


Three large, stylized arrows pointing towards the center: a green arrow from the left, a red arrow from the top, and a blue arrow from the right. They are set against a white background with a blue gradient at the top right.

Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair, Finance Committee
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Dear Chair

Re. Finance Committee call for information – Welsh Government Draft Budget proposals for 2024-25

Clinks is delighted to again be able to provide evidence to the Finance Committee about the Welsh Government Draft Budget. As the infrastructure organisation for the criminal justice voluntary sector in England and Wales, we will be focussing our evidence on the question, ‘Is the support provided by the Welsh Government for third sector organisations, which face increased demand for services as a consequence of the cost of living crisis and the pandemic, sufficient?’.

Clinks is a membership organisation with over 500 members, including the voluntary sector’s largest providers, as well as its smallest. We have 37 members who are either based in, or operate significant projects in, Wales. In addition, we have a dedicated member of staff whose role is specifically focussed around supporting the criminal justice voluntary sector in Wales and building relationships with statutory sector stakeholders.

Last year, [Clinks provided evidence to the Committee](#) drawing on the research we conducted as part of our *State of the sector* project, and our regular and ongoing engagement and support to the sector in Wales. This noted that the number of service users organisations were supporting was rising, there was an increase in service user need, and organisations reported planning to take on larger caseloads in response. It also saw organisations report significant rises in their operating costs as a result of rising inflation and cost of living.

The overall picture that Clinks presented in evidence to the Committee as part of its inquiry last year remains very similar. Below, we identify some updated figures based on our ongoing research and engagement with organisations in Wales.

As part of our forthcoming *State of the sector 2023* report, we again ran a survey of the criminal justice voluntary sector across England and Wales. We conducted the survey in the summer of 2023, asking about the 2022-23 financial year. This received over 100 responses of which 32% (46 organisations) said they operated in Wales. Of those organisations operating in Wales, most worked in South Wales and North Wales (78% and 76% of respondents operating in Wales respectively), with fewer operating in Gwent and Dyfed Powys (51% and 47% respectively).

In 2023, organisations across England and Wales continued to report a significant rise in the urgency, level, and complexity of service user need, continuing the trend seen across previous research.

Moreover, 63% also reported an increase in service user numbers in the most recent financial year, compared to the previous year. In response to the level, complexity, and urgency of service user need, 53% of respondents reported their staff were taking on larger caseloads, with the same percentage also saying they were seeking more funding.

The Welsh Government is a significant funding source for criminal justice voluntary organisations operating in Wales. In our 2023 survey, 22% of organisations operating in Wales said they applied for a grant from the Welsh Government. Moreover, 20% of Welsh respondents said government/statutory grants made up their organisation's largest source of income. As criminal justice is not a devolved area of government, this is particularly significant. There will be many organisations working in areas such as poverty relief, substance use, and accommodation who provide vital support to people in contact with the criminal justice system. The support these people receive from voluntary organisations in Wales is likely a lifeline to them, helping them to transform their lives.

Given the situation facing the Welsh criminal justice voluntary sector, it is, therefore, essential the Welsh Government, in its budget, recognises the role it plays in supporting these organisations, and the people those organisations work with. As we outlined to the Committee last year, this can most effectively be done by providing flexible, unrestricted, multi-year grants. The cost-of-living crisis continues to drive up costs for voluntary organisations: in our 2023 survey, 78% of all respondents said their costs increased, with 47% saying they had increased significantly. As such, these grants must reflect the real costs of providing the support that people in contact with the criminal justice system need. Clinks will continue to advocate that both the government in Westminster and the Welsh Government adequately fund the voluntary sector. In addition, Clinks is continuing to work with ministers and officials in the Ministry of Justice to try to improve commissioning and funding for voluntary organisations operating across England and Wales.

With the current pressures faced by prisons around capacity, and the measures being introduced to try to address this issue, there are also currently acute challenges that need to be considered. The rising prison population will likely exacerbate the already stretched resources of voluntary organisations at a time where prison overcrowding may mean people require additional support.

[Research by Dr Robert Jones from the Welsh Governance Centre at Cardiff University](#) also highlights some of the specific challenges Welsh prisons have been facing, in addition to the current capacity pressures. This found that, in 2022, there were 151 Welsh people in prison (based on home address) per 100,000 of the Welsh population. This is compared to a rate of 134 English people in prison per 100,000 of the English population. [Compared to imprisonment rates in 2022](#), this would give Wales a higher imprisonment rate than England and Wales as a whole, and the highest in Western Europe. Amongst other things, this research by Dr Jones also found the average number of people held in Welsh prisons surpassed 5,000 for the first time in 2022, and the previously identified trends of racially minoritised people in Wales being over-represented in almost all stages of the criminal justice system continued in 2022.

[Previous research from Dr Jones](#) published in 2020 also noted the Welsh prison estate was facing a disproportionate number of Covid-19 infections. It was found that, as of June 2020, one in five of all

confirmed cases of Covid-19 among people in prison were being reported in Welsh prisons, despite them only holding 6% of the total prison population across England and Wales.

The Government's plans to introduce a presumption against prison sentences of 12 months or less, in favour of suspended sentences is very much welcomed by the sector. However, [this change is forecast to lead to an increase of between 1,700 and 6,800 in community caseloads](#). Non-quantified costs are also anticipated to include community resources such as health and housing.

Other measures in the Sentencing Bill and Criminal Justice Bill, such as the expansion of Home Detention Curfew, which has also been welcomed by the sector, the making of Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements automatic for certain groups, and the extension of polygraph testing will also place further burdens on an already stretched probation system. This means it is important the Welsh Government works carefully with the voluntary sector to ensure organisations have the financial resources available to continue to support people in prison, on licence, and serving community sentences as they are likely to be facing increased demand and pressures.

As a significant funder of the sector in Wales, the Welsh Government's budget can provide vital support for Welsh voluntary organisations through flexible, unrestricted, multi-year grants. By ensuring the Welsh criminal justice voluntary sector is adequately resourced, organisations can continue to work with people in contact with the criminal justice system to help them transform their lives, and so reduce reoffending. Insufficient funding will result in organisations having to make cutbacks to their services, even though demand for help and support from people in contact with the justice system continues to rise.

We would be very happy to provide any further information to the Committee that may assist it in its work.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Julius'.

Sam Julius
Head of Influence and Communications
Clinks