



What is the impact of policy change on those working with offenders and victims of crime?

DrugScope Roundtable Event for a Home Office/Clinks Monitoring Change project

Background and context

The Roundtable Meeting was held at The Gestalt Centre in London on the 29 March. There were 11 participants, including representatives from a range of drug and alcohol services working with people with drug and alcohol problems. They represented different kinds of treatment intervention (for example, community and residential), size of organisation (from larger national organisations to smaller local providers) and worked with a range of client groups (including offenders, homeless, young people, women, families and BME communities). Some had a particular focus on offenders, others were working more generally with people affected by drug and alcohol problems.

DrugScope was asked to hold a roundtable event for providers of drug treatment services in the voluntary and community sector to discuss the impact of recent policy and funding changes with a particular focus on offenders and victims of crime. The session was conducted under the Chatham House rule so no comments are attributed to particular participants. The summary of key points below is based on comments made by particular contributors during the discussion, and will not necessarily reflect the views of all, although there did appear to be a high degree of consensus on key issues.

The session was introduced with presentations from Kate Aldous (Project Manager at Clinks) explaining the background to the project and the parameters for the discussion. Marcus Roberts, Director of Policy and Membership at DrugScope, then provided a brief overview of policy and funding developments (power point slides attached). It was noted that drug treatment was relevant to Home Office policy in a number of ways:

- Services work directly with offenders and victims of crime (including in prisons and with offenders on Drug Rehabilitation Requirements and accessing services through the Drug Interventions Programme);
- Services work with other clients who may have a history of offending or be at risk of offending, particularly given the evidence-base for the links between problem drug use and acquisitive crime;

- Services are often involved with victims of crime – notably victims of domestic violence;
- The Home Office also has overall responsibility for the drug strategy.

It follows that the range of policy and funding changes impacting on drug services will be relevant to their work with offenders and victims of crime. These include the allocation of the pooled treatment budget for 2011-12, Local Authority Financial Settlements for 2011-12 and the ambitions for drug and alcohol treatment in the 2010 Drug Strategy and the Building Recovery in Communities consultation – as well as proposals in the Ministry of Justice’s Breaking the Cycle Green Paper.

The key issues discussed included the impact of the new funding environment; the Big Society agenda and the role of the voluntary and community sector; localism in a period of austerity; and the ambition (against this background) to develop a recovery-orientated approach to drug and alcohol treatment.

Key points from the discussion

1. The overall impact. The pooled treatment budget for 2011-12 was £570 million only about 1.6 per cent less in real terms than the previous year, this was welcomed as a sign of the Government’s commitment to drug services where other services were being cut. However, a number of participants had direct experience of Local Authority funding (which accounts for as much as half the total investment in some areas) being cut back. Young people’s services appear to be particularly hard hit. One participant reported that there were concerns locally that there could be as much as a 50 per cent cut in local young people’s services, which were experiencing cuts in staffing. This also impacts on the remaining services that have to pick up the work, with the risk that they focus on a basic services and things like early intervention and social integration work get left behind. To date, the group did not report comparable cuts to adult services. But there were reports of some service closures.

It was noted that disinvestment in other local services (for example, housing or domestic violence) will have an impact on the ability of drug and alcohol services to work effectively with clients and deliver recovery and re-integration outcomes. There was a particular concern about the impact from loss of Supporting People funding. One participant commented that ‘an example is the change of housing benefit rules for claimants up to 35 years of age – it will be more difficult to support recovery if someone is only able to live in a hostel or shared house (possibly where other people are using drugs or alcohol) with no prospect of a transfer to social housing’.

It was commented that key organisations in the sector have always had a focus on recovery, and an anxiety was expressed that ‘*some of the*

services that are currently under threat are those that are best placed to evidence recovery’.

Some services commented on the increased use of staff resources to pursue funding opportunities, even where the prospects of success were not high. One smaller organisation reported that it had submitted 20 funding bids, with 19 having failed to attract funds. This was a significant drain on resources.

Participant comments

‘at the moment it is all about whether you can survive or not.’

‘when you add up the bits that have been lost it begins to add up to a significant percentage of your overall income’

2. A number of positive opportunities were identified. It was commented that In the drive to open up the market in the sector there were opportunities to move to more integrated contracting and the greater involvement of charities in public service delivery. The loss of contracts previously being held by a group of individual services could motivate them to develop collaborative approaches, with the potential to reduce overhead costs, benefit from economies of scale and make organisations more ‘front facing’. There are opportunities for organisations ‘to work smarter’. It was acknowledged that a more challenging environment was *‘causing some organisations to act more intelligently – for example, four or five organisations in the area pooling skills with other organisations in order to survive.’*

There was recognition of a commitment in the Spending Review to protect the most vulnerable – for example, investment in pooled community budgets (initially in 16 areas) targeted at the most vulnerable families. This was welcomed. One concern was how this will be sold locally where other services are cut. It was commented: *‘we hear that problematic individuals and families will get investments – but if this is made public to the general population they may not like this as it will seem that families/individuals that are perceived as causing problems are getting money’.*

3. The wider business and economic environment is impacting on drug and alcohol services. Like organisations in other sectors, these VCS providers were concerned about general economic issues like the impact of rising VAT, NI contributions, pension contributions and an overall rising cost base. In the current environment they felt there was limited opportunity to achieve full cost recovery. Under these conditions it was observed that *‘there won’t be opportunities for smaller organisations that can’t compete on cost with larger organisations’*, with the risk that locally embedded voluntary and community sector organisations will be driven out.

More widely it was suggested that the impact of spending cuts to the public sector will increase demand for services – while there may be opportunities for the VCS, there is also a risk that it will be overwhelmed.

Participant comments

'VAT increase has an impact on services, from training provision, even down to stationary orders being minimised'.

'The risk is that you start to scale down some of the things that defined you as a good employer'.

'You can find that in meetings the service user is not being mentioned, because staff are anxious about their own jobs'.

'I am continually surprised at how low contracts are going out at – how can services deliver for that price?'

