help offenders change their lives.

### Question 5d

In order for local partners to effectively harness the resources of the Third Sector there needs to be a much greater strategic alliance between the probation service and voluntary sector, with the former acting as 'champions'. This relationship would include provision of information to the Third Sector about the needs of offenders and endorsing their relevance and effectiveness at tackling complex issues affecting offenders' lives. Local infrastructure organisations should be equipped with knowledge and understanding of the criminal justice system, helping them to recruit their members into this agenda. Clinks is working together with NAVCA at a national level to try to achieve this, and we are working through our London Project to link with London-based Third Sector umbrella bodies to achieve similar objectives.

### Question 5e

Clinks is closely involved in the development of the NOMS Toolkit, referenced in the consultation document. This will be a valuable aid to providing the evidence of so-called 'softer outcomes' including improved motivation, raised self-esteem, better life skills, etc. These are milestones that often need to be achieved before offenders are able to engage meaningfully with correctional programmes. The Toolkit is not intended to replace good systems already in place with many Third Sector organisations and it is important that commissioners of offender services encourage and validate these measures. It is also crucial that smaller organisations that deliver effective services, but who may lack the capacity to produce evidence, are supported to develop monitoring systems that are appropriate to their size and services.

### Question 5f

There are considerable disadvantages and inequalities that characterise the position of BME groups and women in the criminal justice system. The position that individuals within these groups start from on the way to desistance from offending is markedly different to other groups. For individuals in these groups there are structural and discriminatory barriers that impact specifically on their progress. Outcomes frameworks need to take account of these issues and measures that record enhanced empowerment, confidence, improved health, and personal and social relationships need to be given significant priority.

### Questions 6a - 6e

The pathway structure relating to reducing re-offending has proved useful in the past in terms of identifying the key responsibilities of government departments other than the Ministry of Justice. However, it is clear from this consultation that it will need to be revisited. A couple of the pathway groups have been 'suspended' or disbanded, whilst others have struggled to find a focus. The other issue is the degree to which key themes cut across the pathway structure. For instance, accommodation and finance/debt have a clear link as do ETE and substance misuse (e.g. Welfare White Paper). The priorities identified within each pathway in the consultation are insular and solely output focussed, rather than seeking broad outcomes for offenders regardless of the specific pathway issues.

The Third Sector provides services that can more flexibly respond to the complex needs of offenders. The pathway approach could use the Third Sector's holistic approach to meeting need to link up objectives and funding streams from other key government departments.

### Question 7a

Clinks supports the key priority for Prolific and Priority Offenders (PPO) relating to a renewed focus on the Rehabilitate and Resettle strand. Unless this element of the PPO scheme is successful much of the progress in the other two strands, especially 'Catch and Convict' will be undermined. There will continue to be a 'revolving door' situation, with offenders going back into prison with fresh offences committed following release. There are real opportunities for recruiting Third Sector provision to support rehabilitation and resettlement at the local level. Clinks is currently working with Tower Hamlets and Lambeth to enhance the engagement between the public sector and the VCS in relation to service delivery to offenders. The Clinks London Project will support the DOM to facilitate a proportionate shift in resources toward the rehabilitate and resettlement strand and bring effective Third Sector providers to the table.

The work already being undertaken with women offenders, although encouraging, is focused almost entirely on supporting women who are released from prison. One of Corston's priorities was the diversion of women from custody, and there could be more emphasis in the Reducing Re-offending Strategy on developing high quality community-based provision for women, including the mechanisms for facilitating access to service provision at an early stage in women's offending careers. The creation of one or more 'one stop shops', cited as best practice by Corston, could contribute to the diversion of women and a reduction in re-offending. These could be linked closely with the further development of the Women's accredited programme.

The priorities for the Young Offenders cohort, similarly to the Women's cohort, focus on post-custodial objectives. There could be greater emphasis placed on working to develop community provision to divert Young Offenders away from custody. However, whether in custody or subject to community orders, the key issue for Young Offenders is the transition from the Youth to the Adult system. The Barrow Cadbury Trust has recently funded Clinks to contribute to the implementation of the recommendations arising from the 'Lost in Transition' report, published in 2005. The Transition to Adulthood (T2A) initiative seeks to develop models of support to help young offenders make the difficult change from the Youth to the Adult system. A key strand within this is the development and promotion of high quality mentoring support for young people in this group. The importance of mentoring generally for young people is highlighted in the joint Clinks/Princes' Trust publication '*Breaking the Cycle*'. The Reducing Re-offending Strategy refers to identifying a regional approach to the recruitment, training and management of volunteers, and there is scope for taking a sharper focus on developing for this particular group of offenders.

### ADDITIONAL ISSUES

#### *Tackling racism and discrimination*

There is some limited reference in the strategy to the issues for Black and Minority Ethnic offenders within the criminal justice system. However, given their significant over-representation in the prison population, and the disproportionate representation at all stages in the criminal justice process, there is scope for a greater strategic focus on the needs of this group. This is also a key issue for London given the demographics of the city. Clinks has supported a coalition of black-led organisations in a campaign, Race for Justice, which recently published '*Less Equal than Others*', presenting research evidence of differential treatment of BME offenders. There is significant scope for recruiting and supporting BME Third Sector organisations in order to meet the needs of BME offenders and build bridges into those communities.

### *Effective local commissioning*

Clinks commissioned several organisations to undertake research in London on the commissioning of services for offenders with complex needs including homelessness, unemployment (with a focus on BME groups), addictions, and mental health. The case studies, which include the perspectives of commissioners, providers, and service users, have been published in a report *'What Works in Local Commissioning - a 360° Perspective'*. This will be the focus of a seminar in March 2009. The key messages across all the case studies are about the user's perspective, flexibility, and good quality relationships and the space for them to flourish.

### **CONSULTATION**

Tackling offending and re-offending in London is complex and not made easier by the prisoner flow in and out of the city prisons. The voluntary sector in London is extraordinarily diverse and dynamic, and co-ordinating engagement with these organisations is a challenging task. Clinks' London Project has made some progress in supporting the criminal justice agencies in the region to achieve reductions in offending and re-offending, and in terms of developing greater synergy between the public sector and the VCS. We look forward to strengthening these key relationships over the next two years and beyond.

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