

Increasing the voluntary and community sector's involvement in Integrated Offender Management

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Executive summary

- Integrated Offender Management (IOM) aims to reduce re-offending through local agencies taking a partnership approach to the management of repeat offenders. As part of an undertaking to increase voluntary and community sector (VCS) involvement in service delivery, the Home Office set up an initiative to provide small grants to VCS organisations to work with IOM partnerships.
- The initiative used the expertise of the national VCS umbrella body, Clinks, to develop and administer the grants scheme. This ‘hands-off’ approach to delivering centrally funded resources was considered to be innovative within a criminal justice setting.
- The Home Office commissioned an evaluation of the initiative which aimed to: explore the strengths and weaknesses of the funding model; identify perceived

barriers and facilitators to voluntary and community sector involvement in IOM; explore how the Home Office might best work with the VCS to encourage and support their capacity to work in partnership with statutory agencies; and identify any implications for the delivery of future similar projects.

The funding model

- Clinks, a national membership organisation that supports the work of VCS organisations within the criminal justice system of England and Wales, was appointed to oversee the project. Clinks in turn appointed a lead voluntary and community sector agency in each of the four localities selected to test the initiative. These lead bodies acted as a broker between local statutory and VCS agencies, coordinating local bids and overseeing the local delivery of projects.

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Keywords

Integrated Offender Management
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- Three types of organisation bid to undertake local projects: independent voluntary organisations; social enterprises; and local umbrella bodies such as a Council for Voluntary Service. Over half the funding for the project work was awarded to organisations with no previous experience of working with offenders. Seventeen projects were funded across the four areas. The total value of the grants awarded was £497k.
- Projects funded through the initiative focused on **delivering services to offenders** (e.g. work placement opportunities for offenders, multi-agency initiatives for supporting offenders post-release); the provision of **volunteering and mentoring** opportunities for IOM offenders; the **strategic development** of the VCS to engage with IOM (e.g. establishing fora, mapping of voluntary services); or providing **seed-corn grants** to support small voluntary organisations.
- Clinks was empowered to provide the required scrutiny and accountability on behalf of the Home Office. The hands-off approach to funding decisions taken was welcomed by local organisations. The management and bidding processes were perceived to be relatively light-touch and straightforward. The compressed project timescales may, however, have limited the number of VCS organisations which became involved.
- Clinks' links to, and credibility within, the voluntary sector, together with their specialist knowledge, were regarded as important in allowing the swift implementation of the project. The four local lead bodies had good relations with many small VCS bodies in their areas. The fact that Home Office funding for IOM was given directly to the VCS was cited by several VCS stakeholders as helping to raise their profile and build credibility within local IOM partnerships.

Involving the VCS in IOM – what it meant for the local areas

Interviewees identified a number of benefits arising from the initiative.

- **Links between voluntary and statutory sector organisations were strengthened.** The initiative as a whole was perceived to have consolidated local relationships between VCS and statutory agencies

in the criminal justice arena. Several local projects sought explicitly to strengthen these links. Elsewhere relations improved through the setting up of joint governance arrangements for IOM.

- **Changing practitioners' views on the value of VCS involvement in IOM.** The initiative was perceived to have been successful in positively influencing the views of those in the statutory sector on the value of the VCS sector. It had brought about a shift away from the VCS being viewed solely as 'well-meaning amateurs'.
- **The ability of the voluntary sector to address the diverse needs of offenders.** Organisations that bid for funds were encouraged to consider local needs of the IOM population. As a result, projects were developed to address the needs of specific offender groups (e.g. female and BME offenders) which might not have been met through traditional commissioning processes. The use of seed-corn grants was felt to have been effective in allowing smaller VCS bodies, with expertise in niche areas, to become involved in IOM.

Participants identified the following challenges to involving the VCS in IOM.

- **Mixed levels of understanding of IOM amongst the VCS.** IOM was a new agenda for many of the local VCS organisations involved in the initiative. Those organisations which were new to IOM, in some cases, were found to have a very limited understanding of IOM.
- **Targeting IOM offenders.** There were issues in some projects around correctly identifying which offenders were in scope for IOM. It was not always clear whether VCS agencies were working with members of the IOM cohort.
- **Staff buy-in.** While local projects were well-supported by senior IOM managers, some VCS staff felt that frontline staff were less likely to buy into the funded projects. This was problematic for VCS services which relied on offender managers to make referrals.
- **Risk management.** Interviewees from both sectors identified several issues around how the VCS managed risk. Organisations which were new to working with offenders did not always have easy

access to the expertise required to assess offenders and appropriately manage identified risks.

- **Developing appropriate information-sharing agreements.** Interviewees in all four areas reported some difficulty in establishing workable information-sharing protocols. Information-sharing agreements which were in place before the initiative started did not always reflect data sharing in the VCS (e.g. limitations around IT equipment and storage).
- **The ability to sustain services after funding had ended.** With limited opportunities to seek additional funding, it was felt that making services available to offenders for a limited period risked raising expectations that could not be sustained. This in turn risked confirming a perception that VCS services were fragile.
- **Competition within the VCS.** The VCS is both competitive and diverse in its make up. Both factors may act as a potential barrier to collaboration between different VCS bodies. Although the initiative contributed to improvements in collaborative working, there were limits to what could be achieved.

Implications

Key implications for policy and practice are:

- The use of a voluntary sector national umbrella body to develop and administer the initiative worked well in this instance, but it may not be feasible or desirable for all areas. Future application should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- The mix of local and national brokerage organisations was perceived to have played a critical role in delivering this initiative but this may not reflect VCS capacity and capability nationally. If local brokerage organisations are used in future initiatives, departments will need to consider how to build capacity in less developed sectors.
- One challenge for increasing VCS involvement in service delivery is around the level of resource required to build local capacity. Consideration needs to be given to how approaches such as this might be encouraged or sustained without funding incentives.
- Small amounts of funding to voluntary and community sector bodies can make a marked

difference to local activities. The diversity of the VCS market could be supported through commissioning mechanisms, with the VCS being represented on groups responsible for commissioning of IOM services.

- Where capacity allows, VCS organisations working with offenders should have representation on local IOM steering groups, perhaps through a lead local area agency such as a Local Infrastructure Organisation.
- Buy-in to VCS engagement in IOM is important at all levels across both VCS and statutory organisations. Whilst strategic influence is important, buy-in from frontline staff is important and steps to ensure this should be reflected in organisational communications strategies.
- Data-sharing issues in relation to IOM may be eased if the Home Office and Ministry of Justice provided a nationally agreed template to assist local areas in developing arrangements.
- The use of appropriately targeted seed-corn funding can help VCS bodies with no prior experience of working in IOM become involved and help meet the needs of specific offender groups.