4. Markets and the values of the voluntary and community sector. The distinctive contribution of VCS organisations in the drug and alcohol sector is partly a reflection of their value base, and it is important that policy and funding is supportive of this if it wants to harness much of what is valuable in the VCS approach. In a more market orientated system, where there may be a number of stakeholders chasing contracts, service users can come to represent a cash value to services with a focus on interventions that can get an outcome after a relatively short period of treatment. The Government has expressed a commitment to building services around individuals, and rejecting a paper chasing and tick box approach. The experience of VCS providers is that often the real impact on people's lives of treatment interventions comes later, and the data later still. Where clients have multiple interventions – that can be delivered in silos by voluntary, community and statutory organisations – there is a danger that at the end of the year they are chased by a number of different organisations not for sake of support but because they are all after evidence to demonstrate an intervention has been given, this process itself may be detrimental for the client.

Participants were unclear about the status of the Home Office Voluntary Sector compact, and said that it didn't currently appear to be a point of reference for commissioners and others.

Participant comment

'I am concerned that the personalisation agenda may be slowly edged out, as it seems to be less talked about'.

'What happened to the voluntary sector compact? In Summer, the Government said that they supported it and wanted to strengthen it, but I haven't heard anything about it since'.

5. Impact of process of change on staff morale. Some services reported that they were having to issue redundancy notices, and had lost staff. There

was an issue of staff morale, and it was felt this would inevitably impact on clients too. It is more challenging to deliver the recovery-orientated and aspirational services demanded in the Drug Strategy 2010 where staff are insecure in their posts. The point was made that failure to respond effectively to issues of staff morale would have longer-term business costs – for example, in absence and loss of key staff from the organisation and/or sector.

Participant comments

'Staff having to work with larger caseloads now which diverts the time they have to reach isolated people in the community.'

'Rationing and waiting lists are going up as other projects are closing therefore referrals are increasing who they just can't get round to assess.'

'The Recovery Agenda stresses the importance of workforce development, but this is at a time when workforce morale is low. In practice how can we deliver ambitious recovery based programmes under these conditions?'

6. The use of volunteers. The participants welcomed the appropriate use of volunteers – for example, the greater interest in peer mentoring and mutual aid in drug and alcohol policy and the recognition of the value of volunteering to support the recovery and reintegration of people in drug and alcohol treatment. However, there was concern that at a time when services were experiencing economic pressures there could be an incentive to view volunteers as a alternative to paid staff. It was noted that the effective use of volunteers required a proper framework, training and supervision, and this is a significant resource investment - volunteers are not 'a cost free option'. Using volunteers who were not suitably qualified for their roles involved risks to the safety of service provision and the service user. The sector needs to be careful about how volunteers are used and there is a potential for service users to be used inappropriately. It was felt that there was a need for guidance on the use of volunteers.

Participant comments

'Anecdotally the specific use of volunteers to staff hostels has been surprising. Volunteers with little expertise or experience being put into some quite intense projects.'

'There is a huge potential for exploitation. Mutual aid may to be seen as an alternative to treatment, rather than supporting it.'

'There's an expectation that staff should be NVQ level trained with volunteers there's a deprofessionalisation of the field in which there has been huge investment in workforce development.'

'Volunteers doing work that qualified graduate workers are doing, how would you feel, entering a hospital or a doctor's surgery for treatment and being treated by volunteers?'

'We used to use volunteers but this became human resource intensive when they didn't turn up – when you are a staff member you have clear hours and responsibilities, but that is not the same for volunteers.'

7. Issues for managers. Senior managers are involved in strategic planning within their organisations, at a time of adjustment to a changing policy environment. They are looking – for example – at workforce development issues and asking 'what do you require in terms of values, competencies, resources, etc to deliver recovery orientated services'. At the same time, this is a period of uncertainty and anxiety for staff, who may be faced by the prospect of redundancy, and many staff will be concerned about their jobs. Organisations talked about the various approaches they are taking to human resource management and staff welfare, including individual support for staff, regional forums and staff surveys. It was commented that it is important not to get so tied up with internal management that organisations lose their 'outward' focus – including meeting and working with commissioners. A related point was made about the potential impact on 'Head Office' resources where there are pressures on income.

The limited support for Trustees was also raised – Trustees play a vital role in the governance of VCS organisations, but it is challenging for them to keep pace with policy and funding changes during a period of rapid and significant change.

Participant comments

'There is a question of being transparent of how cuts are affecting a service but then you also need to be able to manage staff anxiety because the anxiety transfers to the service user.'

'Trustees can find it hard to understand the complexity of the changes faced by service providers – it's a huge challenge for them to keep up with everything that is going on'.

8. Contractual issues and cash flow. TUPE emerged as a key issue. From the point of view of VCS organisations, they may be required by TUPE law to take over staff from statutory or other agencies, but expected to deliver a different/improved level of service. A particular issue is the capacity of VCS organisations to take over responsibility for staff pensions and the financial risk this entails (one participant commented that 'transfer of local authority pensions could potentially put limitless risk on providers'). From the point of view of staff, some people could potentially find themselves working for a succession of organisations – across both statutory and VCS sectors – as services are recommissioned and TUPE is applied, which is not supportive of belonging, identify and values. It was commented that in a 'buyers market' contracts favoured the commissioner over the provider. Some services said they were being asked for more interventions data which did not appear to have relevance to the contract. Cashflow was

identified as a key issue – for example, it was commented that the experience was the Local Authorities were often late with payments.

Participant comments

'A major issue is that you are taking over NHS contracts under TUPE rules and there can be a great deal of resentment that a voluntary organisation has taken over the service. In the TUPE process the organisational culture may impact on staff in unforeseen ways e.g. why should you have an allegiance to a new contractor?'

'Contractually, all the risk seems to fall with the provider and is not shared'.

'Some commissioners don't understand the consequences for VCS providers of some of the contractual issues. We need to look at standards of commissioning'.

'Cash flow has been an issue since a change of contracts so the Local Authority is now paying in arrears.'

'Our reports are always on time to the Local Authority, but the payment from them is never on time'.

