

The Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme

Supporting People:
Good News for Women
Ex-Prisoners?

Sally Malin

Research Paper 2004/01



The Griffins Society

Working for female offenders
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The Griffins Society

The Griffins Society is a voluntary organisation working for the care and resettlement of female offenders, including those with a history of mental illness and violent behaviour. The Society was set up in 1966. At that time there was little residential provision for women offenders and the Society concentrated its efforts on filling that gap by providing specialist hostel and move-on accommodation. Those residential projects were transferred to another voluntary organisation in 1997 and the Society decided to alter the focus of its activities. This change of emphasis included establishing the Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme in the Social Policy Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2001.

The Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme

The aim of the Fellowship Programme is to provide ‘thinking space’ for those working in the criminal justice system or allied fields who wish to study a particular aspect of the circumstances or treatment of women offenders. Applications are welcomed from anyone with an interest in female offenders, such as magistrates, probation officers, staff of supported accommodation, drug/alcohol counsellors. In keeping with its origins, the Griffins Society welcomes applications from the voluntary sector, as well as statutory organisations. Fellowships are not awarded to people in academic employment, or studying for a degree. Each Fellowship runs for one year and Fellows are awarded a grant. Academic support and supervision is provided by Dr Judith Rungay, Director of the Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme. Fellows have full access to all facilities at the London School of Economics.

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For further information about the Fellowship Programme and its publications, or to correspond with the author, please contact the Griffins Society:

The Griffins Society
PO BOX 22791
London
N22 8WH
email: admin@thegriffinssociety.org
www.thegriffinssociety.org

The Griffins Society is a Registered Charity (Reg. No. 1034571)

This report is dedicated to the former residents of Stockdale House, Camden

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge, with grateful thanks:

The Griffins Society, for funding the Fellowship scheme, and creating a network of people concerned with women ex-offenders – and for getting me started back at Stockdale House in 1981

The LSE, and in particular Judith Rungay for her patient supervision

My fellow Griffins Society Fellows 2003-4 – Sarah Cairns, Rebecca Clarke and Juliet Dempster

John Walters, for a helpful early steer on possible projects for comparative study

All the interviewees for the study:

Chris Dolphin, Resettlement Coordinator for Women's Prison Estate, Prison Service

Christopher Smith, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Derek Kettlewell, National Probation Directorate Supporting People Advisor (excluding London)

Helen Cash, National Advisor, Supporting People, London

Joy Dalkin, (Policy Advisor, Adult Offenders and Rehabilitation Unit), Home Office

Kezia Crew, Lead Officer and Acting Head, Supporting People, LB Camden (also speaking on behalf of Stephen Conroy, Supporting People lead, Camden PCT)

Lourdes Keever, London Probation Service

Liam Hughes, Chief Executive, East Leeds PCT

Kate James, Research Officer, Supporting People Team, Leeds City Council

Clare Henderson, Supporting People Manager, LB Islington

Elizabeth Clowes, Assistant Director of Commissioning, LB Islington/Islington PCT

Joy Taylor, Prisons Liaison Manager, New Bridge Project, Liverpool

Bronia Benecki, Head of Resettlement, HMP Low Newton

Liz Griffiths, Chief Executive, East Potential

Lawrie and Angie Brown, Community Chaplaincy Coordinators, Churches' Criminal Justice Forum

M. M Barnet, Directeur, Soleillet

Anne Forbes and Nan Saeki for assistance with the Leeds case study

Sarah Patey for translation and assistance with researching the Soleillet project

Marcia Saunders, Chair, North Central London Strategic Health Authority; John Carrier, Chair, Camden PCT, and Paula Kahn, Chair, Islington PCT for research access to Camden and Islington PCTs

Peter Sedgwick and Stuart Dew, Churches' Criminal Justice Forum, for personal encouragement and support

My husband, John Keenan, and our family – for providing unflinching hospitality to yet another of my projects

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Executive Summary

The importance of housing in the resettlement of women ex-offenders is well established. *Supporting People* is a UK government programme which took effect in April 2003, bringing major changes to the planning, funding and delivery of housing related support for over 1 million people, including ex-offenders. The programme brings together at local authority level the main partners of housing, health, social services and probation to plan strategically and commission services which are cost effective, reliable, transparent and needs-led. For 2004-5, the Supporting People allocation for England was £1.8 billion; for the UK, £2.8 billion.

This research project, carried out between October 2003 and December 2004, sought through interviews and document review to explore the early impact of Supporting People at both national and local levels on planning and provision for women ex-offenders. A comparative perspective was secured by review of 2 community based ex-offender initiatives outside the UK.

The research suggests that heavy demand on Supporting People resources, and heightened transparency of spend at local levels, are creating a challenging climate for champions of provision for women ex-offenders.

However, Supporting People does offer potential for better planning and provision for ex-offenders through improved joint working between key statutory agencies, and with the voluntary sector. Given that absolute numbers of women ex-offenders remain small, coordination may be more effectively conducted across a number of local authorities. Local Supporting People needs analyses suggest the potential relevance for women ex-offenders of 'floating support' independent of housing tenure. In addition, the multi-agency inspection regime for Supporting People has created a more robust framework for scrutiny of planning and provision for ex-offenders.

1. Introduction

Housing and reoffending - problems

The importance of housing in the resettlement of offenders is long established. In 2002 the Social Exclusion Unit reviewed criminological and social research on the evidence of the factors that influence re-offending, and identified housing as one of nine key factors: drug and alcohol misuse; mental and physical health; attitudes and self control; institutionalisation and life-skills; housing; financial support and debt; and family networks. The report, *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners*¹, identified three key areas where policy change could make a positive impact on resettlement: loss of housing during custody due to Housing Benefit policy or poor communication with housing providers; difficulties in accessing housing on release, including a limited supply of hostel accommodation; and patchy practice within prisons in the provision of housing advice to prisoners. Strikingly, the report concluded that much offender homelessness is caused by a failure to address what happens to accommodation at the time of conviction.

In addition, young people who are homeless are more likely to engage in crime than those living at home. More than half the difference between these two groups is attributable to the effects of homelessness rather than other factors such as social class, intact families, parental control, or compliance with school².

Housing and reoffending – solutions

The Government proposed a number of responses to the housing problems identified in the SEU report. Firstly, the Government's National Accommodation Strategy, as part of the National Rehabilitation Strategy led by the Home Office, will seek to ensure that prisoners do not lose their homes as a result of being in custody.

Secondly, the Homelessness Act 2002 made changes to the homelessness legislation which prevent the blanket exclusion of particular groups, including prisoners. The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 extends the category of homeless applicants who have a priority need for accommodation to include, among others, those vulnerable as a result of having served time in prison. The Order, which only applies in England, does not mean that all released prisoners will automatically have priority need for accommodation – it is for the housing authority to decide whether an individual applicant is vulnerable.

The third key response of the Government to the housing issues identified by the SEU has been Supporting People (SP). SP is a government programme which took effect in April 2003, bringing major changes to the planning and funding of housing related support for around 1 million people, including ex-prisoners and people at risk of offending. The programme brings together the main partners of health, housing, social services, probation and local authorities, to plan strategically and commission services that are cost effective, reliable, transparent, needs led and client based. For 2004-5, the total Supporting People grant was £1.8 billion.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has the main responsibility for the Supporting People programme. It allocates a Supporting People grant to Administering Authorities and monitors their performance. Administering Authorities (unitary authorities and counties in two tier areas) are responsible for implementing

the programme within their local area. The Administering Authorities contract with providers and partner organisations for the provision of Supporting People services. A Commissioning Body (a partnership of local housing, social care, health and probation statutory services) sits above an Administering Authority and plays a key role in advising and approving a Supporting People strategy. Negotiation and consultation is also required with all housing and support service providers, other statutory service providers, the private sector and voluntary organisations to plan and commission support services to meet identified needs.

The Supporting People Programme brings together considerable existing funding streams including Transitional Housing Benefit, which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase; the Housing Corporation's Supported Housing Management Grant, and Probation Accommodation Grant Scheme into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities.

The programme allows for greater diversity of provision tailored to individual needs and delivered in a strategic context. For example:

- support services for people from black and minority ethnic communities whose needs have previously not been met in an appropriate or timely manner;
- support services for vulnerable older people who wish to live independently, including those in sheltered housing;
- temporary hostel accommodation - including probation hostels and those providing support for women fleeing domestic violence;
- support services for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties;
- floating support to a range of vulnerable people including young people leaving care; and
- Home Improvement Agency services whose work includes providing practical support to older owner occupiers to enable them to live independently.

