

Clinks briefing for private meetings of the Justice Select Committee

1. Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system (CJS). Our aim is to ensure the sector and those with whom it works are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of people in the CJS and their communities. We do this by providing specialist information and support, with a particular focus on smaller voluntary sector organisations, to inform them about changes in policy and commissioning, to help them build effective partnerships and provide innovative services that respond directly to the needs of their users.
2. We are a membership organisation with over 500 members, including the voluntary sector's largest providers as well as its smallest. Our wider national network reaches 4,000 voluntary sector contacts. Overall, through our weekly e-bulletin Light Lunch and our social media activity, we have a network of over 13,000 contacts. These include individuals and agencies with an interest in the CJS and the role of the voluntary sector in rehabilitation and resettlement.
3. Clinks manages the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance, a national network of over 800 artists, arts organisations and criminal justice practitioners using creative approaches to reduce reoffending. We also support a network of women's centres and specialist women's services working in the CJS.
4. Clinks welcome the opportunity to provide the committee with emerging evidence about the impact of Covid-19 on the voluntary sector working in criminal justice to inform the committee's private meetings. The information we present in the following is garnered from a range of sources and activity including:
 - a. the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3)ⁱ that has a current special interest group (SIG) on Covid-19 to formally channel policy discussions and suggestions into the MoJ and HMPPS.
 - b. Clinks bi-weekly survey of voluntary organisations working in criminal justice to track the impact of Covid-19. The latest survey had 119 usable responses.
 - c. Regular network meetings of voluntary organisations working in criminal justice to collect evidence of the impact of Covid-19 on service delivery and service users.
5. We have split this briefing into two substantive sections- the impact the Covid-19 pandemic is having on voluntary organisations, including a specific focus on their finances and challenges for the future.

Impact of Covid-19 on the voluntary sector working in criminal justice and their service users

6. The responses to our most recent survey continue to demonstrate the flexibility and resilience of organisations in this sector and how tirelessly they are working to meet the needs of those they support in the face of such restrictions. However, as with the previous survey, these results indicate organisations are struggling to maintain service provision remotely and less volunteers are available to support them. At the same time, organisations are grappling with the uncertainty around their financial stability and the long term implications of the pandemic. For the second time we find organisations are experiencing barriers in applying for financial support from the government, finding themselves ineligible.

7. Service delivery by organisations has been severely impacted by the pandemic, with most services (61%) saying they have decreased their service provision and some (18%) having to stop delivering services altogether. This is particularly concerning given the needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system are likely to be rising at this time. Arts organisations, whose work is usually highly interactive (specifically theatre, dance and performance based activity), face distinct barriers in adapting their services for remote delivery and ensuring alternatives are effective and meaningful. A higher proportion of organisations providing arts based provision say that none of their services can be delivered remotely and or that only some of their services can be.
8. The RR3 group remain very concerned about how to access service users to deliver services during imprisonment without being able to phone in to prisoners and limitations to the credit and time people in prison have to make contact with services they can't now see face to face. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) have been clear in their position that it is not possible due to security and practical reasons for people using PIN phones to receive calls. **However, this remains an urgent issue and a solution must be sought. If people are to be in their cells 23 hours a day for the foreseeable future, it is vital that services can access people through these means.**
9. Although many are utilising technology to continue to deliver their services remotely, 18% of organisations are still delivering face to face services. Organisations present at our networking meetings and members of the RR3 SIG has raised continuous concerns about the availability of Personal Protective Equipment for voluntary sector staff continuing to work in frontline roles, especially as there is often limited opportunity to socially distance.
10. Volunteers provide essential support for organisations to deliver services and their numbers continue to decline- with 44% of organisations saying the number of volunteers supporting their work has declined since the Covid-19 pandemic.
11. Organisations are putting important measures in place to support staff to cope through this time but there is serious concern about the impact of the current situation on their wellbeing. There is particular concern about the anxiety caused by the lack of certainty for organisations and the added pressures of staff supporting people who are in greater need because of Covid-19 restrictions. One organisation told us there are 'difficulties for staff trying to support clients through crisis and this is impacting on staff's mental health.'

