

COMMUNITY JUSTICE FILES 20

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Engaging Communities in Criminal Justice: a Green Paper

This Green Paper was published in April 2009. The paper describes itself as being built around four primary aims: achieving stronger community-focussed partnerships, building on the success of existing community justice projects, increasing the intensity and visibility of community payback and keeping the public better informed.

The paper begins by considering the role of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and magistrates' courts. It proposes the introduction of community prosecutors who would work closely with local people on issues of particular concern. Community impact statements would be introduced to aid the CPS in making decisions about when to prosecute. Drawing on experience from the Community Justice Centres in Liverpool and Salford, the paper proposes a greater use of problem-solving solutions in courtrooms with the intention of dealing with local crime problems. Hallmarks could be awarded to courts identified as providing a good service to their local communities.

The paper then goes on to look at the role of probation, prison and youth justice services and considers ways of building on recent developments to make community payback projects more visible and more responsive to the needs of the local community. Improvements are proposed in the way that assets are seized from convicted criminals with a suggestion that funds raised are clearly used to benefit the community. There is mention of reparation and restorative justice as offering possible benefits for victims of crime as well as an increase in volunteering in the criminal justice system.

The paper proposes that more information should be made available by the agencies of the criminal justice system to the public. Also, each local Criminal Justice Board should have a lead member for community engagement. A number of these measures, including community impact statements and the community prosecutor role, are to be piloted in 30 areas of England and Wales.

Introducing the paper, the then Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said:

The public are our best weapon in fighting crime. That is why we want to make sure people have their views heard and that they are kept updated on what has and is being done by the criminal justice system. If people understand and trust the criminal justice system and see it as a public

service, they will be able to get on with their lives without fear of crime, secure in the knowledge that there are tough consequences for those who break the rules. This document provides an opportunity for the people to have a say on a crucial system which has their needs at its heart.

The consultation period on the green paper ended on July 31st. The green paper can be downloaded at

<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm75/7583/7583.pdf>

Evaluation of the National Neighbourhood Policing Programme

The recently published Home Office Research Report 14 contains findings from the second year of the national Neighbourhood Policing Programme (NPP) evaluation. The NPP was officially launched in April 2005. A key aim of the NPP is to increase the public's confidence in the police as measured by the British Crime Survey.

Neighbourhood policing is intended to ensure that the work of the police responds to the concerns and problems of local communities and that local policing is visible to local people and seen as responding well to their concerns.

Results from the first year evaluation of the NPP were inconclusive in respect of improved public confidence. The recently published second year evaluation reports some positive change but did not find this to be statistically significant. The report argues that, given that the implementation of neighbourhood policing has not been consistent, these findings are to be expected. It also argues that some element of local and qualitative evaluation may be helpful and appropriate given the diverse and locally determined nature of policing.

The full research report is available from

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/horr14b.pdf>

Voluntary and Community Organisations Working with Black Young People Affected by Crime

'Policy, Purpose and Pragmatism' is the title of a report produced by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS) which investigates the experiences of voluntary and community organisations working with black young people affected by crime in England. The report is based on information received from 16 organisations and was, in part, written in response to the work of the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee which identified the voluntary sector as having a key part to play in work with black young people caught up in the criminal justice system.

The CCJS report comes to a number of conclusions. Firstly, a number of voluntary organisations were ambivalent about the specific relevance of ethnicity to their work, preferring to offer a more ethnically-neutral account of their contribution. Race and ethnicity remain complicated issues to discuss in the context of offending and crime.

Secondly, whilst the practices and interventions described by the voluntary organisations tended to be imprecise the value base for these activities (building trusting relationships with young people and providing them with support) was expressed clearly. Funding is a key concern identified by all organisations. The constant pressure to secure resources and compete for money is seen as threatening the ability of these groups to provide a useful and innovative service.

The report finishes with a number of points that could usefully guide future commissioning decisions. These include:

- Will increasing the capacity of local voluntary organisations to deliver services on behalf of statutory agencies distance community groups from the young people they work with?
- Some voluntary and community organisations already feel aggrieved about the way that they have been 'used and abused' in their relationships with funders and statutory partners.
- The report also identified some voluntary sector organisations who felt that they had not been well served by research projects. This suggests the need to find more creative ways to research and evaluate the work done by these groups.

The full report can be downloaded at:

<http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/opus1650/Policypurposeandpragmatism.pdf>

The Bradley Report: A Review of People with Mental Health Problems or Learning Disabilities in the Criminal Justice System

This review was published by the Department of Health in April 2009. It looks broadly at the issues of mental health and learning disability, considering all the stages of the criminal justice process.

