

Our impact

2016



Findings from an independent impact assessment



About Clinks

Our vision

Clinks' vision is of a vibrant and independent voluntary sector working with informed and engaged communities to enable the rehabilitation of offenders for the benefit of society.

Our mission

Clinks supports, represents and campaigns for the voluntary sector working with offenders. Clinks aims to ensure the sector and all those with whom they work, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders.

Become a member

Our strength comes from our membership and over 500 organisations have already joined. The more members we have, the more powerful our voice becomes.

Join today: www.clinks.org/membership

About the authors

Chris Tully has worked in the voluntary sector for 27 years. He has conducted monitoring and evaluation projects for organisations working in the Criminal Justice System including Clinks and Women in Prison. His work includes developing a user engagement model for INQUEST, and facilitating family listening days on behalf of the IAP, the IPCC, the EHRC, the Care Quality Commission, the Harris Review, and Dame Elish Angiolini's independent review into deaths in police custody.

Helen Shaw is an educator, researcher, and organisational and leadership development consultant who works with individuals, teams and organisations. She currently teaches on two leadership Masters programmes. Previously, Helen was Co-Director of INQUEST for 21 years where she worked in complex and challenging political and legal milieu to bring about lasting changes to practice and policy.

Researched and written by Helen Shaw and Chris Tully

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Introduction

This report presents the findings from an impact assessment that was researched and written by independent consultants Helen Shaw and Chris Tully between mid-February and March 2016.

The consultants were appointed through an open tendering process carried out by Clinks.

The research methodology involved an analysis of the context in which Clinks works, document analysis, a survey, semi-structured interviews, observation and analysis and interpretation of data.

The aim of the impact assessment was to assess:

- 1 Whether Clinks is providing the range of services and activities that its stakeholders want and need
- 2 What difference Clinks is making to its members and the wider voluntary sector in criminal justice, and ultimately, to their service users
- 3 Whether Clinks' work is of a good quality.

At the time of the assessment, Clinks had 613 members¹ and was working nationally, regionally and locally with members and partners to deliver its vision of a vibrant and independent voluntary sector working with informed and engaged communities to enable the rehabilitation of offenders for the benefit of society.

This report presents the views of a range of Clinks members and key stakeholders, including small and medium voluntary sector organisations, statutory stakeholders from local and national organisations, funders and those who have worked in partnership with Clinks. Respondents fed back on what Clinks does well, where it could do better and offered recommendations for its work. The overwhelming response from those consulted was positive. In particular, the interviews allowed members to give more detailed responses. This resulted in valuable insight into how Clinks is perceived and has provided constructive criticism that will help shape its future work.

The impact assessment has been carried out during a changing and challenging environment for the voluntary sector working in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). This environment is described in more detail in Clinks' *State of the sector* report for 2016.²

Perceptions about what Clinks does for the sector

Information sharing was the most commonly identified aspect of Clinks' work that added value. Its information sharing was characterised as:

- Accurate
- Accessible and jargon free
- Authoritative
- Detailed
- Contextualised
- Up to date
- Relevant to the sector
- Beneficial to service delivery.

Light Lunch – its weekly ebulletin – was almost universally praised, with particular appreciation of the vacancies and funding sections. Individual responses were shaped by job role and position in and/or knowledge of the sector.

With over 10.5k followers, representing a 35% increase on the previous year,³ the reach of its Twitter accounts has developed considerably and demonstrates the action that has been taken a result of feedback from previous impact assessments.

There were mixed views on Clinks' website, with the majority finding the range of information available invaluable. However, a number of members and stakeholders wanted more thematic organisation of material, more regular updates to ensure all material is current with a more professional look to set a benchmark for the sector and more use of modern applications.

There was widespread satisfaction with the briefings, policy papers and other publications, characterised by Clinks' ability to interpret and contextualise complicated government policies. These publications are described as high quality, timely and concise, adding value and increasing confidence for members by linking policy to political context and simplifying documents for easy access. It's clear that staff in the voluntary sector feel they are time poor. The way in which Clinks interprets and analyses information, prepares responses to policy, signposts, provides opportunities

for networking and briefs the sector is hugely welcomed and appreciated. A few respondents felt that Clinks tries to provide too broad a range of materials, resulting in a lack of focus and quality.

Events and training opportunities offered by Clinks are immensely popular and in keeping with the feedback data from Clinks training events in 2015.⁴ Respondents welcome training that improves their services and helps them develop organisational sustainability. The cost of travel, linked to a lack of localised training, was identified as a potential barrier to attendance. Some suggested shorter courses, or developing an online training provision. A small number feel that Clinks could do more to challenge the sector about becoming more professional and could develop training and events to reflect its own professionalism and message.