Supporting People is pivotal in providing housing related support to enable continuity and stability for released prisoners who need help to minimise the likelihood of their re-offending. Without this support, many prisoners would be unable to access appropriate housing, or would be unable to sustain their accommodation, itself a major factor in re-offending. Thus Supporting People is crucial to the effectiveness of many other New Labour policy imperatives, including the delivery of the Government's commitment to reduce crime.

Concerns

However, there have been concerns, particularly at local level, about the ambitious scope and pace of the initiative. There have been concerns about a shift from a national rights based system to a cash limited funding system, and about whether in practice cash strapped local authorities would seek to shift responsibility for clients with high levels of need from their own community care budgets to the new Supporting People budget. If so, would provision for other groups suffer – particularly groups such as ex-offenders, who may be seen by local communities as less deserving of support.

It was therefore unclear to what extent Supporting People was likely in practice to create more – and better – housing related support for women ex-prisoners. Nor was it clear whether a local authority based planning system would have the strategic capacity to plan effectively for such a diverse and challenging client group.

This research has sought at an early stage in the life of Supporting People to assess its impact on planning and provision for women ex-prisoners. The aim has been to explore the merits and shortcomings of the programme, and to identify ways in which Supporting People might in future be used as a springboard for better planning and provision to meet the needs of women ex-offenders.

2. Methodology

I wanted to explore the impact of Supporting People on planning and provision for women ex-offenders. Methodologically, this was a challenge: Supporting People is a relatively new programme which has been implemented at considerable speed; it encompasses 150 local authorities; and its remit for women ex-offenders needs to be seen against the broader canvas of the many other client groups it seeks to serve.

I therefore decided to approach the question from 3 different angles: national; local and comparative. I wanted to know what, from a national perspective, were the aspirations for Supporting People, what was seen to be working well, and less well. I then wanted to know whether national hopes were mirrored by local reality. Finally, a comparative perspective was sought in order to provide a broader, if opportunistic, 'paradigm check': might there be something to learn from approaches elsewhere to provision for women ex-offenders?

For the **national perspective**, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives from key national agencies involved in implementing Supporting People (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Home Office; Prison Service; National Probation Directorate; Association of Local Government). Appendix 1 lists the individuals interviewed. It should be noted that interviewees each spoke from an personal perspective, and comments should not be read as the official view of any agency concerned. This section of the research is described in chapter 4, and Appendix 2 details the prompt questions used for interviews.

The research then moved to explore **local perspectives** of the impact of Supporting People at local level. Interviews were undertaken with key players in the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington, and in Leeds. In practice, the opportunity to interview local key personnel was severely constrained by other demands on potential interviewees' time. This means that the local case studies reflect a narrow spectrum of views, and conclusions from data collected can only be tentative. The local case studies are described in Chapter 5.

To supplement the local case studies, I undertook a review of Audit Commission inspections to date of local authority Supporting People programmes. This provided a broader picture of some of the challenges involved in implementing Supporting People, although it should be noted that data collected relates to all ex-offenders and not solely to women ex-offenders.

Contact was also made with a number of 'prime movers' – individuals and projects identified by earlier interviewees as promoting innovation and development. In practice, this led to some blurring of the original research design, with data collected not only about initiatives funded through Supporting People but also from other housing initiatives. However, the information collected does highlight some good news of potential relevance to women ex-prisoners. This section of the work is also described in Chapter 5.

The final stage of the research sought to provide a **comparative perspective** through study of 2 community based initiatives for ex-offenders outside England and Wales. This strand of the research has looked in particular at the Canadian experience of community chaplaincy, and at a French project, Soleillet, based in Paris. Information was collected from secondary literature and from telephone interviews with key personnel. Chapter 6 describes this work.

Chapter 7 discusses key issues arising from the research, and proposes recommendations in response.

Chapter 8 lists recommendations.

References follow at the end of the report. Appendix 1 documents the format used for the semi-structured interviews, and Appendix 2 provides a list of interviewees.

3. Setting the Scene

This chapter seeks to establish a context for the research, drawing on findings from a literature review undertaken as part of the research project. The chapter focuses on 3 key areas: characteristics of the prison population, and in particular the female prison population; the role of housing in the resettlement of prisoners; and recent trends in criminal justice and social policy

The chapter concludes that many of the prison population have experienced significant disadvantage and problems which are likely to impact on their need for, and ability to, access to housing. However, despite the central role of housing in the resettlement of prisoners, the complex relationships between the criminal justice system and other statutory and voluntary sector service providers make access to housing advice and provision for many ex-offenders complex and problematic.

Furthermore, Supporting People for ex-offenders sits at the interface of sometimes contradictory government policies on crime control and social exclusion, and is likely to be particularly vulnerable to an ‘implementation gap’ between central government policy and local delivery

Characteristics of the Prison Population

All the research shows that the women – and men – in British prisons today are extraordinarily disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals. The Government’s Social Exclusion Unit (2002) found that, compared with the general population, prisoners are 13 times more likely to have been in care as a child; 13 times as likely to have been unemployed; 10 times as likely to have been a regular truant or excluded from school; and 5 times more likely to have been in receipt of benefits³.

A survey by the Chief Inspector of Prisons showed that two thirds of young prisoners have no educational qualifications, and one in five had no idea where they would live when they left detention. A study by NACRO showed that 60% of young prisoners came from unstable living conditions, 40% had been neglected or abused as children, and that 72% of prisoners had some kind of mental health problem – 14 times the level in the general population. Another showed that 25% of remand prisoners – one in five of whom are subsequently acquitted – had attempted suicide before entering prison⁴.

In addition, the number of people in prison as a direct result of drugs is high and still growing. However, many prisoners have never received help with their drug problems. The Social Exclusion Unit report estimated that in one prison 70% of prisoners came into jail with a drugs misuse problem but that 80% of these never had any contact with drug treatment services

Many prisoners have significant mental health problems. Some 72% of male and 70% of female sentenced prisoners suffer from two or more mental health disorders. These figures compare with just 5% of men and 2% of women in the general population⁵. Neurotic and personality disorders are particularly prevalent – 40% of male and 63% of female sentenced prisoners have a neurotic disorder, over three times the level in the general population. A significant number of prisoners suffer from a psychotic disorder – 7% of men and 14% of women, which is, respectively, 14 and 23 times the level found in the general population.

However, if most prisoners come from disadvantaged backgrounds, it remains the case that the women who end up in prison are significantly more vulnerable than their male counterparts. They are 35 times more likely than the general population to be suffering from mental disorders (male prisoners are 14 times more likely). They are seven times more likely to be drug abusers (men are five times). Some 71% of female prisoners have absolutely no educational qualifications. As many as half are estimated to have experienced physical abuse and one in three have undergone sexual abuse. In addition, many women prisoners have very limited experience of stable employment; 46% in one survey had not worked in the previous five years. Some 15% of sentenced women prisoners had previously been admitted to a psychiatric hospital, and 37% had previously attempted suicide⁶.

Furthermore, women prisoners are much less likely than the general population to be able to call on the support of a stable relationship, but more likely to have childcare responsibilities: 55% of women prisoners have at least one child under the age of 16. At least 20% were living as lone parents before imprisonment (compared to 9% in the general population). Each year, it is estimated that more than 17,700 children are separated from their mother by imprisonment⁷.

The Role of Housing in Resettlement

Each year about 90,000 adult prisoners and young offenders under the age of 21 are released from custody⁸. Most prisoners will face a range of challenging problems on release – a lack of family or community support; the need to find accommodation; the need to find employment or training; and difficulties in navigating complex webs of both statutory and voluntary sector services. Bearing in mind the characteristics of the prison population, individual ex-offenders are likely to face real difficulties in accessing exactly those services which could be of most help.

The Social Exclusion Unit report *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* (2002) reviewed research, inter alia, about the housing issues facing prisoners. They noted that around one in three prisoners are not in permanent accommodation prior to imprisonment⁹; as many as a third of prisoners lose their housing on imprisonment¹⁰; around a third of prisoners about to leave prison said that they had nowhere to stay¹¹; and noted that a recent study had indicated that around one in every twenty prisoners claimed to be sleeping rough immediately prior to imprisonment¹².

The report also identified a number of specific housing issues facing women prisoners on release, many of which flow from the characteristics of the female prison population discussed above. Thus, the greater proportion of single women means that there are fewer partners to maintain housing in their absence. Fewer women's prisons means that women are more likely to be held far from home – making it harder to maintain effective contact with housing providers. And although half of all women prisoners have dependent children, on release many are unable to regain their children from care without suitable accommodation, and cannot get access to housing appropriate for a family without first regaining custody of their children.

