

Harris Review

Liaison & Diversion

Roundtable Event

11th December 2014

Harris Review Attendees

Dr Dinesh Maganty
Deborah Coles
Stephen Cragg QC
Dr Meng Aw Yong
Graham Mackenzie (Secretariat)

Attendees

Shauneen Lambe – Just for Kids Law
Nicola Wendel – Crime Reduction
Initiative
Lesley Dixon – Family Lives

Apologies

Seray Himmet – Kids Company
Yinka Ajibulu – Kids Company

Welcome and Introduction

- Deborah Coles welcomed the attendees and invited them to introduce themselves.

Aims of the Harris Review

- Dinesh Maganty outlined to the attendees the aim of the Review, in relation to the self-inflicted deaths of young adults in custody.

<http://iapdeathsincustody.independent.gov.uk/harris-review>.

Objective of the roundtable

- Dinesh Maganty articulated the specific aims of this roundtable, explaining that during the process of gathering evidence relating to self-inflicted death of young adults, the question of whether the young adults within the scope of the review 'should have been in custody' in the first place had been highlighted. The Review has therefore embarked on a sequence of three roundtable meetings to look into diversion away from the Criminal Justice System, either before an individual's exposure to it or at their first point of contact; additionally, the Review is looking at alternatives to custody at the point of sentence.

Plenary discussion

- There would be significant benefits of the holistic approach adopted through the Youth Offender Teams; however, there was concern that such a structured approach could drag young people into the Criminal Justice System unnecessarily, thereby causing distress through being stigmatised by association – therefore a more holistic approach amongst local voluntary organisations and community groups was essential, but not governed through the CJS, including the development of a multi-agency plan;

- Funding was an area identified that was essential, as it determines the level of facilities and support that is available outside of the CJS, which can support a young adult and prevent them from entering the system;
- It was felt that often diagnosis of mental health takes place too late and at the wrong point within the CJS; there should be more focus at diagnosis taking place before an individual enters the CJS. Group discussed increased resources required within schools, helping teachers to diagnose mental health issues at an early stage, thereby providing appropriate evidence to make decisions, such as exclusion from school and poor behaviour – such an early intervention would be expected to deliver downstream benefits;
- Many teachers are not provided with training or support required to help a pupil whose parent/guardian is in custody and the Group felt that this type of training would assist teachers in addressing an individual's frustration or behaviour. In addition, training for teachers should be provided to ensure that they are aware of the impact their language can have upon an individual, including labelling someone as being aggressive, disruptive or a bully rather than seeking to understand the underlying cause and how such labels can fuel an individual's behaviour;
- There would be benefit in the introduction of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) staff or facilities into schools as a way of supporting teachers and those young adults in need of their services before the issue escalates;
- There has been significant investment in supporting female offenders following the production of the [Corston Report](#), a similar analysis and focus on issues relating to young adult and adult male prisoners with mental health issues should also be considered in order to identify the best ways to support them;
- General concern that many organisations have relevant information on an individual but are not communicating more widely, either because there is no overarching lead organisation directing the process and so the importance of sharing information is not understood, or it is related to an organisations misunderstanding of the Data Protection principles and therefore there is a general reluctance to share;
- Wider perception that given the investment into the Youth environment and development of the CJS structures, many organisations take the view that it would be quicker and easier to direct an individual into the CJS so that the young adult can be effectively diagnosed and treated, rather than take responsibility themselves;
- Not enough is done to support young people as they transition from 17 to 18, and sometimes even earlier in their lives. More needs to be done therefore to support them and to ensure that they develop the required emotional resilience, as well as understanding the appropriate contacts/organisations that can assist and support them, and
- Observation that there was a contrast between the amount invested in alternatives/early prevention schemes, which are intended to stop further offending, prevent crime and better support victims as compared to the

significant cost to the public purse of prosecuting and imprisoning young adults, which often fails to reduce rates of reoffending.

In addition to the discussion on liaison and diversion relating to those requiring support before they experience the CJS for the first time, there was discussion which touched upon the issues to be covered in the subsequent roundtable events; these are detailed below.

- The provision of mental health teams in courts is not universal and is often patchy and inconsistent, which in turn impacts the support provided to offenders, together with advice provided to Sentencers when considering alternatives to custody;
- The standard of representation at the courts, especially Magistrates courts, can also be inconsistent, which in turn can impact upon the way that an offender is supported or represented before the court and the mitigation that is presented to the Sentencers, and
- Sentencing options for those with diagnosed mental health issues are limited, and it is often easier and quicker to sentence an individual to imprisonment, on the expectation that suitable treatment will be provided, as against seeking available resources to issue an Hospital Order, e.g. two separate medical practitioners and confirmation of available resources.

Summary of discussion and next steps

- Dinesh Maganty summarised the findings from the discussion, which included the longer term benefits of investing mental health services at an early stage; the need for increased co-ordination and communication between organisations; it should not be for custodial establishments to manage individuals with mental health issues – organisations should take responsibility and more should be done to engage with young adults, listen to them and develop their emotional resilience.
- There are two further roundtable events scheduled over the coming months and the notes from each meeting will be published on the Harris Review website. The findings from the discussions will be shared with all of the Panel, and will be used to develop and support the overall findings and recommendations.