Regular consultation with members and professional analysis of evidence give Clinks a reputable basis from which to represent the diverse voices of the sector. This is seen as crucial to the organisation's impact and legitimacy. However, there is evidence of survey fatigue, with a preference from some for face-to-face consultation, perhaps using scaled down round-tables. Others want Clinks to be more effective in reporting back on how members' evidence has been used.

Clinks is seen by many as the interface between government, the Criminal Justice System and the voluntary sector. Stakeholders regard strategic thinking as being a crucial facet of an infrastructure organisation. By seeing the bigger picture, Clinks enables organisations to think ahead, plan and develop effectively and to engage in discussion about service delivery and sustainability. Particular benefit is felt by smaller organisations that feel more removed from decision makers at a national level, or simply don't have the resources to engage with the broader issues within the sector.

The formal support provided via the funding, partnership and consultant finder services were seen as crucial to members' organisational development, sustainability and resilience, as were information sharing, policy, strategic oversight and networking opportunities.

How Clinks creates impact

There is universal praise for the staff team. The organisational culture that underpins Clinks' approach is highly valued. It is seen as fundamental to how it is positioned to meet some of the future challenges. Managing the introduction of the new CEO caused some anxieties about how this approach will be sustained, but initial soundings suggest Clinks is managing this well.

There are concerns about capacity and the impact on the sector if Clinks is unable to operate with a full complement of staff. Much of Clinks' success is based on reputation and sector knowledge. The majority of respondents identified Clinks as a credible, authoritative and effective infrastructure organisation. On-going consultation and communication and its history of work with the voluntary sector means it shares an empathetic relationship with members.

Respondents and stakeholders see the role of Clinks as providing a voice for the voluntary sector. They recognise the vital function of coordinating opinion from across the sector. However, there were questions from a few about how Clinks reconciles diverse member voices and whether it should even try.

Clinks' recognition of the advantages and value of developing partnerships within the sector is highly valued, as is providing a framework for linking members, other organisations, stakeholders and agencies outside the voluntary sector.

Clinks' success in bringing together groups to discuss issues and seek solutions is popular and effective and praised for engaging a broad section of organisations. This is exemplified by the case study of the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3), with participants drawn from across the sector, generating a sense of democracy and involvement. Clinks' approach helps to challenge a perception that some organisations are being side-lined.

Clinks performs a crucial role in creating opportunities for members and others in the voluntary sector to have a sense of community, with shared values and vision. Networking is also important for members who provide direct services and wish to

either collaborate with similar providers, or avoid duplicating provision. As the sector segments and responds to the challenges of new ways of working this threatens this sense of community.

Clinks' ability to build and sustain relationships, and to manage and facilitate difficult and challenging conversations, underpins its ability to have an impact. Many respondents from the statutory and funding sectors spoke about Clinks' important role in bringing people together for dialogue, often in areas that can be difficult or challenging.

Government, other statutory agencies and key funders see Clinks as an honest and trustworthy source of information. Many members see Clinks as a route to policy makers and influencers. For many it is important to know that Clinks' comments on policy are evidence based and linked directly to the experiences of its members. Government officials, who think Clinks is very well placed "to navigate the sector through the impact of policy announcements" appreciate this role.

Clinks' work at local and regional levels supports and strengthens the sector. This work has developed local partnerships and cemented work with regional infrastructure bodies. Respondents felt this could be better communicated across the sector to raise the profile, making it more visible for potential users of Clinks' services.

Challenges and opportunities

There were assumptions and confusion about who Clinks represents within the voluntary sector, despite its clear statements of vision and mission. As greater pressure is felt by small and medium sized organisations, the vision and mission statements may need to be revisited, clarified and possibly added to, in order to reflect a growing focus on sustainability, resilience and diversity. There were concerns from some in the sector about Clinks straying from its key remit. This may be linked to a misunderstanding of its mission.

Some stakeholders and members questioned how to balance London and regional work and how Clinks can respond to the devolution

and localism agenda, in order to continue to shape and influence discourse.

Clinks and its members are "navigating a course in uncharted waters". Working with this complexity, the tensions it creates and the room for misunderstandings cannot be underestimated. The idea that Clinks can make positive use of the uncomfortable middle position it occupies, facilitate more dialogue, and extend the range of those it engages with, was welcomed enthusiastically.

Clinks might also consider how it responds to the emerging reframing of the debate on the CJS. Can and should Clinks contribute to changing the narrative on crime, punishment, rehabilitation, multiple and complex needs etc.? What will the CJS look like in the next few years and what environment will the voluntary sector need to work with and within?