At a broader level, the SEU report explored areas where policy change on housing could make a positive impact on resettlement. Three key areas were identified: loss of housing during custody due to Housing Benefit policy or poor communication with housing providers; difficulties in accessing housing on release, including

limited supply of hostel accommodation; and patchy practice within prisons in the provision of housing advice to prisoners. These areas need to be seen in the wider context of the SEU's overall view that any successes in tackling offending behaviour and reducing re-offending were often achieved against the odds because of a lack of capacity, unclear lines of accountability, insufficient joint working, and a lack of innovation.

Given the characteristics of the prison population, it is evident that for many ex-prisoners housing is a necessary, but not sufficient, element of resettlement. Indeed, the levels of disadvantage and vulnerability experienced by many ex-prisoners suggest that without additional support, securing and retaining housing will be extremely difficult. Supporting People was explicitly envisaged by the SEU report as playing a key role in delivering such support.

Supporting People – the Policy Context

In this section of the report, I review some key dimensions of the policy context within which Supporting People has been developed and implemented. My purpose here is to move beyond a merely architectural notion of Supporting People, in which there is assumed a straightforward relationship between the design of a policy and its implementation. Rather, I suggest that, with regard to ex-prisoners, Supporting People occupies a complex arena within which a number of governmental philosophies and policies sit in an uncertain and fluid relationship.

'Tough on Crime'

Two strands in the criminal justice policy of New Labour stand out: an increased severity, and a declared commitment to 'what works'. The number of offenders arrested, cautioned and appearing before the courts has remained relatively constant, and there has not been any increase in the overall seriousness of offences brought to justice, yet more people are being sent to prison, and for longer. Ten years ago, one defendant in 26 would have gone into custody – today the number is double that¹³. Those appearing in magistrates' courts are three times more likely to go to prison than they would have ten years ago¹⁴. First time offenders are far more likely to go to prison.

This increased severity is a peculiarly British phenomenon, as comparisons with other European countries indicate. England and Wales has 141 prisoners for every 100,000 of our population – while Holland has 100, Germany has 98, France has 93 and Denmark has 64. Only the United States has proportionately more people in jail, looking across the major developed countries. There are more life-sentence prisoners in England and Wales today than the whole of the rest of Western Europe added together yet there is no evidence of a higher homicide rate in the UK than in other Western European countries¹⁵.

The Carter Report (2003) suggested that the cause of all this is the interaction between public perception, media, politicians and sentencers¹⁶. Thus magistrates and judges make harsher sentencing decisions in response to the Government's more prescriptive sentencing guidelines and a climate of increased public intolerance, fed by 'tough' rhetoric from politicians and media reporting. This view has received more recent corroboration from the Coulsfield Inquiry Report, commissioned by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, which suggested that

government, the media and sentencers must share responsibility for unnecessarily severe sentencing and a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system¹⁷.

New Labour's commitment to be 'tough on crime' through law and order policy has been seen as both a continuation of the rhetorical tone of the predecessor Conservative government, and as a means to secure a fragile electoral balance between its different constituencies¹⁸. In particular, New Labour has undertaken to ensure control over poorer residential, as well as more central and public locations, so demonstrating a commitment not only to its middle class supporters in the affluent suburbs, but also to the respectable working classes. On this basis, New Labour has endorsed US style 'zero tolerance', introduced Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and curfews, and committed to increase prison capacity. In similar vein, penalties for sex offenders and anti social behaviour have been toughened; the right to jury trial has been limited; and juries may be informed about defendants' previous criminal records. In all of this, there is a strong centralising tendency, and a unifying rhetoric of 'toughness'.

The second key strand of recent criminal justice policy has been an increasing emphasis on 'what works' – the need for interventions with offenders to be based on evidence of effectiveness. This began under the Conservative administration and has been enthusiastically endorsed by New Labour. Increasingly, programmes for offenders are required to demonstrate, empirically, their impact on offending behaviour. Yet, bizarrely, a number of the cornerstones of current practice in the criminal justice system remain immune to such scrutiny. What evidence is there, for example, that the increased use of imprisonment has any deterrent effect on possible offenders? Might it not be the case, rather, as Sir David Ramsbotham suggested after five years as Chief Inspector of Prisons, that 'Fear of imprisonment may deter those who have a job, a home and a family but not those who have no hope of achieving or retaining them.'¹⁹

Concerns with effectiveness – what works – thus tend to be focused at the micro rather than the macro level. Standards of proof have not been standardised. Rather than looking for new ways of reducing crime, or of repairing the damage caused by crime, government has sought to make the criminal justice system itself more effective in ways that, perversely, may make the underlying problems worse. As David Faulkner has commented:

As well as seeking to improve efficiency by reducing delays and increasing detections and convictions, their policies have widened the scope of the criminal law, extended the reach of the criminal justice process, and tightened its grip. Successive governments have introduced legislation to create new criminal offences at a rate of between 100 and 150 offences a year.²⁰

'What works', or evidence based practice, may have had further consequences for women offenders. It has been argued that the evidence on which practice is based has in the main been derived from male based research samples. In turn, this has led to criteria of efficacy and interventions which are not rooted in the specific experiences key to the offending of women.²¹

'Tough on the Causes of Crime'

New Labour's visible commitment to be 'tough on crime' has been complemented by a range of initiatives intended to be 'tough on the causes of crime'. In this, the administration has drawn heavily on models developed by the New Democrats in the USA, and has sought to mesh consumerist rights based values with a more communitarian philosophy. Such initiatives include intelligence led policing, local urban regeneration strategies and community justice initiatives.

Central to the New Labour commitment to a communitarian morality has been the establishment and work of the Social Exclusion Unit. Drawing, interestingly, on European social philosophy rather than that of either the UK or the US, 'social exclusion' has toppled 'the underclass' as a way to theorise social and economic disadvantage. Less clear, perhaps, is New Labour's overarching vision of what a socially inclusive society might look like.

Successive reports from the Social Exclusion Unit evidence the government's concern with a wide range of socially excluded groups and individuals – for example, rough sleepers; teenage parents; children in care; people with mental health problems. Equally striking has been the SEU's open-minded quest for solutions, not all of which would conform to the stringencies of 'what works' evaluation. Typically, the SEU team will seek out ways in which agencies are already responding to the problem, and incorporate examples of good, or promising, practice in their reports. Thus the SEU report on reducing reoffending was the result of a wide-ranging consultation by the Unit not only with other government departments but also with front line staff, service users and the voluntary sector.

SEU reports have been actively followed up by government, with considerable investment in social capital and social entrepreneurship at local levels, often through multi agency partnerships, and often also with an increased role for the voluntary or not for profit sector. Initiatives such as Connexions, the New Deal and the New Deal for Communities have proposed more scope to tackle local problems in the light of local conditions.

Discussion

Supporting People for ex-offenders sits, I suggest, at the intersection of a number of New Labour's philosophies and policies. In particular, it sits at the junction of criminal justice and social policy, and at the crossroads of local, regional and national government.

Increased severity in the criminal justice system has led to harsher sentences and a greater volume of people going to, and leaving, prison. Avowed commitment to 'what works' has had a number of perverse outcomes, not least the difficulty in securing resource for interventions which may not so readily yield evidence of their value. Although a debate is now emerging²² about the need to understand the values and processes which underlie views about effectiveness, criminal justice agencies do not as yet appear to have reconsidered questions about how evidence is constructed, and its relationship not only to the needs of the target group, but also the values of that population. I suggest that as the net of the criminal justice system has widened, more individuals have become enmeshed in a downward spiral of personal dislocation and social exclusion.

Meanwhile, social exclusion has been a key concern of New Labour, and a range of new programmes have been put in place to meet the needs of diverse groups of the socially excluded. Such programmes have appeared to offer more scope for local innovation, and to have been founded rather on likely impact than definitive proof of successful intervention.

Governance arrangements for local, regional and national government have also been in a period of transition, and this has had implications for crime control and Supporting People. Central government control of the agenda has been maintained through target setting, auditing, and the creation of performance tables, while local authorities and local partnerships have in reality had less scope for construction of local policy in the light of local conditions. Moves to establish and strengthen regional government has offered opportunities for wider connections between agencies, and economies of scale, but have also added a further tier of administration which can be difficult for key players to navigate.

Supporting People planning and provision for ex-offenders, then, may have been particularly vulnerable to an 'implementation gap' between central, regional and local government, and to inflexion within a range of policy discourses. Subsequent chapters will explore through the data collected for the research project whether this was in fact the case.

4. National perspectives

In this part of the research I wanted to find out how key national agencies saw the potential of Supporting People to address the needs of women ex-offenders. Interviews were held with representatives of:

- the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)
- Home Office
- Prison Service
- Probation Service

A list of interviewees can be found at Appendix 1.

