

## **Written evidence submitted by St Mungo's**

### **Transition of the resettlement model from 'Enhanced Through the Gate' to its current resettlement approach under unified services?**

St Mungo's provided the delivery of housing advice and support under the previous Community Rehabilitation Company's (CRCs). We observed that there were several positive changes that took place as part of that process, such as the increased understanding of the impact of a person's housing status on reoffending; the increased reach of supervision upon release; and the commitment to work in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). However, we also observed several issues:

- The programme was highly prescriptive which reduced the ability of VCS providers to bring local or thematic expertise to service provision.
- The contracts were highly process driven, using the resources of providers to focus on administrative compliance instead of the quality and outcomes of the service.
- VCS organisations often felt that their experience did not influence decision making due to a lack of direct engagement with MoJ because communication between the MoJ and VCS providers needed to be facilitated by CRCs.
- We observed that the National Probation Service (NPS) and CRCs appeared to work in silo. A large part of this is the result of many NPS regions managing partnerships with multiple CRCs operating in their geographical area and operational challenges such as the IT interfaces between different organisations.

The intent of the transition into the new unified service was to address many of these concerns and ensure a more joined up approach to provision. Whilst there were a number of consultations held as part of the redesign and implementation process, these consultations were not as effective as they could be, because providers didn't have enough opportunity for direct engagement with MoJ to influence strategic decision making processes.

Due to the time-restricted deadline of June 2021, the transition to the new unified service was rushed and we are still seeing the impact of a high number of recruitment gaps across probation; low probation staff morale and retention; and confusion across the probation service around roles and responsibilities in custody and community cross over.

The contracts for Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers gives us more direct communication with MoJ and HMPPS, meaning theoretically we are better placed to use our experience to influence service development and strategic decision making.

The structure of the commissioning arrangements under the dynamic framework dictate that CRS providers can only work with service users who are referred through the Referral and Monitoring system (RAM), meaning we are reliant on probation practitioners to deliver against many of our commissioning targets. Due to the high number of staff vacancies across probation and a lack of understanding of their role in referring to CRS, providers (particularly in large areas such as London) aren't able to see clients that need our advice

service in custody because the referrals we receive are for those who have already been released or are close to release.

### **Current performance in resettling prison leavers into the community**

There has been a reduction in the quality of services delivered to individuals at risk of homelessness since the introduction of the new services contracts.

This reduction in quality can be attributed to issues found in three main areas:

#### **1. Contracts.**

- a. CRS contracts are highly process driven; measuring success through starts and appointment offers instead of quality interventions and positive outcomes.
- b. Contracts are highly prescriptive meaning that expert providers can't bring their experience to service provision; services can't be delivered in a personalised approach; and providers are restricted in developing innovative approaches to delivery.
- c. Contracts are administratively demanding and commissioning arrangements make it difficult for smaller VCS providers with specific local and/or thematic expertise to bid for contracts. Even amongst larger VCS providers like St Mungo's, the high amount of contract management means that a large amount of capacity is used on back office operations.

#### **2. Referrals.**

- a. CRS providers are reliant on the quality of referrals from Probation Practitioners who often lack capacity and don't understand the information that CRS providers require. Delayed responses to queries and late sign off procedures leaves providers with unrealistically short timeframes to work with a client.
- b. This leads to an increased workload for CRS providers to chase and follow up on poor referrals, which are often lacking important information such as prison location, local connection, and risk level. Providers are expected to take ownership of fulfilling these referrals, creating an additional workload before being able to begin working with a client.
- c. This additional workload is not recognised in commissioning contracts meaning that unrealistic expectations are placed upon providers.