9. Impact of criminal justice reform. The commitment to reduce short-term sentencing was welcome but it was commented that thought needs to be given to the impact on services. For example in the Ministry of Justice's *Breaking the Cycle* Green Paper there is an assumption that the prison population will fall, which means that people who would have gone to prison will require housing at a time when there is already a shortfall in social housing, and concerns about disinvestment in housing support (for example, with the removal of the Supporting People ring fence).
10. Interpretation of national policy at local level. There can be a tendency for national policy directions to be interpreted unhelpfully at local level, particularly where there is a lack of 'meat on the bones' of policy themes such as localism and the Big Society. Commissioners may try to anticipate what they take to be the direction of travel of national policy - for example, the Drug Recovery Payment by Results pilots are affecting commissioning outside the pilot areas.

Roundtable Consultation Report



Background

NCVYS was asked by Clinks to support their Home Office funded work exploring the impact of the comprehensive spending review on the voluntary and community sector at a time when there are many changes taking place to challenge the Sector working in the area of crime prevention and victim support.

The project was established to identify the impact of the above on the Sector, what the key issues are, and in particular its ability to contribute to reducing crime and address issues of community safety, and work with statutory sector.

The Home Office were interested in the following areas:

Violence against women
Youth Crime
Victim Support
Drugs
Crime prevention

As a key infrastructure organisation NCVYS was requested to identify 5 organisations involved in community safety/crime reduction work which could provide an insight into developing efficient ways of working during a time of change and financial restraint.

They were asked to participate in two Clinks-led London workshops, one in December 2010 and one in February 2011, and between workshops, to write a case study of their experiences as the reform agenda is introduced including experiences of working in partnership with the statutory sector such as Community Safety Partnerships (police, local authorities, Drug Action Teams, Local Criminal Justice Boards).

NCVYS was also requested to run a roundtable consultation event to collect the experiences of youth organisations to:

- understand VCS experience of the current changes, the Coalition's reform agenda and the impact of these now and in the future .
- understand VCS experience of working with the statutory sector, for e.g. on Community Safety Partnerships, on crime prevention and victim support agendas.

- identify any specific support needs for the immediate transition period, and for ensuring sustainability in longer term (2011-13)

Roundtable Consultation Event

NCVYS contacted its membership inviting those working in the area of community safety to the roundtable event on Friday 18 March 2011. Twelve organisations responded and on the day itself the following were able to attend. Participants were also directed to the Clinks discussion papers and a survey available on their website.

Key areas for discussion

On the day of the roundtable consultation event participants were given an overview of NCVYS and Clinks involvement with the project, and then split into two small groups to look at the following questions:

- How do the changes in the funding and delivery landscape affect the VCS and its ability to work with the Home Office and other Government Departments?
- How can we ensure that the needs of vulnerable people and communities are still met?
- How can the Home Office develop a partnership with the VCS during this time of transition that is also sustainable in the longer term?
- Where relevant, how can the relationship between VCS and Community Safety Partnerships can be strengthened?
- What support you require from the Home Office and other government departments?

The following were used as additional prompts:

- Changes in local commissioning
- Development of new investment models
- Police and Crime Commissioners
- Availability of crime data
- Localism / decentralization

Participants then came together again to present their key points and engaged in further discussion which is recorded below.

Key recommendations

The group focused on 5 questions

1. How do the changes in the funding and delivery landscape affect the VCS and its ability to work with the Home Office and other Government Departments?

Those working in youth justice are often dealing with young people who have left the criminal justice system. They felt the focus should be on funding and providing preventative work as this is much more cost effective, but this needs a long term perspective, too often government are focused on short term fixes which only mask the deeper issues.

The group agreed that a key area of prevention work was education, for example, one organisation worked with a 14 year old boy who was incarcerated on a murder charge and sent to a secure children's home and provided with full time education. As the evidence came out it became clear that he probably wasn't involved in murder, they were able to get him bail, however his school refused to take him back, and they couldn't get his Local Authority (LA) to pay for continuation of education. There are two key stage 4 provisions in his borough they cost £9000 a year, they can't afford that, currently people are paying £120,000 a year to incarcerate him, but the LA can't pay £9,000 to educate him.

Participants felt this need for prevention could be compared with the NHS, over time the government has invested in prevention; with smoking there was a point when treatment of lung cancer was acknowledged as hugely expensive, they realised they could prevent this cost if they stopped people smoking in the first place, the difficulty was the balance with tax from tobacco vs. treatment of cancer. But a shift came about, the recognition that prevention is more effective, and the fact that some people have continued to smoke does not mean that they do not receive treatment for their cancer.

2 How can we ensure that the needs of vulnerable people and communities are still met?

Once a young person has left the criminal justice system it is important to get them onto an educational or vocational course as soon as possible. Often young people are waiting 3-5 months for a course to commence and this gap in provision can lead to that young person reoffending. It is also important that these positive activities are tailored to each individual, therefore the course must allow for flexibility. Already cuts to EMA have seen attendance levels in education dropping.

The group were concerned with the latest Woolf report *Review of vocational education* as the report focuses on the middle tier who aren't achieving what they could, but the young people they work with are arguably below the lowest tier.

There is a perception that this report is suitable for all young people, however the young people they engage with have very low self esteem, and complex issues and they require tailored education and training.

Many of those present had stories about young people being forced to sell drugs to fund educational courses, or to survive. For example a young homeless man had spoken with one of the participants about how he wants his own place, but he knows that they can't give him that, so he is selling drugs in order to achieve this. Another young man in Leeds who had left prison, wanted to get onto a Forklift course but they have cut funding for this, it pays better than factory work and he really wants to do the course, so he told his youth worker he would sell drugs for a bit and then get on that course, of course the worker advised him against this, but the young person felt he had no other choice. If there are fewer opportunities and funding for young people then some will find their income from illegal means.

And even when young people can access education they need to be given opportunities to start a new life on leaving prison, for example an organisation that worked with a young person who had left prison at 15 when he had done 20 GCSEs all A's and B's and no one would consider him for a job. The organisation spoke to the funders and they agreed to fund a college course, and would make sure he gets £50 a week, but when they spoke with housing benefit they refused to assess him as he was receiving Job Seeker's Allowance. Tailored support is required for young people that have left prison and are seeking further education.

3 How can the Home Office develop a partnership with the VCS during this time of transition that is also sustainable in the longer term?

The Home Office needs to create National Standards to ensure that all the work at the local level is equal. If decentralisation is the focus then the Home Office must ensure universality of provision and that there isn't a postcode lottery. Though the relationship would be between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Local Authority, the Home Office should create a central channel of communication that will reach government.