It should be noted that the individuals interviewed gave their own individual perspective on Supporting People, and that observations below cannot be read as the official view of the agencies concerned.

It should also be noted that interviews were carried out against a fast moving background. Key national developments relating to Supporting People during this research project (October 2003 – December 2004) are summarised at the end of this chapter.

The ODPM Perspective

A range of issues relating to civic leadership and democratic accountability were highlighted. Local authorities have been given a new role as ‘community leaders’, and there is scope for using Local Strategic Partnerships to build wider ownership of Supporting People agenda. Both of these will require capacity building. However, both the National Probation Directorate and PCTs are widely seen as undemocratic because no elected members feature in their respective governance arrangements: this makes it more difficult for the voices of probation and PCTs ‘to be heard’ at the table.

In addition, the voluntary sector has responded with varied levels of enthusiasm to Supporting People, and does not as yet see itself as a ‘strategic supplier’ of services

There is, therefore, a need to develop a very consultative approach to the implementation of Supporting People if the above issues are to be addressed effectively.

In practice, relatively few new services for offenders have been developed through Supporting People. Most offenders come through the homelessness route, and the Homelessness Strategy has been better developed. There are also major difficulties in shifting resource from existing patterns of spend to meet the needs of ‘new’ and politically less popular groups such as offenders.

There has been considerable variance between local authorities in securing SP resource, and needs assessment for Supporting People has been relatively under-developed. The trend now is to make better use of information already available at local level, for example through local authority, probation and PCT statistics

The Home Office Perspective

The SEU report proposed that ‘accountability for delivering services to offenders should rest with mainstream departments/agencies’. However, this poses a number of challenges. Accommodation outcomes are devolved to 360 plus local authorities within each of which there needs to be strategic consideration of offenders’ needs.

Although certain groups of offenders are given priority status, in practice, and particular in those areas facing an overall shortage of housing stock, offenders have to compete for housing with other sectors of the population. There are also significant tranches of accommodation and housing provided outside statutory provision which may be appropriate for offenders

What is required in order to secure a more effective systemic response, is much better joint working between the prison and probation services (or NOMS), in particular through the Offender assessment system (OASys) and the Joint Sentence Implementation Board. In addition, the government’s strategy for development of regional government offers scope for the development of joint regional rehabilitation strategies between the Prison Service, Probation Service and Government Offices for the Regions and the formation of an Accommodation Regional Strategic Partnership.

The Prison Service View

Housing is seen as absolutely key for women leaving prison, and was identified as the top priority by both the SEU report and the Joint Inspectorate follow up

Prior to Supporting People, there was no strategic overview of supported housing for women ex-offenders. Housing provision was delivered largely on an ad hoc basis through individual establishments. HMP Low Newton has been in the vanguard, especially in its imaginative use of prisoners to deliver housing advice

Many establishments have struggled with housing issues, in particular local prisons because of both the volume of other operational pressures and the short length of stay. It was therefore difficult to establish appropriate role.

One good example of supported housing provision prior to Supporting People was Rothera, a Langley House Trust project in Bradford. This provided self contained units in houses across Bradford, for women ex-offenders. Other good examples included: St Mungo’s project providing good quality housing for women especially crack cocaine users; Amber project in the south west of England, providing for young male and female drug misusers in rural semi stately homes.

Overall, the Prison Service has seen Supporting People as positive, and in line with their own view of appropriate direction, but have felt rather distant from it. ‘Probation has represented criminal justice – therefore the Prison Service has had no direct involvement in the SP process.’ Key positive features of SP have been the introduction of a more strategic approach to housing provision for offenders; beginning to break down ‘silo working’; beginning to address the diversity of need; and beginning to bring together the key players and stakeholders to develop dialogue about who, what, where and how.

More negative features of SP have been its (to date) limited engagement with many key players in the criminal justice and community fields; it is widely seen as driven from on high, with limited local flexibility and scope for replication of successful initiatives – for example, St Mungo’s hostel in Lambeth for crack cocaine users has been very successful yet has not proved replicable elsewhere.

Better management information will now be forthcoming, for example from the new Prison Service Key Performance Indicator on accommodation. In addition, the new Prison Service Women’s Team will have a remit to review provision for women prisoners, for example with regard to drugs, mental health issues, family reunion issues

There is also an important and growing link with the government’s regional agenda: for example, Regional Resettlement Strategies have been developed through Regional Offices for the south west, the north west, Yorkshire and Humberside. These have been primarily driven by prisons and probation, but a number have extended partnership through Crime Reduction Partnerships to work with Job Centre Plus; major local authorities and PCTs. Manchester City Council has been particularly enthusiastic. There is a genuine concern and interest in all regional organisations to ensure the needs of women offenders are met appropriately.

Probation Service

Prior to SP, the key funding stream relating to housing for offenders was the Probation Accommodation Grant Scheme (PAGS). This was held by the Home Office, with a bid process for prospective new schemes. These usually needed to be linked with a bid to the Housing Corporation. The process was very complex and therefore tended to favour more energetically entrepreneurial organisations. These funds had latterly been devolved to local probation services and there was little new development in the run up to SP – indeed, the housing stock available to ex-offenders was actually reducing

The Probation Service is now seeking to widen access for offenders across all provision, not just ‘offender specific’ hostels, and believes there is an issue about exclusions of ex-offenders. There has been a move over a number of years away from use of male dominated hostel provision for women ex-offenders, and instead a greater use of support in shared settings, or support in independent tenancies.

Opportunities for women have increased greatly and West Yorkshire is a particularly good example of this. Leeds was widely seen as a local authority doing a good job, and in particular their qualitative work looking at more marginal SP groups – for example, the research study *On the Fringes* looking at women in prostitution. This was helping to give women offenders’ needs a much higher profile. The Foundation High Risk scheme in Bradford, was also commended. This provides supported independent tenancies under supervision of the Multi Agency Protection Panel (MAPP). The scheme links with mental health services and has a good success rate, including work with women offenders

SP processes are still evolving, and there is scope for further development. ODPM is playing a helpful role in its documentation – for example the Quality Assessment Framework paper will help develop better review of provision. Similarly, the forthcoming ODPM good practice guides for different sectors (such as domestic violence) will be useful.

Overall, the key benefits of SP for women offenders should be: more focus on what is needed, and quality provision, and better joining up between agencies. The key potential dangers are of costs being driven down, and of diminished provision for less popular groups

Within London, a Probation Service post is funded by ODPM with a remit to develop the interface between criminal justice agencies and local government in London with specific reference to SP. The post includes a responsibility for developing cross boundary arrangements for SP within London.

Local Authority Crime Reduction Strategies require each local authority to analyse services provided for both perpetrators and victims to produce a gap analysis. Women offenders are a small group in number (typically between 10-15% of Offender Groups at local level) and many have children so may be able to get housing but not SP services unless they have access to floating support. Women offenders are also much more likely to be victims of abuse and it is often forgotten that they can be victims as well as offenders.

Prior to SP, there was no coherent planning process for supported housing provision for women ex-offenders. Women were a minority group in the system and therefore few really developed particular expertise needed to address their needs effectively. Local authorities now should build on voluntary sector expertise to enhance their own knowledge and create a sector view on 'what works' for women ex offenders

The Probation Service in London had considerable provision before SP – 750 bedspaces – but little specifically for women because of their comparatively small numbers. Voluntary sector organisations were the key providers. Research undertaken in north east London in 1991 indicated that women were much more likely than men to have a housing problem. The supported housing provision that was available was usually a house or building, often shared with men, with support provided only at these specific addresses. This was clearly inappropriate for the many women offenders who had experienced abuse. One interesting project developed in Newham was the Home from Home scheme which was established in the early 1990s and is still going. It provides shared and mainstream housing in a cluster of small units, for very young women who are pregnant and or with very young children. They are able to develop parenting skills but it is designed with security in mind and accepts some will be fleeing domestic violence. The design encourages women to provide support to each other in parenting of young children, and in addition an element of floating support is provided.

Floating support was more difficult to pull together because of disparate sets of interests as well as funding streams, and so women offenders would often be allocated social housing through priority needs relating to children, but then there would not be any floating support available.

Within London, there has perhaps been a failure by local authorities to bring health and probation services stakeholders fully on board – 'a lack of shared vision across the public services'. There are also issues arising from the local authorities' role as 'risk holder' and the consequent need to develop exchange mechanisms for dangerous perpetrators. There is still more work needed cross authority to identify the legitimate movement of service users, and not just because there is nothing for them unless they travel to the other side of London.

From the available data so far, it is not possible to tell how many services in London aimed at offenders and people at risk of offending are specifically designed around women. The review process could provide a better picture but it will take time.

