

Notes from MOPAC Co-Commissioning Fund Workshop, Female offending, 13.07.17

BREAKOUT GROUP ONE:

What is the potential for London to explore cross borough / sub regional solutions in respect of **diverting women out of the criminal justice system?**

Potential for pan-London or sub-regional delivery:

- Colleagues felt that this was an excellent opportunity to **bridge divisions in provisions** between organisations and expand coverage geographically and across the spectrum of need (i.e. by including women at risk of offending).
- It was felt that a diversion scheme lends itself to **sub regional commissioning arrangements with services clustering around hubs** like custody suites, courts, and new or existing women centres.

What does the current service look like in terms of gaps, but also good practice?

- While there is pockets of good practice in the South and West it was felt that clearly **there were not enough women centres** and that more female friendly physical spaces were required.
- It was agreed that a focus purely on diversion was not sufficient and that proposals should be for wraparound support services delivered in partnership by multiple statutory and non-statutory providers in a **mixed economy**.
- There was also a clear gap of provisions for women who are without resources to public funds.

What information and data is required to support the development of EOIs in this area?

- Information sharing between authorities was cited as a barrier to partnership working.
- The Metropolitan Police Service's previous resistance to altering their charging practices has been a barrier in the past but in light of recent changes in leadership and the introduction of new NPCC guidelines on out of court disposals, now is the time to introduce a substantive change in the way the criminal justice service treats female offenders.

BREAKOUT GROUP TWO:

What is the potential for London to explore cross borough/ sub regional solutions in respect of **resettlement services and alternatives to custody**?

Potential for Pan-London or sub-regional delivery:

- Overall, it was agreed that **a more holistic service form of provision needs to be established**– similar to the DV one stop shop. This provision should not be solely catering for offenders but aim to address the root causes for female offending before the offending takes place/has CJS implications.
- There is a challenge to have a systematic approach that works both on a strategic and operational level. We must also to **avoid ‘justice by geography’**, particularly with the localisation and short-term nature of funding. There is a recognition that London exports criminality through county lines – we need to ensure consistency here too, where the offence may originate in another area.
- Courts/CPS/ MPS/ probation need to know about services that are **alternatives to custody**.

What does the current service look like in terms of gaps, but also good practice?

- There is a challenge to get consistency and sustained services due **differing commissioning cycles and short term funding streams** – it was felt that we need to help the sector galvanise so that in this time there was recognition that the whole will be better than the sum of its parts. Some VCS organisations are beginning to do this better. There is a challenge in that most are competing for the same grants.
- This **provision needs to be community-based**, with co-located services for women in the community. The services would then be able to use peer mentoring for effective integration into the community.
- It was felt that there is a **need to address housing, employment and social needs**, not just refuge. For example, true resettlement includes other factors, for example **schools access and employability**. There was discussion around the job market, and how to widen access to traditionally gender specific jobs e.g. work within the construction industry, but somehow made available or accessible for women.
- The group felt that we need to consider **childcare costs and provision** when making alternatives available. An example was raised around not just crèche facilities for younger children, but for older children too that eg catered for school times – so an

awareness of different challenges for having older children and not putting responsibilities for younger siblings.

What information and data is required to support the development of EOs in this area?

- The group felt that there is **a need to develop of a menu of options available for the judiciary** and those making charging decisions. For example, it was suggested this included court triage arrest and prevention, including restorative justice options. This needs to be up to date and perhaps online so pre-sentence report writer can have info available as needed.
- There is a need to **be aware of the local authority drivers/levers to make this a priority** - local authorities can help by providing space for testing new policies, and oversight.

BREAKOUT GROUP THREE:

What is the potential for London to explore cross borough / sub regional solutions in respect of **young female offenders**?

Potential for pan-London or sub-regional delivery:

- Colleagues felt that this area is under resourced, and as such there is ample opportunity for service provision.
- It was suggested that the needs of this group dictate that a **regional approach is more appropriate than pan-London**. Existing women's centres cater for adults and there is a need for services for the younger age group. **One possible opportunity could be a hub for 15 - 24 year olds** like the current women's centres for adult women offenders. Regional services need to be accessible as young women are not as willing to travel to access support.
- It was explained how there is also a **gap in transition services**. There is also **stigma attached with offending**, and so there is a need to broaden the service offer.

