



Women's Networking Forum notes

10th September 2018 – Bristol

Clinks and Agenda held the eighth networking forum for voluntary sector organisations working with women in contact with the criminal justice system (CJS). The meeting was chaired by Clinks and Changing Lives. 24 voluntary sector organisations, including partner organisations, were represented at the meeting. This note aims 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, demonstrating how delegates can engage with national lobbying and campaign work led by voluntary organisations. In particular Clinks spoke about:

- The Female Offender Strategy and its key priorities and commitments, including the launch of the grant funding competition. Clinks has published a briefing about the strategy that you can read [here](#).
- The [Follow-on Farmer Review](#) in to the importance of maintaining family relationships for women in the CJS and the call for evidence that Clinks led.
- And the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) [probation consultation](#), including the events Clinks held with the voluntary sector in order gain their views on the proposals, which Clinks used to inform its consultation response.

2. Consultation on the residential units for women announced in the Female Offender Strategy, Ministry of Justice

Hugh Howell, Policy Officer in the Vulnerable Offenders Policy Team at the MoJ, consulted with delegates about the Residential Women's Centre Pilot announced in the [Female Offender Strategy \(PDF\)](#). Hugh's presentation gave an overview of the MoJ's current position in developing the pilots and the key proposals. Key points from his presentation included:

- The MoJ have committed to piloting a residential women's centre in at least five sites across England and Wales.
- Services users will be provided with overnight accommodation for a fixed period of time. The minimum period of time as well as the physical specifications of the sites are still under consideration.
- The aim is to develop intensive residential-based support models in the community that provide effective, sustainable and scalable options for women in contact with the CJS that divert them from custody, improve their outcomes, and reduce the number of times they enter custody on short sentences.
- Each centre will need to provide wrap-around support so that during their stay, women can begin addressing their needs, including support for substance misuse, health, maintaining family ties, and education and employability. Service users will also receive support with

finding suitable and safe accommodation to ensure they are in a position to “move-on” at the end of their stay.

- In the long term, the aim is to reduce reoffending and reduce the number of women entering or re-entering custody on short sentences and recall, to enable women to maintain positive outcomes in the long-term in the areas listed above, and to reduce the intergenerational impact of being caught in a cycle of offending and custody.
- The service will need to work with a range of partners including probation services to facilitate any required offender management and enforcement activity as well sentencers, prisons, police, physical and mental health providers and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), to gain the necessary support from each organisation.

The presentation was followed by roundtable discussions about the key proposals. Attendees discussed the pros and cons of the proposals; the role of the voluntary sector and other stakeholders (e.g. PCCs) in the design and delivery of the residential units; and what additional service requirements the MoJ be should be considering. The following provides a summary of the key issues organisations raised:

The nature and purpose of the centres

- The extent to which involvement with the residential centres will be voluntary or enforced upon women, the punitive versus supportive intent, and the women that will be targeted by pilots - which has not yet been specified.
- The length of stay at the centre. If too short it can prevent meaningful intervention that addresses the causes of women’s offending and has long-term impacts on desistance. However if a minimum of six months or more is enforced that could conflict with the proportionality of sentence and offence, particularly if someone has already served a custodial part of their sentence.

The role of the voluntary sector

- The enforcement role that women’s voluntary sector organisations will be expected to play, and what scope there will be for organisations who do not want to do enforcement to remain involved in the delivery of services for women at the centres.
- The need for meaningful co-design with the women’s voluntary sector including smaller, specialist services such as those who deliver to black, Asian and minority ethnic women.

Meeting women’s needs

- Whether there will be provision for women with children on-site that enables them to maintain contact and, where possible, provide caring responsibilities.
- The capabilities of the centres to meet the complex needs of diverse cohorts of women who often experience multiple disadvantage.

‘Moving on’ – accommodation and ongoing support

- The current funding landscape and the effect this has on the surrounding provision of services. The effectiveness of the women’s residential centres will be limited if there is not sufficient funding for wrap-around services and ongoing access to support for women after they leave the centre.
- The lack of housing currently available for women in contact with the CJS. Women leaving the centres must have safe, stable and sustainable accommodation to move on to otherwise

it will undermine any progress made during their stay at the centre and impact on the centre's long-term results.

Service-user involvement

- A lack of consultation with women who have lived experience of the CJS in the design and development of the pilots.

3. How can the specialist women's sector build a sustainable network of quality provision?

Cullagh Warnock, Freelance Consultant

In the latter half of the meeting Cullagh Warnock gave a presentation on how the specialist women's sector can build a sustainable network of quality provision. The group then discussed the challenges to sustainability – and potential opportunities on the horizon. The following summarises the session.

Partnership working

Partnership working has many benefits; it enables large and smaller organisations to share resources and expertise as well as the benefits of scale and specialism that the other has. Cullagh suggested the sector build more networks and partnerships with each other, particularly given the current criminal justice policy and economic landscape. Some of the key changes and challenges identified in Cullagh's presentation and by delegates include: the impact of austerity (which has become the norm rather than a temporary measure), increasing devolution, the impact of the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms and further upcoming changes to probation following [the announcement by MoJ to review the structure and content of probation services](#).

As well as this, the current environment also poses challenges to creating effective partnerships and networks. The current market mentality creates unhelpful competitiveness between voluntary sector organisations, pitting them against one another and causing them to operate in siloes, which prevents collaboration, partnership working and a unified voice. The sector's fragmented funding creates a further barrier to building networks that are sustainable.

Accessing funding

The group discussed the funding landscape, highlighting that it is changing and the sector will have to adapt to meet those changes. There is currently limited funding available from central government and there will be changes to the funding coming through from local authorities. The delegates discussed how devolution could provide new opportunities and the importance of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) as a future source of funding for voluntary organisations. As there is greater recognition of women with complex needs, a greater emphasis on public health, and a greater move towards cross-agency approaches, there may be more alternative funding opportunities outside of criminal justice sources given the sector's work with women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

There are other funding sources that can also offer opportunities, including charitable trusts, philanthropists, and Local Community Foundations. Cullagh also spoke about the [Big Lottery's](#) changing approach to the way they grant funding - and to who.

The overriding message from the sector was to come together more, support each other and look for ways to work more closely with one another and deliver services together. Alliance contracting could provide an opportunity to fund more partnership working.

4. What next?

The key issues raised at this forum have been fed back to the [Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group \(RR3\)](#). Laura Seebohm, an RR3 member who chairs the women's networking forum, will continue to use the feedback to ensure they represent the sector at future RR3 meetings.

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

The next meeting of the women's networking forum will take place on **13th November 2018** in Liverpool.