SP is focused on the individual and therefore allows women's gender etc to count. There will be a continuing voice for the user in monitoring the implementation of SP. At a strategic level, SP has put women offenders on the map. It has also highlighted some key complexities – women can be victims (for example, of domestic violence) but also offenders. There is a need to develop specialist services collaboratively at sub regional level to achieve the economies of scale and floated services so they can reach into the home environment wherever that may be

SP is about balancing competing priorities: who will ensure women offenders continue to get increased attention? Despite small numbers, the potential social benefits from ensuring quality provision for women offenders could be enormous, because so many are also parents. The other key problem in London is the lack of a strong voice for the voluntary sector in planning arrangements. This deprives the planning process of those with the greatest expertise in this field

Key Developments During the Research Project October 2003 – December 2004

Robson Rhodes Review

In October 2003, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) asked Robson Rhodes to lead an Independent Review to gauge the true picture of how the Supporting People funding was being utilised. The review was published in January 2004.²³

The review was commissioned because of the final cost of the Programme, estimated in the 1998 White Paper to cost some £350 to 700 million across Great Britain. Estimates and costs rose to a golden cut level of £1.4 billion in December 2002 and finally to a platinum cut level and 2003-4 allocation of £1.8 billion in England alone

There were particular concerns about the growth of the Transitional Housing Benefit (THB) element of SP, which increased by £400 million from the Golden cut estimates by local authorities which were announced in February 2003. This was matched by a growth from an estimate in 2000 of fewer than 100,000 units of housing support to an estimated 250,000 units in December 2003.

The review started from the premise that two legitimate perspectives needed to be reconciled. The 'public purse' perspective argued that the grant was unevenly distributed and was not demonstrably value for money. The 'allow us to manage' perspective argued for a managed change to the existing provision over a three year period

A number of findings and recommendations emerged. Local authorities had begun Supporting People from very varied platforms of existing provision, and it was recommended that an improved allocation formula be developed to reflect population, need and cost. The evidence base for commissioning was often weak, and more effective tools for local needs assessment and service review were recommended. Particular attention to floating support was recommended, having noted that the total spend on floating support services had increased from £160 million to £332 million between the golden and platinum cut. Similar findings and recommendations were made with regard to generic support. Significantly, the review identified difficulties in securing an adequate level of resource for less popular groups, including ex-offenders, and recommended

that ‘the ODPM with others should give early consideration to measures to establish and protect an adequate level of funding and provision for the least popular vulnerable groups’. Concerns were also voiced about the capacity of individual local authority SP teams to conduct specialist strategic reviews, and a recommendation made that more Strategic Reviews be conducted at a strategic levels across larger groupings of local authority SP teams.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee review of Supporting People

In July 2004 the cross party ODPM Select Committee report on Supporting People endorsed many of the findings of the Robson Rhodes review, while commenting that ‘in the short time available a full audit of the Supporting People programme was plainly impossible. Its conclusions on the extent to which the programme as a whole represents value for money can therefore have only limited validity’. More critically, the Committee expressed concern that ‘despite a long period of preparation for this important programme, involving copious written guidance and centrally allocated expenditure on local administration, it should be necessary some 18 months after it has started to re-address basic realities of how it is to operate in practice’. It urged that the ODPM should establish clear criteria as to what money can properly be spent on, if necessary ring-fencing funding for less “popular” groups. It also recommended that the ODPM undertake a lessons learned exercise on the way in which the Supporting People programme was brought into operation²⁴.

Reducing Reoffending - National Action Plan

Also in July 2004 the government published *Reducing Reoffending: National Action Plan*. This document built on the 2002 SEU report *Reducing Reoffending by Ex-Prisoners*, and also took forward the government’s manifesto commitments ‘to ensure that punishment and rehabilitation are both designed to minimise re-offending’, and ‘to improve the education of those offenders in custody.’²⁵

Greater strategic focus and joined- up working are the two key themes in the Action Plan, which details over sixty national action points. These had been agreed across government and span all the key areas, or ‘pathways’, to reduce re-offending

Reviewing progress on housing and accommodation issues – identified as Pathway 1 - since the 2002 SEU report, the Action Plan noted an increase from 67% in December 2001 to 71% in April 2003 of the number of prisoners with accommodation arranged for their release. Around 70 prison establishments were now operating some form of housing advice and support service, and development was well advanced of a strategic plan for Approved Premises and Offender Housing for those offenders requiring enhanced support. Crucially, changes through the Department of Work and Pensions as from October 2004 to Housing Benefit regulations would aim to prevent loss of housing due to rent arrears. Attention is also drawn to the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 under which each local authority had produced a homelessness strategy.²⁶

The Action Plan also sought to support changes being made through the creation of a National Offender Management Service (NOMS), while noting that NOMS’ mission to create ‘a seamless case management

approach' across the Prison and Probation services was still in its infancy.

Supporting People Announcement 2005-6

On 7 December 2004, the Rt Hon Lord Rooker, Minister of State for Regeneration and Regional Development and the Rt Hon Nick Raynsford, Minister of State for Local and Regional Government made an announcement in the House of Lords and House of Commons respectively.

Announcing a Supporting People allocation for 2005/6 of £1.715bn, Ministers noted that good progress had been made but that there was still work to do. There was scope for efficiency savings, and some authorities are not delivering an appropriate quality of support.

In response to issues identified through the Robson Rhodes Review, the Audit Commission inspections and other research, government will now require authorities to complete reviews of individual services by April 2006 and ensure that these are value for money, good quality and strategically relevant. Five year strategies would be developed in partnership with local authorities, and would examine critically services delivered in light of local need and strategic priorities. Monitoring by central government would be strengthened through measurement of performance against three Key Supporting People Performance Indicators.

Help and advice from the centre would be provided through capacity building programmes, and monitoring and support to authorities and providers.

The ODPM would be working closely with other government departments to ensure that the Supporting People programme is better integrated with other support programmes.

In 2005, the ODPM will consult on the revised needs based distribution formula which will provide the basis for allocating Supporting People grant in the future. This is likely to give rise to significant changes in current pattern of allocations between authorities, which would be introduced over time. A consultation was also announced on the grant conditions for Supporting People in 2005/6, which the government proposes to keep broadly the same as for 2004/5. This second consultation will close on 11 February 2005.

5. Local perspectives

In this section of the research, I wanted to explore local experiences of Supporting People. To what extent did local aspirations for, and experiences of, Supporting People chime with national perspectives?

My initial plan was to undertake 3 local case studies, for each of which interviews would be conducted with a range of stakeholders. Two London boroughs, Camden and Islington, were selected to take advantage of links I already had with the NHS in north central London, and also because both boroughs were of particular interest to the Griffins Society which had formerly provided accommodation in Camden serving many women on release from Holloway (Islington). Leeds was selected for the third case study both to provide a contrast with London and again to build on existing local contacts.

In practice, data collection for the local case studies was more difficult than anticipated. Although key personnel in each of the 3 areas were supportive of the research, and generous with their time and expertise, the volume and pace of work to implement SP within each area was such that obtaining access to all relevant documentation and to a number of other stakeholders proved impossible. This may indicate something of the pressure implementation of Supporting People is placing on local agencies.

I therefore sought to supplement the 3 case studies in order to build a fuller picture of local experiences of Supporting People. This has been done in 2 ways.

Firstly, I followed up examples of promising developments identified to me by interviewees and other contacts. Such developments have not always related to women ex-offenders but remain of relevance to this study given the relative paucity of information about local initiatives for women.

Secondly, I reviewed the 23 Audit Commission inspections of Supporting People services currently available on their website. Again, information on provision for women ex-offenders is scant, but there are, I suggest, important messages about the overall impact to date of Supporting People on provision for ex-offenders.

The local case studies

As with the national interviews, it should be noted that interviewees were providing individual perspective on Supporting People, not the official view of their respective organisations.

Camden profile

The London Borough of Camden has a population of 198,020²⁷. Population and jobs are increasing; population since the early 1980s, jobs since at least the mid-1990s. Forecasts indicate a continued increase in the next ten to fifteen years.