There was a fear that if the Home Office backed off completely, then the Local Authorities may not do anything, as the Home Office would be passing down money without standards or expectations. Localisation needs joined up thinking; the VCS could share learning and make it work bigger and better.

4 Where relevant, how can the relationship between VCS and Community Safety Partnerships can be strengthened?

The CSP is seen as too police driven and it is identified by the community as an extension of the police, rather than a community benefit. It needs to be broader and not so much focused on the police aspect but the wider community aspect. Plus it is hard to know how to engage with the local CSP programmes.

Quite a few of those present spoke of how the police presence had in fact alienated the community, there is an essential problem in using the police to work on a community project, when they are the enforcers. In the communities where Community Safety is most needed they may not be trusted and may be met with hostility.

There was also a concern about PCC elected officials who could respond to hysteria, media and prejudice, there needs to be national safeguards in place, with the elected individual subject to equality duties, and there could be a case for legal intervention to stop it being a populist role.

5 What support do you require from the Home Office and other government departments?

The sector requires capacity building funding, to stop the VCS relying on central government funding. The VCS also requires funding to help local organisations to transition from local funding to other sources but they need a proper transition period without which they would collapse. The transition fund is too small and inaccessible, and there is a huge gap between expectations and what it can achieve. This period has in fact led to a loss of skills and a loss of commissioning expertise due to redundancies. Organisations felt there would be an increase in street level violence if organisations don't get further funding through the transition period.

Other key topics

Funding and Commissioning

There is currently not a level playing field for applying for funding; a private sector team has 40 people whose sole role is to win bids, therefore the government needs to support the VCS to be equal partners.

There were also anxieties about local VCS organisations not having the expertise and high standards that national organisations do. For example a small, local organisation maybe passionate about the cause, but this could be combined with a lack of expertise at a local level and a financially insecure future. Therefore commissioners need to know what would generate the most impact from their funding; the Home Office could run courses on education for successful commissioning on results for commissioners.

Focus on results

There was a mixed view on this, some felt this focus on results took them away from their work on the ground with the young people, forcing them to complete paper work when they could be working directly with young people. Whereas others felt this was a fantastic opportunity if the government does it properly. Though there needs to be an understanding that to get really powerful data takes time and money.

Conclusion

There is a need for the Home Office to set out clear standards so that Local Authorities and charities can work together to ensure that all young people receive the same level of service, regardless of the area they live in.

Education is the central building block to allow young people to start a new life on leaving prison, but they require tailored courses and support.

The key demand was a focus on long term thinking beyond a government's term that would allow for palpable benefits in the future. But there is currently a real need for funding right now, as organisations make the transition to becoming more independent of Home Office funding.



Roundtable Consultation Event Report
‘Doing More with Less: Partnership Solutions to cuts in public spending’

Date: Monday, 28th March 2011

Venue: Victim Support National Centre, Hallam House, 56-60 Hallam Street, London, W1W 6JL

The following report outlines the key discussion topics at the roundtable event and highlights a number of challenges and proposed solutions.

1.1 How have the changes in the funding and delivery landscape affected all our organisations and our ability to work with the Home Office and other government departments?

The organisations represented recognised that the changes in the funding and delivery landscape had impacted on our work with the Home Office and other government departments.

There was a consensus that cuts in local authority funding have made a big impact to the VCS organisations represented at the event. It was recognised that each local authority has reacted differently to the changes. One of the benefits identified was the increase in partnership working between charities and local authorities, as some local authorities have invited charities to apply for certain funding streams that they cannot apply for themselves.

The difficulties identified were:

- The funding cuts have affected work with statutory agencies. For example, Imara was going to work within the police force but due to funding cuts, it had to find another way to work with the police and is now a partner.
- Reductions in funding have led to reduction in staffing resources which in turn have caused an increase in waiting lists/times for clients needing specialised services. This has led to organisations needing to re-focus services to attempt to fill identified gaps.
- Agencies that organisations previously signposted clients to have disappeared or shifted focus, resulting in needs of clients not being met.
- Although some partners have taken advantage of year end funding available, future funding is not visible. This has led to a lack of direction,

for example for Youth Offending Teams, and uncertainty about how services will be delivered in the future.

- Local authorities and police want more from charities than they can provide. This can be due to the lack of infrastructure of the charity.
- We do not yet know the full extent and impact of cuts, for example on police, local authorities and NHS. This results in additional uncertainty and may lead to staff redundancies that could be avoided if future funding levels were known.
- We can foresee the cuts having a longer term impact on future society, for example young people, but it is unclear to what extent.
- One participant has seen the impact on a national and local level: having had its funding cut by two-thirds, the infrastructure support it can provide to VCS organisations will be affected. The local impact depends on individual projects and authorities, leading to inconsistencies of service.
- The cuts in some areas seem counter-productive against the backdrop of the “Big Society” and the localism agenda. For example, some volunteer centres may close, discouraging rather than encouraging volunteering.
- The cuts appear to be uncoordinated and in silos. This could impact on the level of crime if preventative work stops.

1.2 What can be done by organisations like Clinks and Victim Support to ensure that our partners in the voluntary and community sector are supported to meet the needs of vulnerable people and communities?

It was recognised that a partnership approach would lead to effective service delivery to meet the needs of vulnerable people and communities. Ways to ensure this can be achieved were discussed, and a number of solutions identified.

Organisations like Clinks and Victim Support could:

- Take on the administrative burden of managing partnerships to overcome the challenge, to smaller organisations without a large infrastructure, of partnerships being time and resource intensive.
- Provide national advocacy on behalf of VCS organisations, to deliver joint messages and flex their existing relationships with government departments for the benefit of their partners. Many organisations at the event had relationships with different departments, such as Department of Health, Ministry of Justice, Home Office, and Local Authorities, and there

was consensus that people saw strength in joining forces and sharing contacts more widely.