Structural reforms and funding of criminal justice services, Transforming Rehabilitation (TR), health, local authorities and police and crime commissioners all present the sector with challenges in funding service provision. There are different perspectives on whether engaging with commissioning and receiving funding in this way aligns with the values of the voluntary sector and Clinks is uniquely placed to facilitate some of the necessary conversations.

The role taken up by Clinks during the roll out of TR has provoked significant comment. There is rich learning for Clinks from its TR experience. Some expressed the view that Clinks had embraced the process too enthusiastically, whilst others questioned the quality of the legal and business knowledge offered by Clinks. Nearly all identified it as a priority for Clinks as the key infrastructure organisation working in the sector.



Clinks has listened and responded: 10 pledges

In order for Clinks to know it is doing the right things, in the right ways, and delivering the best possible impact, it needs to hear from and respond to its stakeholders. This impact assessment has shown that Clinks is providing the right range of services and activities to meet its members' needs, that these are having a positive impact and are of a good quality.

Clinks is keen to make changes where it can to respond best to what the sector needs in order to work most effectively with its beneficiaries and on their behalf. It will be making some changes and investing time and resource in new activities to reflect what's needed at a crucial time of change and challenge for the sector. As a result of the recommendations produced by this impact assessment, Clinks has made 10 pledges to inform its future work.

1 / Knowing our strengths and goals

We will be clear about what we do, why we do it and for who. We will revisit our vision, mission and values and ensure there is clarity about our remit and messaging across all our communications channels.

2 / Valuing our people

We will ensure we understand and sustain our organisational culture and safeguard our valued and respected organisational stance. Some of this can be achieved through continued investment in staff. In 2016/17 we are investing in key roles that will allow our teams to work more effectively together and we will be looking for ways to help all our staff contribute effectively to our shared mission.

3 / Keeping our finger on the pulse and responding to need

We will be looking at a broad range of strategies to maintain our impressive track record of consultation with our membership. This could include greater use of the roundtable model and facilitating groups representing particular demographics/types of work/shared interests. We will continue to work with research and infrastructure partners to better understand the sector, its needs and future challenges and to respond accordingly.

4 / Keeping it local

Across England and Wales we are investing in core roles to provide a more tailored and localised support offer. We will engage more with key commissioners, influencers and processes that are likely to impact on our locally based member organisations. This will include a focus on devolution and supporting strategic engagement by the sector with reform prisons, reformed probation providers and police and crime commissioners.

5 / Keeping you in the loop and on the agenda



We will implement a new communications strategy that aims to make most effective and timely use of relevant communications tactics and channels. This will allow us to inform the sector and shape the agenda affecting how it works. We will continue to invest in our social media presence, building on our impressive results to date. We will look at how technology can help us to more effectively connect those in the sector to one another, to those they need to work with or alongside, and to those they need to influence. We will help the sector understand the outcomes and the impact of our collective work. Because we share the work we'll share the successes and learning.

6 / Growing our base and support



We have invested in a revised membership, training and events offer. We will be working with members and wider partners to offer services that provide the sector with timely, effective, relevant support, not duplicating but adding value. Where practicable and needed, we will have a more localised and regional offer. We'll look at the potential benefits and uptake of short courses and online training, enabling greater engagement with isolated and cash strapped members.

7 / Keeping you informed



We will share a 12 month forward plan with members, as part of our communications strategy, to help reduce the potential for misunderstanding, organisational overlap and duplication of effort. We will refine our stakeholder engagement approach and provide more ways to hear from you and tell you what's happening, what you've helped achieve and what's coming next.

8 / Partnering for progress



We will work with a range of partners from various sectors to broker relationships that provide voluntary organisations with opportunities to improve outcomes for their beneficiaries. This will include scanning the horizon for new opportunities and providing the practical support organisations need to respond positively.

9 / Building our future strength



We will diversify our income and aim to grow our earned income. This will allow us to respond better to the needs of the sector, whilst continuing to work with those funders and partners where there's synergy and mutual benefit. We will do this with due consideration to the income needs of the sector and, wherever practicable, will aim not to duplicate or compete.

10 / Connecting for change



We will build on what we are best at – advocating with, and on behalf of, the sector through change and challenge as the policy and service landscape continues to evolve. We will learn from the policy experiments of recent years and apply these lessons for the benefit of the sector and its beneficiaries as further changes happen. In doing so we will further develop our work as a facilitator of difficult/challenging conversations within the voluntary sector and with our key stakeholders.

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