The population is ethnically diverse, and consists predominantly of younger, and single, adults. There are pockets of intense deprivation alongside areas of relative wealth. More than one resident in five (22%) rents

from a private landlord, and almost 5% live in a communal establishment. 86% of household spaces are in purpose-built or converted flats, just 14% are self-contained houses.²⁸

The SP allocation to LB Camden for 2004/5 was £39,696,525.²⁹

Camden Perspective on Supporting People

Positive features for ex-offenders of Supporting People in Camden have been a closer focus on need, and a reduction in stigma; breaking down of barriers to referrals of offenders to services; the potential for a better joint agencies response to high risk offenders; the potential to ensure more appropriate development of floating support services to meet both generic and specialist needs; and the potential to recognise the spectrum of need, and to be much more flexible

In addition, LB Camden has been actively involved in the Pentonville Pilot. This scheme, which has been funded through the Criminal Justice Intervention Programme and Supporting People, identifies individuals who have committed low level crime and been sent to HMP Pentonville. Together, the prison, the LB Camden Drug and Alcohol Team and the Street Prevention Team are developing schemes which will ensure appropriate support for these individuals on release, and so prevent re-offending

Negative features for ex-offenders of SP in Camden have been ever changing demands from central government, which have deflected from service delivery at local level; difficulties in linking with local prisons – for example, HMP Pentonville . In addition, acute pressures at local level are anticipated as resource is redirected to less popular groups such as ex offenders in consequence of the ODPM ruling that care homes cannot be funded through Supporting People.

There have been few champions for women ex-offenders within the Supporting People context. The LB Camden Housing Department has taken an interest from a community safety perspective, and some of the local voluntary sector providers have also spoken for women offenders. Links with the PCT were very good, and although probation had struggled to attend meetings, contact had been constant and productive.

LB Camden now hopes to build on its strategic approach to SP. One current key initiative is the service review of floating support, which has hitherto been very geographically determined. However, financial pressures are likely to suggest a greater use of generic services.

Islington – profile

Islington has a population of 175,797, with high proportions of single and younger people. Like Camden, the borough has high levels of both deprivation and affluence. The borough is also home to two prisons – HMP Holloway (women) and HMP Pentonville (men), and Islington PCT now has responsibility for provision of primary healthcare services to both. With high turnover of inmates in both prisons, this equates to some 56,000 prisoners a year.³⁰

The Supporting People allocation to LB Islington for 2004/5 was £16,551,521.³¹

The LB Islington SP team of 7 is located within LB Islington Housing, reporting to the Assistant Director, Housing Needs. The team comprises 4 project staff; a referrals officer; a finance officer; and a Supporting People Manager. LB Islington has 112 contracts with 55 providers. Links with social services and the PCT are strong; links with probation more sporadic.

LB Islington has an above average supply of accommodation for offenders, including accommodation run by Penrose (exclusively for women ex-offenders), Stonham (for high risk offenders); NACRO; NW London Housing Association; St Martin's. Together, these organisations provide 5 dedicated bed spaces for women ex-offenders, and 120 for men. However, there remains a grave shortage of accommodation for offenders within the borough. Most projects are only able to accept a few new referrals each year because of a lack of move on nominations for those ready to be resettled.

Prior to SP there was no coherent planning framework for ex-offender provision. Referrals were – and still are – made directly from probation to voluntary sector providers, and it can be difficult for the local authority to establish its place in this dialogue. Furthermore, not all ex-offenders living in ex-offender accommodation within LB Islington have Islington connections, and the SP team at times feels itself 'stymied by a lack of information'. Service reviews are seen as the key opportunity to ensure quality of service, and appropriate use of resource.

Overall, the positive features of SP for LB Islington have been the opportunity for the local authority to 'get a grip', and through needs analysis, good partnership working and service reviews to work towards better services. In addition, SP brought new revenue into the system, and introduced proper accountability for supported housing services, and a supporting system for scrutiny of service delivered.

Negative features of SP have been the discovery of low baseline provision for women ex-offenders; difficulty of shifting resource, especially to unpopular groups such as ex-offenders, and the management of competing priorities, especially in a 'NIMBY' ('Not In My Back Yard) climate.

Next steps planned by LBI are effective use of information to develop a gap analysis; the development and implementation of new best practice specifications for commissioned services; strengthening of links with local prisons – HMP Holloway and HMP Pentonville – to ensure better through care for prisoners with LB Islington connection; improving referral and move-on processes – 1 hostel currently has had a short stay resident for 5 years;

However, these proposed next steps need to be seen in the context of what feel locally like 'planning blight', and uncertainty about revenue streams consequent on the government's announcement of required savings after overspend of earmarked expenditure.

The Leeds perspective

Leeds is a large and diverse city with a population of 715,401, and a growing economy. However, despite its transformation over the last decade, significant pockets of deprivation and disadvantage remain, and there are concerns that a 'two track' economy is emerging.

The SP allocation to Leeds for 2004/5 was £35,347,269.

The most striking feature of the approach to SP adopted by Leeds City Council has been its emphasis on robust qualitative needs analysis as the premise for development of its Supporting People programme. In this, it has built on its long established proactive approach to researching the housing, support and community care needs of local people. A *Housing and Community Care Strategy for Leeds* was developed in 1997, leading to the establishment of the Housing and Community Care Project, which continued to conduct needs analysis until 2000, when these research projects became incorporated into the local Supporting People needs analysis programme. In addition to conducting and developing research projects in-house, the Supporting People team has developed close working relationships with other researchers in the city. The approach has led to independent corroboration of findings and recommendations, and confidence in the methodology employed by research partners has enabled the Supporting People team to incorporate its key findings into a programme of needs analysis, increasing the breadth of Supporting People needs analysis to date.

Five pieces of research have already been written either as part of the Supporting People needs analysis or by other researchers and incorporated into the programme of qualitative research to date. The projects have addressed the needs of young people with chaotic lifestyles, young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities, mentally-disordered offenders and drug-using parents.³²

Other pieces of qualitative research which have been undertaken include an investigation into the housing and support needs of families in Leeds; an investigation into the needs of BME elders; an investigation into the need for 'wet' supported provision in Leeds; an investigation into the housing and support needs of people on the fringes of homelessness and/or the criminal justice system in West Yorkshire. A project is currently being undertaken to investigate the housing and support needs of people living with life threatening illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.³³

The research has produced a sophisticated analysis of need and current gaps in provision. In particular, issues for women ex-offenders have been identified, including the experience of child sexual abuse, prostitution, motherhood and an increase in custodial sentencing for women. It is recognised that the female peak offending age is younger than that of men, and risk factors for women (especially young women) are often overlooked. The scarcity of bail hostel provision appropriate for women has also been identified.

The most striking research report from Leeds is *Just surviving: the housing and support needs of people on the fringes of homelessness and/or the criminal justice system in West Yorkshire* (March 2004). This report, commissioned by the West Yorkshire Supporting People Cross Authority Group used inclusive, representative sampling, and collecting data through interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. In order to investigate hidden and unmet need, the sample was primarily drawn from services outside Supporting People. At the time of the research, 57% of the 347 participants were in custody, 26% were homeless or living in temporary accommodation, 11% were living in a tenancy with support, and 4% were living in a tenancy without support.

The findings of the report are disturbing: one third of participants had lost their accommodation during their most recent period in custody, and one third had not had their own accommodation prior to imprisonment. 55% of participants reported experiences of violence and abuse, and women were more likely to have experienced this than men. Those who had experienced violence or abuse were more likely to report substance use issues, mental health problems and rough sleeping.

Preferences were generally for social housing with flexible housing related support. Having a home was a key goal. Support was often being received from agencies not encompassed by Supporting People, such as the specialist agencies for women involved in prostitution. Some of these agencies felt that they were themselves 'on the fringes', and that better coordination of services was required so that multi agency packages of support could meet their clients' needs more effectively.

Leeds has also been able to build on a good history of joint working between local authorities and the NHS with regard to mentally disordered offenders. A key current challenge is ensuring that the new Arms Length Management Organisations ('ALMOs'), which have been established to manage local authority housing, will include specialist provision relevant to offenders. Another key concern is to ensure that use of Anti Social Behaviour Orders ('ASBOs') do not trigger a downward spiral into homelessness for the (usually young and vulnerable) individuals concerned. Young offenders are a particular cause for concern, West Yorkshire having seen a seven fold increase in use of youth custody over the last 7-8 years, and a disturbing rise in deaths by suicide among both female and male young offenders.

Findings from Audit Commission reviews of Supporting People programme

The Audit Commission has been charged with carrying out inspections of all Administering Local Authority (ALA) areas for Supporting People within a five year period. The timetable also provides for re-inspections where serious concerns over performance arise, and for inspections at the direction of the Secretary of State where the ODPM has concerns over progress and performance.

The Housing Inspectorate has lead responsibility for this work. Inspections are carried out with the Social Services Inspectorate and the Home Office's Probation Inspectorate. Each inspection team includes a service user inspector to ensure that all inspections focus on the impact of the programme on outcomes for service users.

It is intended that 30 inspections will take place in each financial year over the next five years. Reports of inspections are made public and available through the Audit Commission website.