- Act as a broker and commission services to ensure organisations meet the needs of clients and are quality assured. Organisations at the event described this as a “dating agency”. There was a recognised need to consider; risk management, reputational risk, infrastructure, quality assurance, training, assessment and accreditation, independent evaluation and value for money.
- Offer peer-to-peer support, for example a new organisation that does not meet the criteria to apply for funding could join up with and learn from a more established organisation.
- Provide information on how and when to initiate partnership working, as the organisations at the event had all seen increased competition for funding and service delivery, which has resulted in ineffective partnerships when the organisations support the same client group. It was recognised that organisations should:
 - create trust with potential partners
 - understand potential partners’ services, values and ethos
 - be clear in what they can and cannot deliver
 - build on strengths and play on unique selling points
 - understand the importance of measuring outcomes

To ensure further that VCS organisations are supported in meeting the needs of vulnerable people and communities, the government could:

- Encourage collaboration and information sharing. For example, introduce incentives to support partnership working.
- Co-ordinate the evaluation of services, which are independent, sustainable and cost effective.

1.3 How can the Home Office develop a partnership with our organisations during this time of transition? And how can that be sustained in the longer term?

Organisations at the event discussed what is meant by “partnerships”, and that they need not necessarily be resource intensive. The perception was that many

government departments focus on process rather than outcomes. There was a varied response when asking about current relations with the Home Office.

The Home Office and other government departments could:

- Offer longer term funding which would enable projects/services to plan/evolve and would assist the transition for future partnerships. This would give the sector the stability to identify gaps, understand how to fill them and recognize what we should continue to do or cease delivering. Many organisations at the event had seen the benefits of sustained 4 or 5 years funding.
- Provide rewards for collaborative work (such as cash, increased participation in decisions), with particular focus on smaller organisations that need a national voice.
- Facilitate the evaluation of services, to identify gaps in services and commissioning, which in turn would provide organisations with a steer on the skills they need to deliver their core work.
- Inform VCS organisations what outcomes they want from the sector to enable a clear focus in where resources should be placed.
- Fund an organisation to develop a database of research and evaluations, and possibly establish a network of universities who are doing research in relevant fields, to relieve the sector of some of the costs associated with evaluations.
- Establish partnerships with larger organisations, such as Victim Support and/or Clinks, which have the infrastructure to advocate on behalf of the sector and become a critical friend and a conduit for information.

As partners to the Home Office and other government departments, VCS organisations could:

- Join forces and lobby as one voice, to support each other in this time of transition.
- Hold a roundtable event every 6 months to allow organisations to ensure they are developing partnerships in the right direction.
- Establish a network of partners to ensure consistency in the way organisations are quality assured, including considering value for money, being cautious of delivering more for less, and to reduce duplication of services.

1.4 How can the relationship between the VCS and the Community Safety Partnerships be strengthened?

Current relationships with the Community Safety Partnerships varied depending on the organisation and even within organisations. For example, some areas of Victim Support individuals sit on both strategic and operational Community Safety Partnership boards whilst some individuals sit on neither. This could be the result of personal choice or local protocols.

Organisations at the event identified a number of issues with Community Safety Partnerships:

- Some individuals were unaware of the benefits of the Community Safety Partnerships.
- Some find it difficult to engage with Community Safety Partnerships, due to lack of awareness, time and resources.
- Often one representative organisation from the VCS is chosen to sit on the Community Safety Partnerships, but more often than not this is not representative of the VCS as a whole and does not benefit many sectors of the VCS.
- Most Community Safety Partnerships have had cuts in funding, which has reduced the financial incentive to encourage organisations to attend.
- Some of the Community Safety Partnership meetings are seen as “talking shops” with very little benefit to day to day service delivery.

The organisations at the event highlighted the advantages of Community Safety Partnerships, such as small pots of funding that would be useful to the VCS and the opportunity at Community Safety Partnership meetings and events to network with statutory and voluntary partners.

The relationship between the VCS and the Community Safety Partnership can be strengthened by the Community Safety Partnerships:

- Allowing the VCS to have more than one representative to ensure local voices and needs are identified and heard.
- Providing guidance to VCS partners on the benefits of participation.
- Supporting and advising the VCS organisations on how to engage, especially for newly formed organisations.
- Facilitating the participation of organisations without the need to be physically present at the meetings but to still have a voice.
- Clarifying the objectives of each meeting.

- Holding open meetings in the community, which in turn will achieve the “Big Society” vision.

1.5 Conclusion

All attendees expressed willingness to attend another event, if any arise in the future. Whilst some of the discussion centred on the negative impact of the changes in funding and delivery landscape, several solutions were proposed and much of the focus was on the positives of partnership working and potential for future relationships.

The key recommendations for the Home Office and other government departments were:

- Provide infrastructure support to VCS organisations
- Provide longer term funding
- Reward/incentivise organisations for working in partnership
- Be clear on the desired outcomes from the VCS and how each organisation can contribute
- Advise Community Safety Partnerships that they should; (1) engage more representatives from the VCS and (2) provide VCS representatives with more advice and guidance on how to participate in these partnerships.

The key recommendations for Victim Support, Clinks and other large organisations were:

- Provide national advocacy – deliver joint messages on behalf of others in the sector
- Provide a "dating agency" function – whereby one organisation acts as a broker and establishes a network of partners
- Offer peer-to-peer support – locally or nationally
- Explore providing a database of research and possibly a network of universities to ease the process of evaluating all our projects and services
- Hold future roundtable events
- Act as critical friends to government departments and a conduit for information flow in both directions.

Womens Resource Centre:

Assessing the impact of spending cuts on the delivery of services to reduce re-offending, supporting victims and protecting communities

Introduction

As part of a one day consultation event, Clinks and the Womens Resource Centre invited twelve frontline women's organisations to hear their views on how the voluntary and community sector, as key partners in delivering the Government's 'Big Society' vision is coping against the backdrop of the cuts. Drawing expertise from across the women's voluntary sector, the group was comprised of specialist women's organisations working to support the needs of women offenders.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences of the current economic and political climate and discuss its implications for service delivery. The group identified challenges and opportunities that lay ahead for the women's sector and how they might respond and engage with the government's new agenda.

Throughout the workshop participants discussed the key problems affecting women's organisations and active ways these might be overcome. Participants discussed the role they wished the Home Office (HO) would play in supporting the women's sector and ways to improve the relation between the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and government.