BREAKOUT GROUP FOUR:

What is the potential for London to explore cross borough / sub regional solutions in respect of **women's centres and residential solutions?**

Potential for pan-London or sub-regional delivery:

- It was felt that there are lots of opportunities within this area as **current residential provision is so lacking, and join-up of referral pathways so chaotic.**
- There are **two hubs in London that provided examples that could possibly be built on** in terms of a more holistic response to the needs of ex-offenders (see below) – one includes residential help. There was agreement that a **better geographical spread of similar hubs** providing specialist services was needed.
- There are a number of women centre models that have been successful in other parts the country that could be researched. This included a **social enterprise model in NORTHAMPTON (The GOOD LOAF CIC)** which focused strongly on employment, but again not on residence.
- A number of **other models or approaches were suggested** and discussed, including:
 - Providing support to the **housing first model**
 - **Tenancy deposit**
 - Providing a broader accommodation service for London – **supporting boroughs** on their obligations and identifying opportunities to be maximised
 - **Mobile delivery of services** focussing on specialisms coming into boroughs would certainly be beneficial.

However given the times frames of this fund, it could be better to bolster existing provision rather than seek a totally new solution.

What does the current service look like in terms of gaps, but also good practice?

- Colleagues highlighted how there is, in short, **very little residential provision currently.**
- The two hubs mentioned earlier are the **MINERVA PROJECT (ADVANCE) in HAMMERSMITH, West London, and the BETH CENTRE (WOMEN IN PRISON) in LAMBETH.** It was suggested that more geographic hubs like these are needed, **with a residential aspect** (which the BETH CENTRE does seem to provide). There seems to

be a lack of wrap-around services for women coming out of the CJS, that centres like this could provide.

- It was felt that women are often **bounced between housing providers** on short term basis, as supply but also join-up between providers is often poor, which makes it very difficult to establish order and routine in their lives. There are generally **no female-only hostels**, and DV hostels often operate **zero-tolerance drug policies with no other supported solutions**, making resettlement very hard and ex-offenders more likely to re-enter the CJS. The housing situation was felt to be exacerbated by generally patchy and poorly joined-up advocacy and support services. Hubs providing a range of services, as well as residential referrals/accommodation, would be very welcome.
- Learning from **good practice in women's centres offering co-located services** (eg covering advocacy around substance misuse/health/relationship counselling/DV) shows quite clearly that co-location needs to be **planned with confidentiality, and the creation of a genuine space for women, in mind**.
- **One-to-one support** was seen as key, as women are referred into service providers. This could help to break the 'revolving doors' cycle expressed by some colleagues, whereby offenders on remand or licence with substance misuse issues reoffend and re-enter the CJS, without that specialised support and care.
- Where there is provision, it needed to **provide better integration of a number of care pathways**, not just residences. Current provision was seen as too chaotic. It should include space for ex-offenders to get their lives back on track in the widest sense. For instance **HIBISCUS and WORKING CHANCE** provide employability workshops for female offenders. There was agreement in the group that VAWG services and other care pathways, eg mentoring, or employability, ideally needed to be locked in to the same service, and in a private space.
- One colleague raised a point around '**intentionally homeless' decisions made by councils**, which can be a barrier to accessing temporary and longer-term housing options. The issue is with housing departments discharging their duty to accommodate women post-release, deeming them as 'intentionally homeless' due to going into prison.
- Due to the paucity of residential solutions, some boroughs are finding that **women aren't even being offered 28-day temporary accommodation** by the local authority post-release. There is a need for **housing pathways work with women in custody** and through-the-gate in order to identify/secure accommodation on release, to counter intentionally homeless decisions made on presentation to the housing office.
- A final important point was raised around the **unstable and fragmented nature of government funding streams** – this may be the way the system is, but a more stable core of funding could provide much better planned and delivered services in the long-run.

What information and data is required to support the development of EOs in this area?

- Suggested good practice included **commissioners better sharing information** through working groups – this could lead to better mapping of provision and gaps, pooling of resources and forward planning.
- There was a query in relation to **capital and revenue expenditure** as part of a bid (in relation to building premises), which will be answered in the published Q&A document on MOPAC's website.