Reports follow a standard format. However, as might be expected from a programme of wide scope and recent implementation, there is considerable range in key findings to date. Not all reports make specific comment on services for ex-offenders, although comment on strategies and on provision for other care groups may in some cases either include or have relevance for ex-offenders. This has made it impossible to tabulate findings for the purposes of this research. Rather, findings from those reports of clearest relevance have been documented here.

Good News Comes From:

Manchester City Council which is commended for good service user involvement including hard to reach groups, and effective leadership to partner agencies

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council where the Supporting People has a clear strategic direction, is

assisted by a partnership group of councillors and board members, and has developed additional services for a number of groups including ex-offenders

Richmond upon Thames which has developed a range of positive services for hard to reach groups, including offenders and women fleeing domestic violence, and has also led effective joint working across agencies to identify services for those who pose a risk of harm to the public

Staffordshire County Council where knowledge and awareness of the multi-agency public protection panel has improved through work undertaken by the probation services

Northamptonshire County Council is commended for the development of a comprehensive Supporting People strategy which links with wider strategies such as crime and disorder strategies, and for development of an information sharing protocol for high risk offenders

Sunderland County Council where the shadow strategy clearly sits within a hierarchy of other strategies, and there are well developed arrangements for the management of risk associated with offenders

In addition to the good news above, and independent of the Audit Commission inspection programme, 4 local authorities were in March 2004 awarded Beacon status for their work in developing effective Supporting People local partnerships. These local authorities were Oxfordshire, Suffolk, Salford and Telford and Wrekin³⁴.

Bad News Comes From:

Nottinghamshire County Council where 'the perceived lack of opportunity of some groups including care leavers and offenders to be granted a tenancy and access support services which are linked to a tenancy needs to be addressed in some parts of the county'

Somerset County Council has made limited progress in its work with probation and developing services for offenders, and the inspection report notes the collapse of a proposed scheme for advice, assessment and placement of offenders.

Enfield London Borough Council where 'links between the vision for Supporting People services and the priorities and plans for some other strategic groups such as probation and health are not sufficiently robust'

Wokingham District Council where current provision is almost all for older people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental health problems – and less than 9% of funding going to other groups. Significant unmet need for people, including offenders, has not been addressed

Middlesborough Council where the Supporting People partnerships with health and probation lack shared aims and shared targets for the programme, and it is unclear how gaps in provision, such as for offenders, are to be addressed

Rutland County Council where recent research into the accommodation and support needs of ex offenders shows that further work is needed alongside probation services to make sure that the needs of offenders are prioritised

Findings From Other 'Prime Movers'

The New Bridge Project, Liverpool

There is a maze of systems and processes within agencies and no help to find a way through. The path to crime is easier³⁵.

This project was established in 2004 to run for 2 years with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and Liverpool City Council. The project seeks to ensure that Merseyside prisoners being released from prison have information and access to community based resettlement services available to them both pre and post release. At any one time, North West prisons hold over 11,000 offenders of whom 800 are women; 1500 women are released from North West prisons each year.

The purpose of the project is to reduce the number of rough sleepers on the streets of the city, many of whom are known to be part of the Revolving Doors group – in prison, then on the streets, then re-offending and then back in prison. These are normally short sentence prisoners with no statutory support on release.

There was a consistent request for someone to 'pull things together'. This refers to the provision for accommodation and support, some provided by the Council, some by statutory bodies, some from charities and some from commercial organisations. Access to this provision is time consuming and is dependent on those wishing to access it knowing who those providers are. There is no comprehensive directory and resettlement staff have to build up their own basic information from the contacts they are able to make³⁶.

Two workers have now been appointed. They will provide an interface between the local resettlement teams, with initial focus on HMPs Liverpool and Styal, and service providers in Liverpool. The target group will be those with a right to settle in Liverpool and who were sentenced to 12 months or less in prison. The workers will be 'Liverpool experts', and will share information with other resettlement workers who are supporting other groups of prisoners.

Prisoners as housing advisers

Following the 1998-9 re-rolling of HMP Low Newton, a housing advice service for prisoners was developed. This was initially run by specially trained prison officers, but became vulnerable to other demands on staff time. Pragmatically, the prison then explored whether it might be possible to use prisoners to staff the housing advice service. A rigorous risk assessment process was put in place to select appropriate prisoners, who were then trained in house by NACRO and Prison Service staff.

Housing Advice Service workers seek information from all women on reception in the prison as to their current housing status. The aim is to ensure that prompt action is taken whenever needed to protect tenancies. In addition, each prisoner will be offered 3 opportunities to be interviewed by a worker on their housing need. A Probation Officer works with the housing advice service workers to provide support and ensure appropriate response to any complex issues.

Evidence suggests that the Housing Advice Service is making a positive impact: between 70 and 100% of women now have identified accommodation to go to on release. In addition, as the work has developed, prisoners providing the service have been able to widen their own skills base and to achieve NVQ Level 2 in Customer Care – an eminently transferable skill³⁷.

St Mungo's – Turning 'Soft' Outcomes into Hard Data

St Mungo's works with some of the most vulnerable people – 47% of their clients have four or more critical needs. While it is best known for its hostels for rough sleepers and outreach services, the organisation also provides a range of care homes and specialist hostels, supported housing and short stay hostels, 2 day centres and a training and employment programme. Sixty specialist workers meet a variety of needs, from variety of help with mental health problems to drug abuse to support in setting up in a new home.

The Supporting People programme was therefore of particular relevance to St Mungo's. Given the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of its work with individuals facing many and complex challenges, the organisation sought to improve its outcome measurement, seeking to move beyond more obvious outcomes such as client move on into a wider reflection of the other less easily measured changes clients make.

The gradual increases in confidence, improved sociable behaviour, reduced self harm which are all part of the journey from street life to finding stability and lasting homes³⁸.

The approach developed was the 'Star system', which assesses client progress against a series of 'soft' outcomes (personal responsibility; living skills; social network; substance risk; health; employability; accommodation). The client is assessed at regular intervals. Improvements in certain areas, such as social networks and personal responsibility, become documented as successful outcomes. It is apparent that as improvements are made in one area, they impact on all the rest – change one thing, and others change too, for better or worse.

The Star has now been piloted in four St Mungo's projects, and has been found of practical help to individual clients and to staff, as well as providing a means to collect data of relevance to funders, including the ODPM.

Time for Youth

East Potential's Time for Youth (TfY) works with young people aged 16-24 in east London, Harlow and the surrounding communities. The service works with young people who have convictions, those offending who have not been convicted, and those at risk of offending. Young people entering the programme are allocated a case manager who undertakes an intensive assessment of need, risk and vulnerability. In agreement with the young person, a case plan is drawn up and the case manager monitors its implementation. For young people in crisis or with intensive support needs, there is also the option of additional support from a mentor. TfY offers floating support, which is not attached to residence in foyer accommodation. This means that young people successfully resettled into permanent housing, evicted or taken into custody, can still access TfY support. It

is also unusual in providing support to the higher age of 24, allowing more vulnerable young people a longer time to make the transition to adulthood.

The Home Office's Accommodation Plus group has also used TfY as a pilot to examine the impact of successful interventions with young women offenders. The Home Office has given the service funding for gender specific work with young women, which will support examination of those factors that make young women, in particular, more likely to offend.

Conclusions

It is, I suggest, apparent from the above that the impact of Supporting People at local level has been immensely varied. To date, there is limited data on its impact on provision for ex-offenders, including women ex-offenders. The mammoth scale of the task which local authorities have been set is all too clear both from the review of Audit Commission inspections, and from the local case studies. Ensuring effective planning and delivery of services to ex-offenders through Supporting People is a major challenge for all concerned from strategic to operational levels. Political difficulties in securing or sustaining transfer of resources to less politically popular groups are evident³⁹.

However, there are also signs of hope. The Leeds case study demonstrates an imaginative approach to needs assessment, building on a history of good joint working between statutory and voluntary sectors. A number of the Audit Commission inspection reports evidence effective joint working between key agencies, and, perhaps, a growing local awareness of the need to ensure effective planning and provision for ex-offenders. The New Bridge project in Liverpool demonstrates an imaginative – and replicable – response to the mismatch between Prison Service areas and local authorities, while the HMP Low Newton Housing Advice Service shows that women ex-offenders can play an active role in effective delivery of a much needed service. Time for Youth provides a strong example of ways in which 'floating support' can be reshaped better to meet the complex needs of young offenders. And the St Mungo's star marks an interesting endeavour to ensure that what matters is what is measured.

6. Comparative Perspectives

Why Comparative Perspective?