The impact on organisations finances

12. Due to the continued uncertainty regarding Covid-19, it remains challenging for organisations to plan for the future. Organisations continue to be unsure whether they should make more use of the government job retention scheme as 38% say they are unsure whether to furlough staff (or more staff) in the next month and 40% are unsure whether they will experience cash flow problems in the future.
13. 40% of organisations have used their reserves due to the Covid-19 pandemic with one organisation outlining "it is too early to tell whether COVID-19 will impact upon our reserves as we have discussions ongoing to alleviate financial pressures. However we are aware that if these discussions do not come to fruition we will have to eat into reserves within 2 months and which would impact on reserves dramatically after that period."

14. The voluntary sector working in criminal justice continue to experience significant barriers in relation to applying for financial support from the government. 43% say they are only slightly confident that they have a full understanding of the financial support available; 21% are not very confident and 12% are not confident at all whilst 39% say they do not meet the eligibility criteria for support. As outlined by our colleagues at Charity Finance Group the way in which charities operate is very different from business; we need to be flexible with our resources and cross subsidise in ways businesses do not¹. As a result, many of the support measures designed for businesses just don't work for our sector.
15. We welcome the £300,000 funding HMPPS and MoJ have made available to support the voluntary sector working in criminal justice in its response to Covid. We are pleased to be able to distribute £275,000 of this on behalf of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) as part of activities under the grant for the provision of infrastructure support for small and medium sized voluntary organisations².
16. This grant programme is an important part of the support the sector needs to continue providing its services now and in the future. However, the criteria for these grants and the total sum available means that not everyone in our sector who requires financial support will be able to benefit.
17. We are extremely disappointed that the Ministry of Justice was not successful in their bid for funds to support the voluntary sector working with people in the criminal justice system from the £360m available from Department of Culture Media and Sport as part of the governments £750m emergency package for charities providing key services and supporting vulnerable people during the crisis. Our sector provides vital support to some of the most vulnerable in society and it is frustrating and disheartening not to see this work and the needs of the sector's beneficiaries recognised across government beyond HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice.
18. We welcome the recent report from the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and are pleased to see the committee are supportive of a "a stabilisation fund to secure the long-term financial health and organisational diversity of the sector." It is further welcome that the report recommends that "In addition to the support that has already been announced, the Government should establish further funding to assist charities and voluntary organisations to stay afloat throughout the Covid-19 crisis. This should be available to organisations facing financial pressures, even if they are not involved in the frontline response to Covid-19."

¹ https://www.cfg.org.uk/from_red_to_green

² [*HMPPS have provided £300k for this grants programme. Clinks is able to retain up to £25k to administer the programme from that total. We are hoping not to have to do that and if successful we will grant the full £300k to the sector.*](#)

Potential challenges on the horizon

19. Although the situation is uncertain for organisations many are trying to plan for the future, especially in terms of their service delivery and finances. Organisations remain positive about the flexibility their contract and grant managers have shown over the course of the pandemic, but the long term financial impact for organisations still remains unclear. During our network meetings organisations voiced concern about the risk of funders unwilling or unable to provide support to them in the long term as well as one organisation outlining a risk funders would clawback underspend in the future. This is particularly concerning for the long term sustainability of organisations, especially given there is anticipation of increased demand for their services.
20. Further to this, members of the RR3 SIG said there was an urgent issue regarding plans to remobilise voluntary sector services in criminal justice settings. Organisations need to ensure their staff will be safe when they re-enter criminal justice settings to deliver services. Assurances will need to be given on how prisons will be kept clean, how social distancing measures will be implanted and how this might impact service delivery. Where additional capacity has been set up in temporary sites, such as the former Medway prison, voluntary sector services must be set up to meet the needs of these people.

ⁱ Clinks (2020) Influencing criminal justice policy, available online at <https://www.clinks.org/our-work/influencing-criminal-justice-policy#RR3>