

## **Submission: Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Adfam is the national umbrella organisation working to improve the quality of life for families affected by drugs and alcohol. We do this by working with a network of individuals, practitioners and organisations who come into contact with the families, friends and carers affected by these problems, including extensive work with offenders and their families.

### **Background information**

Adfam was founded in 1984 by the mother of a heroin user who could not find the support she needed to deal with her unique set of problems. Since then Adfam has grown into the national umbrella organisation representing a growing and diverse network of community activists supporting families with multiple problems, and also works to represent families' interests in the wider drug sector through providing training, resources and information in this complex area.

Adfam also has a long history of work in the criminal justice sector, providing low-threshold interventions through prison-based support workers, publications, good practice and training on work with offenders' families.

### **Key points**

Adfam has responded directly to relevant questions below. There are however some key themes throughout the response:

- There is a substantial existing infrastructure of local community organisations already working with offenders, their families, and people affected by drug and alcohol problems. This is continuously relevant to the questions posed by the consultation, and making better use of existing voluntary and community sector activists is the easiest, most cost-effective way to work towards the goals of the new Government.
- Proposed police reforms should work alongside other measures introduced by the coalition Government and the desire to work more effectively at community and neighbourhood level. Developing the capacity of the voluntary sector should be a key objective of the plans for a Big Society Bank, and this should include funding and development schemes for community activists tackling local problems related to drugs, alcohol and offenders.
- If new Commissioners are designed to improve accountability and make the relationship between the police force and local people closer, they must be visible and approachable in their local community and work alongside partners from various local organisations who are already tackling difficult issues in the community.

## **Increasing democratic accountability**

### **3. How should Commissioners best work with the wider criminal justice and community safety partners who deliver the broad range of services that keep communities safe?**

The invaluable contribution of local community activists and voluntary sector providers should not be underestimated in this respect. They are key local partners who understand the issues of their community better than anyone else.

The true range of partners in community safety should be recognised properly by Commissioners. For example, it is not just police services, hospitals and schools that have a stake in the safety of local communities: local voluntary organisations working with drug users and their families, and those working with current and ex-offenders, also have a major role to play. Commissioners should be able to bring these different partners together to ensure mutual cooperation and effective referral systems – for example, a simple process of referring offenders’ families to appropriate support at the point of arrest would help to improve family relationships going forward, consequently improving reintegration and reducing the likelihood of reoffending.

### **4. How might Commissioners best engage with their communities - individuals, businesses and voluntary organisations - at the neighbourhood level?**

The new post of Commissioner is clearly intended to create a closer and more accountable working relationship between police forces and the local communities they are responsible for. In this respect, Commissioners should ensure that they work as extensively as possible with the range of voluntary sector providers in their local area: it is these small community groups that have the most in-depth knowledge of what is affecting them, and their knowledge of particular issues relating to ethnicity and culture can be highly useful. This could take the form of frequent ‘community day’-type events and Commissioners should be as visible and available as possible to local organisations who will enthusiastically greet the opportunity to work alongside local decision makers.

Local community groups have in-depth knowledge of their area and can be an invaluable resource in helping to keep communities safe. Groups working with the families of drug/alcohol users and offenders are a key ‘ear to the ground’ with first-hand knowledge of drug markets, dealing, antisocial behaviour, offending, homelessness and begging, as well as having an active role in partnership with needle exchanges, drug services and prisons, through which they can make a real difference to the rehabilitation of offenders.

Though each community is different, Commissioners from different areas should be able to work in partnership with each other to share ideas about what has worked around the country, and provide opportunities to ‘scale up’ successful models. This could be vital for the effective, quick and efficient sharing of good practice.

There is also a great opportunity for local commissioners to work with voluntary organisations on particular public safety campaigns which can make a real difference to a community – for example

work with family support organisations around drug-related deaths, sexual exploitation, overdose training, domestic violence, young people's issues and general drug awareness. These would demonstrate the enthusiasm of Commissioners to work in the real grassroots of their communities, and demonstrate the leadership that people will expect from them.

### **Tackling crime together**

#### **19. What more can the Government do to support the public to take a more active role in keeping neighbourhoods safe?**

All individuals have a stake in their local community and they should feel that they have an integral role in keeping it safe. Organisations working with sophisticated problems – such as drug use or offender issues – should feel that their work is at the forefront of community safety and not the fringes. Existing organisations which often struggle for local recognition – for example those supporting the families of drug users or offenders – often feel excluded from 'official' channels and the move towards increasingly localised service provision is a fantastic opportunity to tap into their skills. The Government, therefore, should seriously consider providing support – financial or otherwise, for example through access to training – to local groups to help build their capacity and encourage their involvement in community safety initiatives. For example, funds from the proposed Big Society Bank would be ideal for strengthening the voluntary and community sector and recognising the difficult work it already undertakes. This would help to galvanise action from local groups who are keen to play a role in making their neighbourhoods safer.