The focus of the groups' discussions centred upon five key questions:

1. How do the changes in the funding and delivery landscape affect the VCS and its ability to work with the HO and other Government Departments?
2. How can we ensure that the needs of vulnerable people and communities are still met?
3. How can the HO develop a partnership with the VCS during this time of transition that is also sustainable in the longer term?
4. Where relevant, how can the relationship between VCS and Community Safety Partnerships can be strengthened?
5. What support you require from the HO and other government departments?

The following report provides a summary of the key themes raised in the workshop discussions and the key asks and actions put forward by the group.

How can the HO develop a partnership with the VCS during this time of transition that is also sustainable in the longer term?

Participants were receptive to the idea of developing a partnership with the HO however they stressed that it must be founded on mutual respect. Organisations commented that they wanted to be able to negotiate as equal partners and have parity of skills, information and resources.

Participants stressed that the VCS did not want 'just warm words' but wanted financial and political investment in the work of the women's sector. They want to see the HO proactively engage with women's organisations and ensure sustainable funding for their work.

Participants wanted to see meaningful engagement with the VCS, with the HO seeking the VCS' opinion before a decision is made and evidence that the opinions given are counted. Participants hoped that the HO could provide clarity on engagement and consultation frameworks in government departments and lead by example by displaying best practice.

Participants were very clear that they wanted the HO to be more aware of what they were asking the voluntary sector to do and to understand the demands and constraints placed upon them. They hoped to see greater acknowledgement of the capacity issues faced by frontline organisations and felt stronger lines of communication could inform more realistic objectives and effective policies.

Participants commented that a meaningful partnership between the HO and VCS was also contingent on the HO's cooperation with other government departments. They felt that a cross-government strategy was necessary to

ensure comprehensive approach on offending and capitalise on strengths across sectors.

Participants felt that by providing a strategic overview the HO would also help to address practical frontline problems relating to incarceration. For example, the VCS and probation services often find themselves at odds with one another due to fears amongst the probation service that voluntary organisations will take their jobs. They also hoped that the HO would focus on preventative work as well as tackling current problems and work with the VCS to tackle the causes of women's offending.

Whilst participants were positive about the possibility of developing a partnership with the HO, they highlighted the tension of how this might practically fit with the government's new localised approach.

Participants stressed that it was necessary to have a national overview to have a full understanding of women's offending, however they felt it was important to acknowledge that women's issues may be marginalised under the new Localism agenda. Participants hoped that the HO would help to deliver the accountability of local authorities and ensure that they are doing needs assessments.

Participants also hoped that they could assist the work of the women's sector by identifying authorities who lack women's services and lobbying them to introduce them.

Participants envisaged that the HO would also play an important role in identifying problems and providing continuous evaluation of women's services. This active assessment approach would support improvements in the quality of services for women offenders and ensure comprehensive provision.

How do the changes in the funding and delivery landscape affect the VCS and its ability to work with the HO and other Government Departments?

There was unanimous agreement amongst participants that the government's new funding models regarding female offending; were not working for the women's voluntary sector. Organisations stated that the measures were designed and implemented without sufficient consultation with women's organisations and were already having a devastating impact on their services.

Payment by Results

Participants commented that the Payment by Results (PbR) system was hugely problematic and encouraged providers to work with offenders who are easy to rehabilitate, rather than those with complex needs. They felt the system encouraged 'cherry picking' which would compromise the integrity of the service and encourage providers to make inappropriate value judgments about who is 'worth' working with.

Participants commented that due to the harsh funding environment, some organisations were already facing the options of 'easy wins' or closure. This was both negative for joint working and counterproductive to the government's broader aims. Participants stressed that in order to prevent female reoffending, the government instead needs to support the sustainability of women's voluntary organisations and value their expertise in working with women offenders who have multiple needs.

Participants commented that definition of the term 'results' was problematic within itself and that there was not enough direct consultation with the women's VCS on this subject. They felt that the term 'result' was subjective and most importantly failed to understand outcomes from a service user perspective.

Participants also added that the model failed to acknowledge the limits of organisations' ability to prevent re-incarceration and the reality that there may be some offenders who may not 'get better'. Participants felt that it should be acknowledged that despite the valiant efforts of the voluntary sector, they did not have the ability to physically control offender's behaviour and other external forces that may destabilise their progress.

Participants commented that the funding model appeared to examine women's offending in isolation and failed to acknowledge wider issues which make women more likely to reoffend. For example, in the current economic downturn women who leave prison will be re-entering a society where there is high unemployment, limited job opportunities and cuts to welfare benefits.

Participants commented that without a joined up approach between government departments, the voluntary sector's efforts to achieve 'results' may be undermined. For example, even the government's capacity to monitor reoffending is limited, as the prison, police and probation service's computers still don't have the ability to 'speak' to one another.

Social Investment Bonds

Bits we would appreciate clarity on/ and if participants could identify where they fit:

- Social investment bonds isn't working
- There are huge problems associated with Social Impact (risk building, loans)
- Financial risk and long term social responsibility,
- How to generate an income to run services.
- Personalised budgets/ buying services.
- Sub-contracts – WiP won't work under contractor from any organisations that carries out punishment
- Release informations, lack of transparency, no commercial sensitivities, still no 'proof of concept'

Commissioning

Another of the groups' concerns regarding funding mechanisms; was the accelerated use of competitive tendering. Participants stressed that commissioning was not always the most appropriate form of funding, but was increasingly being used, to the detriment of smaller and more specialist organisations.

Participants reported that under the commissioning process, big grants were being awarded to big organisations and small, specialist organisations were unable to compete with them on price. They found larger organisations were increasingly taking over women's organisations rather than contracting to specialist local providers. As a result, increasingly services run by and for specific communities of women e.g. BAMER; disabled, older, younger and LBT women, have begun to disappear.

Participants stated that the key problem with local commissioning is that there was no value being placed on their skills at a local level. Whilst women's organisations possess detailed expertise that larger organisations lack, the importance of their work was not being recognised. Nevertheless, their skills and experience are what is needed to address the offending of women with complex needs and is what will ultimately result in the broadest benefits and cost savings for society and the state.

Participants had concerns that short-term contracts are being given to set up new services without resources and that there was a lack of local commissioning frameworks and cross-boundary working on women offending. Organisations noted that this problem was particularly prevalent within London and led to large inconsistencies in service provision in local areas.