The report makes 82 recommendations, including:

- ensuring that all youth offending teams have a member of staff who is a qualified mental health worker,
- joint training for police officers and mental health workers,
- gathering information about mental health or learning disability issues before the making of an anti-social behaviour order,
- improvements to the provision of appropriate adults to support vulnerable suspects in police stations,
- extending the arrangements made at courts to support vulnerable witnesses to include vulnerable defendants too,
- a significant improvement in the services available to offenders with a dual diagnosis of mental health and alcohol/drugs problems,

- awareness training for all prison and probation staff in the areas of both mental health and learning disability, and
- the development of criminal justice mental health teams.

In response to the report, the government has established a Health and Criminal Justice National Programme Board, which is tasked with producing a plan to implement recommendations from the review.

The review can be downloaded at:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_098694

Assessment Tools: Research Summaries

The Ministry of Justice has published a number of research summaries about the Offender Assessment System (OASys) and the Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS). These tools are used by the probation service and the prison service to assess the likelihood of reoffending and, in the case of OASys, to identify dynamic risk factors (criminogenic needs). The studies report on research into the reliability and validity of the OASys tool and on work done to update OGRS to reflect changing patterns of offending.

OASys was found to have moderate inter-rater reliability, meaning that an offender could be assessed differently by different workers and hence referred for different interventions or level of input. OASys is made up of sections and those with poorest inter-rater reliability were financial management, alcohol misuse, thinking and behaviour and risk of serious harm. The report recommends the removal of the questions with the most significant discrepancy in assessor response as well as a review of the section of the tool that deals with risk of serious harm.

Work was also done to explore what proportion of offenders subject to statutory supervision are assessed using OASys and to investigate the extent to which the tool is fully completed. It was found that assessments carried out in prison had more unanswered sections than those undertaken by probation staff. Sections asking about childhood experiences and the criminal histories of family members were most often left blank.

The latest version of the OGRS assessment tool (OGRS3) was implemented in the probation service in March 2008. OGRS3 is identified as having a number of advantages over its predecessor: it requires fewer pieces of information; it takes account of cautions, reprimands and final warnings; it offers more accurate predictions for female offenders and substantially improves the prediction of proven reoffending.

The research studies can be downloaded at

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/offender-assessment-system.htm>

Do Better Do Less: The Report of the Commission on English Prisons Today

The Commission on English Prisons Today is an initiative of the Howard League for Penal Reform. The recently published report 'Do Better Do Less' is the product of its two year process of inquiry.

The Commission has taken a radical approach to the problems facing the prison system and argues for significant reform. It argues for more local control and accountability and would like to see the dismantling of both the National Offender Management Service and the central control of the prison service. Prison and probation budgets should be devolved to local areas to encourage reinvestment in social services and support likely to reduce crime. The Commission supports a significant reduction in numbers of people in custody with a closure of prisons and new focus on community based initiatives.

The report also supports a greater use of restorative approaches, providing that they are accompanied by safeguards to protect the interests of both victims and offenders.

In the foreword to the report, Professor David Wilson, the Chair of the Commission, writes:

'The Commission proposes that justice is more local and engages more closely with communities. A reduction in the use of prison will allow for reinvestment of resources into local communities and the use of solutions outside of criminal justice tramlines. Both justice reinvestment and restorative justice offer new models for reducing conflict and crime.'

The report can be downloaded at

<http://www.prisoncommission.org.uk/>

Forthcoming Events

Mental Health and Crime: Making the Difference

Nacro's annual mental health and crime conference will be held on Wednesday 9th and Thursday 10th September at Loughborough University. The conference provides everyone working in this field with the opportunity to discuss the recommendations of the Bradley Review and the forthcoming Offender Health and Social Care Strategy. Speakers include Martin Barnes, the Chief Executive of Drugscope, Richard Bradshaw, Director of Offender Health at the Department of Health and Douglas Shad from Norwich Criminal Justice Mental Health Scheme.

Further information about the conference can be found here

<http://www.nacro.org.uk/about/diary.htm>

Annual Youth Justice Convention

This event will be held on Wednesday 11th and Thursday 12th November at Southport Theatre and Convention Centre. Speakers are expected to include Deputy, Chief Constable Bernard Lawson from Merseyside Police, and Wendy Sinclair, Director HMP and YOI Ashfield.

Further information about the event can be found at
<http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/yjc09/>

Offender Health Research Network Annual Conference

This event will take place on Thursday 24th September at The Midland Hotel, Peter Street, Manchester. The conference will focus on the implications for research and service delivery of the Bradley Report. The keynote speakers will be Lord Keith Bradley, author of the report, and Richard Bradshaw, director of offender health at the Department of Health.

Further information can be found at
<http://www.ohrn.nhs.uk/conferences/OHRNConference24092009Flyer.pdf>