#### **3. Services and accommodation.**

- a. The capacity issues within HMPPS mean that those with a housing need in custody are often not allocated a Probation Practitioner and therefore can't be referred into our housing advice services. This reduces the likelihood of our service delivering a positive housing outcome as we have a narrower time frame in which to identify stable accommodation before release.
- b. We welcomed the introduction of the Community Accommodation Service (CAS-3). However, in its early iterations, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed.
  - This temporary housing provision impacts on LA housing duties. In our experience, LAs have considered individuals in CAS as housed, which has limited the support available for move on opportunities.
  - There is a risk that CAS-3 will reduce the priority placed on move on services; creating a larger problem where people are unable to move on from CAS-3 accommodation because they haven't received support pertaining to longer term housing options. This leads to bed

blocking, whereby there is a lack of space in CAS-3 accommodation because service users can't move on.

- c. There is an emphasis on the Private Rented Sector (PRS) as a housing solution for a high proportion of prison leavers. It is important to also recognise that many prison leavers have support needs such that the PRS is often an inappropriate housing option, however there is a lack of available supported housing.

## **Improving resettlement services**

There are a variety of opportunities to improve Government policy and practice regarding resettlement services which focus on responding to the issues we have identified above:

### *Contracts*

St Mungo's recommends that contracts for CRS place a greater emphasis on quality and outcomes as this has a positive impact on reducing reoffending and promoting a positive move on. This should hold a greater prevalence in contracts than it currently does.

Further, we recommend that HMPPS explore methods by which the contracts for CRS providers can be simplified whilst maintaining the level of reporting and oversight required to ensure effective provision. It is our experience that in CRS provision the high level of back office capacity required can place unnecessary pressure on providers. By simplifying the contract management requirements there leaves greater capacity to innovate in the sector and opportunities for smaller VCS organisations to bring local/thematic expertise. This also positively improves our ability to benefit from the change notices in delivering services to remand and unenhanced prisoners. The decision to remove service delivery to remand prisoners with accommodation has had a negative impact on services. Although individuals on remand may have accommodation upon arrival in custody, this accommodation can be lost; leading to an increased number of sentenced prisoners that need housing interventions on release. This is being addressed through negotiations for this work to be included in our service delivery but should also be included in future consultation with providers to understand the volume of demand for services.

Resettlement provision should also have a clear reporting process through the probation service, and a defined role that is distinct from housing advice.

In planning future contracts, we recommend a more comprehensive consultation process with providers so that contracts accurately represent the work we need to do to achieve positive outcomes. This should include a better process that uses the experience of providers, not just MoJ data, for assessing the expected volume of need so that contracts are commissioned with adequate resource.

### *Referrals*

Changes should be made to reduce CRS providers' reliance on referrals from practitioners to deliver their services. We would like to see individuals in prison able to directly refer themselves, as well as voluntary sector organisations working in prisons. This would increase our impact as it would mean there would be a higher percentage of appropriate referrals; it would give more capacity to probation officers; and would mean we are able to speak to the individual rather than being reliant on a third party.

There needs to be significant investment into the probation service to allow for practitioners to make appropriate referrals and respond to services when referrals are made and action

plans agreed. This should be accompanied by better guidance to improve the quality of referrals from Probation.

#### *Services and accommodation*

To increase the effectiveness of CAS-3, more funding and guidance should be provided to support move on so that prison leavers can access secure, stable accommodation and to ensure that bed spaces are continually becoming available to prevent release to the streets.

As part of improving housing move on outcomes, resource and guidance should be made available to offer a range of housing options that are suitable for the support needs of each individual. This includes increasing the availability of supported housing and housing-led support solutions, particularly for people with more complex needs.

St Mungo's supports the way in which Through the Gate services have the potential to provide better flexibility within service provision and allow for vital support upon the day of release. However, within the current contract arrangement this is not available as part of the services we are commissioned to provide. We would recommend that meet at the gate provision is included within future CRS contracts

Lack of ID is an issue for many prison leavers that prevents access to housing, work, training and employment or benefits. Whilst we support the intention of providing documentation in the absence of ID this is not cost effective, and often means that people find it harder to move away from the label of ex offender. If resources are being used to provide prison leavers with documentation, a more effective use of resource would be to provide prison leavers with genuine ID such as a birth certificate.

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