Participants also expressed concern at the lack of clarity and communication they received from local commissioners and highlighted the need to educate commissioners about the value of women's services. Organisations stated that there needed to be greater funding for commissioning training on the value of specialist services and were greatly concerned that equalities work may be increasingly over looked in the economic downturn. Participants were concerned about the increasing turnover of staff in local authorities and were very alarmed that the HO no longer had a women's commissioning team.

An additional concern the group had regarding commissioning was that they felt that there was an accountability gap between central and local government, in terms of allocation of resources. Participants felt that there was often a misperception that women's offending is dealt with at a national level and local authorities were not assuming enough responsibility for commissioning local services. Participants feared communication may worsen under the government's new Localism agenda and the needs of female offenders may not effectively be met.

Whilst participants were very critical of commissioning processes they also identified active solutions on how problems might be addressed. Participants commented that they wished to see clauses inserted in contracts specifying the need to commission women's specialist services and organisations with a track record in women only services.

Participants also hoped that government could facilitate 'borough surgeries' where they could bring together voluntary organisations and commissioners to share information and foster further engagement. They did acknowledge that there maybe an issue about whether central government has the capacity to

force local authorities to do this; but thought that it was an important way to encourage best practice.

Participants also commented that they would like to see greater recruitment of commissioners with mixed experiences of both procurement and frontline service provision. They felt that having commissioners with the combination of these skills would encourage better informed and effective commissioning decisions. A final and overarching concern that participants had regarding commissioning was an objection to the stringent funding requirements placed on voluntary organisations. Participants were frustrated at the strict funding conditions that they had to meet and felt that the monitoring and evaluation requirements were burdensome and unnecessary.

Whilst participants acknowledged that parts of the women's sector needed to take greater steps to demonstrate its impact. They felt that monitoring requirements placed upon voluntary organisations were excessive and government was more demanding of organisations than they were of themselves. In addition they reported that small organisations and those who rely on volunteers are not necessarily able to participate in competitive tendering; as they are unable to produce all the information need to meet the requirements for commissioning.

Commissioning and the cuts

Participants stressed the problem of the combined effect of increased competitive tendering and the implementation of public spending cuts. Whilst national government may have made funding promises to the women's voluntary sector, closures were occurring right now at a local level. Participants feared that without swift government intervention, a large section of the voluntary sector would be permanently lost, along with its detailed expertise.

Participants explained that women's organisations are experiencing both cuts to their existing funding and facing increased competition for funds. The group discussed how trusts and foundations were also being inundated with applications and organisations are competing with one another for ever decreasing amounts of money.

Participants discussed how funding cuts were having a direct impact on the work of their organisations. For example, one of the leading voluntary organisations working with women offenders, have had a 40% reduction in their income.

Participants remarked that the outcome of the cuts is that women's services are under resourced and reduced down to their core functions.

Participants stated that uncertainty about funding and the future of women's organisations was having a detrimental impact on the quality of their services. Short funding cycles were compromising their ability to plan their workload whilst cuts diminished staff morale. Many organisations found themselves in the position of having to downsize and reduce hours but workers had to invest more of their time in order to sustain funding. Participants knew that this was unsustainable in the long term and would inevitably result in the further loss of skilled staff.

Participants highlighted that organisations struggling to provide services at a grass roots level were being offered the limited alternatives of closure or being forced to merge. They were highly critical of the lack of capacity building funding

being provided to foster partnerships/consortia and emphasised that they were a process not something that organisations should be pressured into.

Participants who had experienced pressure to merge said that in some instances mergers posed a direct tension with the organisation's values. For example, it was suggested that one women-only organisation— should merge with a men's lead group. The women involved with the organisation do not want this however, without alternative sources of funding they may be left with very little choice.

Participants drew attention to not only the immediate impact of the cuts on the women's sector but the wider implications of government cuts and reforms in other areas. For example, cuts to legal aid will limit women's access to justice, cuts to benefits will compromise women's ability to support themselves and the government's focus on employment and training appears to overlook women's wider needs.

Other areas where organisations were concerned about loss or lack of provision, were services aimed at perpetrators, older women (particularly in London), and other particular groups such as LGBT women. Participants were also concerned about the lack of funding available for preventative work, particularly young women. Participants also drew attention to the need for preventative work in other areas, for example, non-clinical approaches to health, such as training in helping to improve memory of people with dementia.

Participants feared that the government's 'rehabilitation revolution' would form part of the wider cuts programmes, as they felt the government is not currently treating women holistically – and instead appear to just want fewer women to be sentenced.

Capacity

Participants expressed how, as a result of the hostile funding environment, their organisations were left both overstretched and under resourced. The reality for some frontline organisations is that they had limited capacity to operate, let alone engage with local authorities and national government. Whilst the ability to influence and engage was becoming ever more crucial in the 'Localism era', it was not feasible for many organisations.

Another concern participants raised regarding capacity; was the problem that government expected voluntary organisations to enhance their capacity by using volunteers. Whilst organisations appreciated the benefits of volunteers, they stressed that they should not be used to replace paid staff. Participants were agitated that the government did not acknowledge the large level of time and resources that need to be invested in each volunteer and how difficult it can be to retain them.

Participants warned that in the economic downturn an increasing number of volunteers will have to leave volunteer positions to secure paid work. This loss would lead to a further loss of expertise in the women's sector. Participants felt that the government's emphasis on reliance on volunteer staff was impractical and should not be a replacement for government investment in the voluntary sector.

Communication

Participants reported that the current funding situation was negative for partnership working and that their channels of communication with central and local government had vastly deteriorated in the economic downturn. Participants reported that the cuts were impacting on the local authorities as well as the VCS and many of the contacts they had were also disappearing. They also remarked that they were also losing contacts and champions at a national level as the women's policy team and National Offender Management Service had also changed personnel. Participants felt that 'partnership working was falling apart' on both sides of their sectors and organisations were finding themselves having to do networking all over again, to re-campaign and sell the work of the sector. They felt that this loss of contacts was devastating as it increased the amount of time needed for working and weakened the voice of organisations.