Professional development is an effective – and cost-effective – way to increase the ability of local community groups working with criminal justice issues, and in other difficult areas. Training and development is available in areas such as setting up mutual aid groups, working with volunteers, fundraising and project management, and this would enable small community groups to take a more active and confident role in solving local problems that they have recognised as problematic. This fits extremely well with the Government's overall desire to strengthen the voluntary and community sector, and put it on an equal footing with private and public sector agencies in providing public services.

Umbrella organisations such as Adfam have a long history of working alongside small community groups to develop capacity and skills, meaning that small local agencies can be linked up with good practice learned in other areas and access appropriate training. These small groups are then able to work more extensively in their local community – for example running drugs awareness workshops or educating others about the realities of the criminal justice system – providing desirable knock-on effects in local areas through effective, visible action.

Since the Government has expressed its desire to introduce a 'rehabilitation revolution' and to better include voluntary sector providers in service delivery at local level, it stands to reason that local organisations working with offenders and their families should be a key partner.

**20. How can the Government encourage more people to volunteer (including as special constables) and provide necessary incentives to encourage them to stay?**

With Government strategies leaning increasingly towards localism and in an environment of spending restrictions, the current climate provides a timely opportunity not only to explore new opportunities for local volunteers, but also to work more productively with existing ones who need no more incentives to give up their time than their own dedication to the cause. Local organisations tackling drug and offender issues, for example, already make heavy use of volunteers in their workforce – research undertaken by Adfam shows that a quarter of the family support workforce are unpaid volunteers from the local community, showing the underlying level of dedication in the sector. Championing the success of these agencies provides a ready-made dossier of ‘what works’ in community activism and shows the stake that all local people have in their community’s wellbeing.

**21. What more can central Government do to make the criminal justice system more efficient?**

As mentioned previously, taking advantage of the skills and workforce available in the voluntary and community sector provides an excellent way of tapping into reserves of dedication, experience and expertise in dealing with complex issues.

For the criminal justice system to work efficiently, the services it provides or commissions must work effectively i.e. initiatives that have been paid for out of the public purse must produce results that are worth the financial input they require. This is clearly recognised as a priority of the new Government, with the promised ‘rehabilitation revolution’ to reduce reoffending a key part of the coalition’s Programme for Government. The ‘independent providers’ that are mentioned in this pledge should include charities and voluntary sector organisations and not just private providers; experience such as Adfam’s in working with offenders’ families - and the positive results this works towards upon release from prison – should be pursued and used to its full potential.

In terms of providing ‘value for money’, the move towards a system which favours local community providers should be carried through properly and not lost in a haze of inappropriate targets. Careful consideration of possible and desirable outcomes should be undertaken, and services should not be shoe-horned into monitoring processes that don’t reflect the unique value of their work – this is particularly important with services working in difficult areas like drugs, alcohol community safety and offending, where creative and holistic interventions which struggle to fit into one subject area really thrive.

**22. What prescriptions from Government get in the way of effective local partnership working?**

Though Government money should of course be fully accounted for, there is some concern amongst community groups that they are not free enough to undertake the difference-making work they really want to.

Local processes - for example the commissioning of services to cut reoffending or tackle drug-related problems - should be as easy as possible for community groups to become involved in. At present

there is some feeling amongst community groups that they are 'shut out' of the commissioning process and there are insufficient and infrequent opportunities to showcase their work and help design and run services which make a positive impact on their lives and the wellbeing of the local area.

### **23. What else needs to be done to simplify and improve community safety and criminal justice work locally?**

In order to ensure appropriate local ownership of community safety measures, channels of communication between neighbourhood-level organisations and decision-makers should be made more direct and transparent. There should be real partnership between these groups, and local people need to be fully involved in service planning to respond to problems that arise in their area.

Devolving powers to decision-makers at a more local level cannot be successful if these new figures are out of touch with what's really happening on the ground. For the new localism to be successful, community activists like those working in drug and alcohol family support need to feel that their local expertise is sought, valued and used to its full potential. Whether this takes the form of local panels, forums or steering groups is yet to be decided, but the relationship between local decision-makers such as the new Commissioners and community groups should be open and continuous.

#### **Further information**

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