

Reducing Reoffending Board (RRB) Minutes

10 September 2-4 pm

Adult Justice Thematic | Reducing reoffending by responding to neurodiversity in the criminal justice

Attendees: Representatives from partner agencies, 3SC experts, NHS England, voluntary sector, and criminal justice professionals.

1. Welcome and Outstanding Actions

The board provided an update on outstanding actions, including a call for partner agencies to nominate senior representatives for a new Multi-Agency Working Group. This group will focus on advancing protocols to reduce criminalisation of care leavers. Members will be contacted via email to provide appropriate contacts.

2. Sentencing Review Update

An overview was presented on the recently published Sentencing Bill from the perspective of the London Criminal Justice Board (LCJB). Challenges were noted regarding understanding demand flows within the criminal justice system and assessing the bill's potential impacts, partly due to data limitations. A dedicated working group is actively modelling demand and risk, with a follow-up meeting planned for early October 2025.

3. Workshop: Understanding Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System

The core discussion centered on the experience of neurodiverse individuals within the criminal justice system, highlighting their disproportionate representation and the associated risks of negative outcomes and limited rehabilitation access. Emerging research, including from London, highlights important links between neurodiversity and reoffending, especially for those who may be stuck in the 'revolving door' of the CJS for many years without their needs being understood and without access to appropriate support.

Experts from 3SC, London's Integrated Offender Management Neurodiversity service provider, shared evidence, case studies, and recommendations. Key points included:

- 3SC's neurodiversity coaching improves outcomes by supporting individuals with ADHD, dyslexia, autism traits, and overlapping conditions through tailored engagement strategies.
- Coaching helps clarify expectations, empower clients, and reduce reoffending.
- The approach emphasizes functional support over diagnostic labels, creating safe environments to address stress and disengagement.
- Recommendations for system improvements include early screening, enhanced information sharing across agencies, mandatory neurodiversity training for frontline staff, sensory rooms, alternative communication formats, and appointing neurodiversity champions.

Discussion on Screening Tools

The use of screening tools was discussed, and members stressed the importance of balancing clinical rigor with operational needs.

Systemic Challenges and Training

Participants acknowledged systemic challenges including long diagnostic wait times and gaps in mandated neurodiversity training across criminal justice and health sectors. Promising integrated care models and targeted training efforts, such as those delivered by 3SC, were highlighted as vital.

4. Reflections from the Third Sector (CLINKS)

The voluntary sector noted variability in neurodiversity support across prisons, influenced by leadership priorities and resources. Highlighted needs include:

- Early, consistent identification of neurodivergence across the criminal justice journey.
- Multi-agency collaboration extending beyond justice professionals to healthcare and housing services.
- Development of sensory rooms and safe spaces in custody.
- Enhanced communication and accessible materials.
- System-wide cultural shifts to reduce stigma and embed neurodiversity in leadership priorities.

Practical initiatives such as sensory rooms, ADHD support groups, and tailored behavioural plans were shared as examples of positive developments.

Additional Comments

Plans to incorporate thorough needs assessments in the new cautions framework were outlined, emphasizing tailored support for neurodivergent individuals. Training initiatives range from brief awareness sessions to accredited programmes tailored for justice sector staff, with ongoing efforts to expand and adapt training for frontline officers. The item concluded with a shared commitment to continue advancing neurodiversity support in the criminal justice system. While progress has been made, participants emphasized the need for ongoing evaluation, improved assessment access, and person-centered support pathways.

5. Responding to Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System

The session opened with reflections on current neurodiversity support across the criminal justice system. Key points included:

- **Understanding Neurodiversity and Offending:** Neurodiversity manifests in diverse ways and may contribute to offending behaviors, such as increased vulnerability to exploitation, but is not the sole cause of offending. A balance between accountability and tailored support is essential to help individuals understand themselves and the justice system, thereby reducing reoffending.

- **Current Initiatives:** Projects like *Policing with Compassion* focus on police responses to neurodiverse young people. Appropriate adult schemes safeguard vulnerable individuals in custody, and ongoing research aims to improve neurodiversity identification in police custody suites. Prisons have appointed neurodiversity leads and developed dedicated neurodiversity wings, with community services offering speech and language therapy for young adults.
- **Mental Health and Rehabilitation Services:** Approximately one-third of women in mental health recovery services have identifiable neurodiverse conditions. Efforts are underway to improve training and awareness, particularly for women leaving prison. Challenges remain in diagnosis due to limited contact time with individuals.
- **Probation Services and Communication Tools:** Practical steps include enhanced data collection, internal working groups on staff training and accessibility, and piloting communication passports to document and share individual communication preferences, streamlining support across services.
- **Support Adjustments:** Recognising that individuals may be unsure of what support suits them best, sharing examples of successful adaptations can guide tailored support. It was noted that neurodiversity is a broad spectrum, and that many neurodivergent individuals do not identify as disabled.
- **Healthcare and Prison Services:** Some prison healthcare services are being remodelled to integrate neurodiversity support through collaboration between healthcare staff and support managers. Investments in training aim to improve in-prison diagnostic assessments and post-diagnosis support, with models such as the neurodiversity wing at HMP Pentonville serving as exemplars.
- **Disability and Neurodiversity Action Plans:** Development of action plans guided by the Equality Act aim to address induction processes and identify gaps in probation services, with a focus on extending support beyond staff to those under supervision.
- **Youth Justice System:** The youth system operates under different frameworks, with local authorities rather than probation services managing cases. Access to child and adolescent mental health services differs substantially, necessitating dedicated mapping for youth services.
- **Prosecutorial Considerations:** Neurodiversity is integrated into prosecutorial decision-making, particularly for children. Defence solicitors play a crucial role, though communication between defence, prosecution, and health services requires improvement.
- **Information Sharing and Offender Support:** Challenges exist in continuity of care and communication across prisons, community supervision, and courts. The use of 'offender passports' — concise, shareable documents summarising key information — was endorsed to improve support and reduce repeat offending.
- **Post-Release Challenges:** Many individuals receive diagnostic insights without meaningful follow-up or access to support services. Emphasis was placed on flexible, relationship-based interventions that do not solely depend on formal diagnoses.
- **Framework for Improvement:** A proposed framework focuses on systemic opportunities, process enhancements, and individual-level changes. Early embedding of

reasonable adjustments, universal screening, improved compliance mechanisms, and consistent information sharing were highlighted as priorities.

- **Needs Assessment and Language:** New tools are being developed that avoid diagnostic labels, instead focusing on individuals' strengths and challenges to promote diversion and support, rather than categorisation.
- **Person-Centred Approaches:** Assessing executive functioning (e.g., emotional regulation, time management) provides a clearer understanding of individual needs than labels alone. Intersectionality and overlapping identities should be considered in support provision.
- **Future Focus:** There is optimism about system-wide engagement, with the next challenge being greater cohesion across services to allow individuals to 'tell their story once', reducing duplication and fragmentation.

6. Forward Plan

The next meeting is scheduled for 10th December 2025, with a focus on youth justice. Board members were invited to submit topic suggestions ahead of the meeting.

The meeting was formally closed with thanks to all attendees and acknowledgements of the valuable contributions made.