Participants said that communications were the first thing 'to go' in the economic downturn and that many local authorities were reluctant to engage with the VCS whilst they were in a state of flux. Some however, felt that the sector could seize this time of uncertainty by creating their own strategy and feeding into the statutory sector. Participants were hopeful that they could use the champions of the women's sector that were left and lead the new agenda on Localism and the Big Society, repositioning themselves as the 'go to experts' on women's offending and equalities.

Participants felt that in order to tackle the problem of poor communication at a local level, it was essential that the VCS make sure that every local authority is aware of its responsibilities. They felt that wherever possible; organisations should establish identifiable contacts within local authorities so that the VCS is able to build relationships.

Participants felt that onus should also be placed on the HO to ensure sustainable funding for the women's sector which would enhance their capacity to engage. Participants stressed that it was vital that the HO ensure that Voluntary Sector Coordinators were kept at a local level to ensure active engagement between the VCS and public sectors.

Public service delivery

Participants expressed concern about the shift in the government's narrative regarding public sector service provision. They were apprehensive of the government's drive to open up public services and cautious that the voluntary sector and private sector provision were now viewed as 'good', whilst public sector provision was deemed as 'bad'.

With the government's increasing emphasis on voluntary sector provision of public services, participants were concerned that the 'added value' of the women's sector would be lost. The women's sector provides important additional value by filling gaps in statutory provision and ensuring that vulnerable and marginalised women receive support. Participants feared that if under the government's new public service delivery reforms an increasing number of voluntary organisations focus on public service provision, the needs of marginalised women may be overlooked.

It was felt that the plans presented a danger of silencing the VCS – as if their focus is on delivery they will have no capacity to engage in policy and decision

making which means the needs of marginalised, groups such as women in the criminal justice system, will not be communicated.

How can we ensure that the needs of vulnerable people and communities are still met?

Participants felt that in order to ensure that the needs of vulnerable people and communities are met it is important to examine the challenges that currently and potentially lie ahead for women's organisations. Participants emphasised the need to address the issues of accountability and Localism, as well as the implications of further cuts to voluntary sector service provision.

As noted earlier in this report, participants wished the HO would take on a strategic role which would help organisations hold local authorities to account and encourage meaningful engagement with the voluntary sector. Whilst Localism presented a positive prospect of empowering communities; participants feared that in reality it may create a 'tyranny of democracy' whereby the needs of minority groups are overlooked.

Participants felt that the HO needs to take and retain a strategic role so that organisations that are deemed as 'unpopular' but which are important, don't go unsupported, e.g. refugee or lesbian and gay organisations.

Participants felt that in order to ensure that the needs of women offenders are addressed at a local level; there is a need for better representation of women and women's issues in public life. They felt that without an equalities focus Localism may replicate existing power structures and the new decentralised agenda could be damaging to women's services.

Due to the problems associated with Localism, participants stressed that the HO needs to support the women's sector in order to address problems at a local level. They would like to see the HO empower women's organisations to hold authorities to account and ensure that local authority commissioners fulfil their targets to engage positively with the women's VCS. In addition, participants wanted the HO to address the postcode lottery of service provision at a local level and recognise situations where there is no alternative solution to providing funding.

Participants stressed the importance of both an interventionist approach to meet the needs of women; as well as sustainable funding. Participants said that they wanted to see a greater financial commitment from the HO to support the sustainability of voluntary organisations working with offenders and wanted to see the importance of their work reflected in service delivery strategies. Many

stated that they were disheartened with the department's work because they felt that there was a significant gap between the rhetoric and reality of the HO's actions.

Participants stated that the most important way to meet women's needs was not just to fund the vital work of women's organisations but ensure that women's issues are on the political agenda. Participants were highly critical of the fact that the HO consultation paper only contained one question about families and one paragraph about women. They expressed that they wished to see a renewed focus on women's offending and its importance reflected in future HO strategies.

Participants stressed that voluntary sector organisations were the key to ensuring that the needs of marginalised communities were met. They emphasised that grassroots organisations take years to build up in terms of trust and relationship building with communities and service users, they are experts in their local communities, who are caring and committed and when organisations face closure all of this is lost.

Participants felt that the VCS helps to create a better society and communities, and help the most vulnerable and marginalised to integrate into mainstream society. They emphasised that specialist organisations offer long term solutions to long term problems in communities and that the risk of losing this expertise would be damaging to wider society. Participants also highlighted that the VCS provides an important voice for vulnerable communities and act as independent advocates who are trained and can support them. Participants thought that the funding cuts illustrated a narrow oversight of the crucial value that the VCS provides.

Where relevant, how can the relationship between the VCS and Community Safety Partnerships (CSP) be strengthened?

Participants commented that in order to improve relations between the VCS and the CSP, there needed to be equal representation from the VCS on CSPs. They would like to see organisations being given a more strategic role within the partnerships and to be better included in their work.

Participants hoped to see gender specific representation on CSPs and hoped that equality impact assessments could be integrated into the overarching framework of CSPs and their strategies. They felt that the relationship between the CVS and CSPs could be improved by providing members with common training on equalities and awarding all representatives responsibility for the agenda, to ensure delivery on statutory targets.

Participants also wanted CSPs to be more visible and easily accessible to the VCS. They commented that there needed to be greater clarity in the CSPs communications, and representatives on CSPs needed to have local knowledge, communication, compassion and commitment.

Bits we would appreciate clarity on/ and if participants could identify where they fit:

- Demonstrating and understanding our values in delivering local authority indicators and outcomes.
- Cross-marketing to promote more cohesive ways of working and show unity.
- Representatives must be effective in
- Cultural shift in the perception of the VCS.
- Also need a cultural shift in our perception of the statutory sector, parity and equality.
- CVS as representative of CJS VCS and women's VCS – lobby your CVS
- LA is consulting with VCS – building capacity through consortia / partnerships
- Transparency and accountability on roles & responsibilities for CDRP and those representing the VCS.
- Include a statutory obligation for representatives from the women's VCS to be involved in commissioning (I was unsure if the CSPs specialises in commissioning?)
- Capitalise on assumptions you do have. Creating their own strategy group and feed into CSP etc
- Expectation of quick fixes – danger of replicating models in other areas without thought – e.g. an 'innovative' programme that works in one area is rolled out to another without consideration of what the actual needs are