There has been growing interest in recent years in the changing relationships between national cultures or traditions in criminal justice, and in ways in which crime control policies and practices now flow within and between nation states. In particular, it has been suggested that a number of key features and concerns within the UK criminal justice arena have their origins in US penal policy and practice⁴⁰.

Recent debate has begun to explore varied facets of this phenomenon of ‘policy transfer’. Jones and Newburn stress the need to distinguish the ideas and rhetoric of policy from its more concrete manifestations in practice, and highlight the often anarchic character of any specific policy when traced from idea to implementation⁴¹. Kingdon has proposed three distinct ‘process streams’ that operate in policy making:

- The problem stream (the process of generation of ‘problems’ requiring attention by policy makers)
- The policy stream (the generation of policy ideas and proposals)
- The political stream (developments in the ‘public mood’, key interest group support etc⁴²)

My purpose here in including 2 comparative perspectives is rather more modest. I would suggest that government thinking about criminal justice policy in England and Wales has ‘got stuck’, particularly when considered in relation to social policy. There is therefore merit, I propose, in looking at examples of 2 projects from other jurisdictions to cast fresh light on what is here taken for granted. I suggest that the project from France highlights an emphasis on the citizenship of ex-offenders, and that the project from Canada – which is now attracting considerable governmental and Prison Service interest here in England and Wales – suggests the potential for developing the social inclusion of offenders through faith communities.

Community chaplaincy in Canada

Community chaplaincy has been active in Correctional Services Canada for over twenty years. Community chaplaincy ministries provide support to offenders and their families - some 11,000 individuals a year - while in prison and when re-entering society.

Community chaplaincy ministries are organisations within the faith communities with whom Correctional Services Canada has contracts. The national Community Chaplaincy budget in 2000-1 was \$758,538.00, with \$23K the average expenditure for each community ministry. In addition, community chaplaincy has over 1400 active volunteers.

Offenders using community chaplaincy services come from a range of ethnic and faith backgrounds. Most offenders are Caucasian, with some key regional differences. In the Prairies region, for example, 45% of the individuals accessing community chaplaincy are aboriginal, of which 15% state that they are practising native spirituality. Other groups also reflect regional realities: St John’s Newfoundland has a number of Inuit in its community, while the black community is strongest in Halifax and Toronto. Overall, of the offenders using

community chaplaincy services, 35% are Roman Catholic, 42% Protestant, and 11% native spirituality.

So what do community chaplaincies provide to ex-offenders? They provide for practical, emotional and spiritual needs. 60% of offenders work with the ministry on their addiction issues; 47% on housing, and many seek support for physical health needs, including AIDS, HIV and HepC. A major part of ministry to women is counselling. Some of the issues that women seek the help of chaplains and volunteers for are child rearing issues, spouse re entry issues, and personal counselling. It is hoped that support for women's chaplaincy, designed to meet the specific needs of women ex-offenders, can be further developed. In addition, community chaplaincy sustains good links with the wider community, for example by providing a crime prevention service, and lecturing in colleges on restorative justice.

With such a broad remit, it is appropriate that Community Chaplaincy ministries are accountable to a number of stakeholders, including Correctional Services Canada. Other stakeholders are the faith community, community agencies, municipalities, the local policy and professional groups⁴³.

Community Chaplaincy – Now Over Here

In 2001 the Salvation Army provided two dedicated officers to the Churches' Criminal Justice Forum with a remit to explore scope for establishing community chaplaincy in England and Wales. There has since been growing interest by politicians and the Prison Service in using the community chaplaincy model, working with a range of faith communities, to 'bridge the gap' between prison and community and so assist effective resettlement of ex-prisoners.

The programme begins in prison where the offenders are prepared for release and put in contact with support services that will aid their resettlement. The team of volunteers, working under the Community Chaplain, then continues to support the prisoner post-release. There are projects already working with prisons in Swansea, Gloucester, North Staffordshire and Preston, and others are being developed in, Feltham, Brixton, Low Newton, Manchester, Dorchester, Leeds, Nottingham and Cardiff. Shepton Mallet, Swinfen Hall and Wayland have also shown interest.

At a national level a community chaplaincy network is emerging⁴⁴.

Soleillet project, L'Aurore, Paris

L'Aurore was founded in 1871 in response to the needs of former prisoners who had been incarcerated because of their participation in the 1871 Paris Commune, and its initial Board of Management included high status individuals such as senators, lawyers, military personnel and civil servants from the War Ministry.

The organisation has a formal commitment to the values of humanism, secularism and solidarity. From its initial work with ex-offenders, and then with the mentally ill, it has now developed to address all aspects of social exclusion through a 3 pronged approach:

- To deal with medical, social and care issues, so that clients are welcomed as human beings and members of a community of citizens, with due respect being paid to their rights and their dignity, and adequate financial support being provided by the public purse
- To develop political and civic strategies, in order that governmental structures pay attention to the issues that concern both individuals and social groups within the care of the association
- To remain pragmatic, so as to maintain effectiveness within the prevailing realities and constraints

L'Aurore sees itself as an active citizen: the association engages in debates on social issues, and sees itself as a leader and trailblazer in finding solutions to provide help for those in difficulty. This is achieved through continuously developing networks and relationships with other professionals and providers. The Board of Management has diversified its own composition to reflect this wider mission. The organisation now employs 200 people, with all staff expected to be totally committed to the values and strategies of the association. L'Aurore is part of the Fédération Nationale des Associations d'Accueil et de Réadaptation Sociale (FNARS) network.

Soleillet

In 1977 L'Aurore was approached by colleagues in the criminal justice and social services systems, and asked to work them to explore the possibilities of setting up facilities geared to caring for both single women and mothers coming out of prison. In response, Soleillet was set up in 1984.

Soleillet is a *Centre d'Hebergement et de Reinsertion Sociale* (CHRS), the generic name of institutions providing a variety of care and accommodation to those in need in French society. Soleillet specialises in the care of female ex-offenders, and is unique in France in doing this. They take in women who have been released definitively, but also those who are on conditional release, or who are out on leave.

The project can accommodate 37 women, children and in some cases a couple with children. In addition, the project has access to a further 14 flats in the social housing estate very near the Soleillet centre. In practice, a wide variety of women leaving prison are accommodated, priority being given to women who have kept their children with them in detention. Soleillet cannot accommodate severe psychiatric cases, or current drug users in need of detox treatment.

The value of the work done by the organisation is in providing housing for women who may well have had significant disruption in their lives, and have come from difficult and complex situations. The risk for such women is that they will wander from institution to institution... The Soleillet social educational team can..plan for the reinsertion of the individual into society. The plan can be adjusted by the team, as the individual concerned becomes more familiar with the norms of society, and in the light of the emerging potential of the individual (information provided by the Director of Soleillet, September 2004)

Discussion

From a British perspective, Soleillet strikes a refreshing note with its emphasis on citizenship: the reinsertion of the ex-offender into civic life, and, equally, the responsibilities of the organisation itself as an active citizen. The former marks a key contrast with recent British emphasis on ‘wrong thinking’ – rather than, say, poverty or disadvantage - as the key cause of crime⁴⁵. And the notion of an organisation itself playing a role as an active citizen suggests scope, perhaps, for a wider civic role for the voluntary sector.

The Canadian experience of community chaplaincy illustrates the role faith communities can play not only in providing personal support to ex-offenders, but also in helping to mesh individuals back into the wider social fabric. It is encouraging to note growing governmental interest in the potential of community chaplaincy here in the UK.

7. Discussion

Policy and politics

Supporting People is an ambitious government initiative which has sought to improve housing related support for a very broad – and diverse – group of people. In order to achieve this goal, Supporting People introduced a new integrated funding framework and necessitated stronger cross-agency partnerships.

For ex-offenders, Supporting People has constituted one key strand of the Government's response to the housing issues identified in the SEU report, the other key initiative being the government's Homelessness Strategy. Stronger identification at local authority level of both need and resource has held out the promise of spend more closely aligned to both individual need and local possibilities than the predecessor Probation Accommodation Grant System .

However, Supporting People has also heightened the political profile of provision for ex-offenders within the local arena, against a background of wide public concern about crime and considerable hostility to ex-offenders. The discourse of criminal justice – arguably dominated by a narrow understanding of 'what works' – has had to battle with discourses commanding wider, and deeper, support such as Valuing People, for people with learning difficulties. Securing appropriate resource and developing new, needs based, provision for women ex-offenders are likely to be additionally problematic given the absolute low numbers of women ex-offenders accruing to any individual local authority.

The comparative case studies from Canada and Paris, France, with their respective emphases on community and citizenship, serve as helpful reminders of other ways of envisioning the social inclusion of offenders. There is a need now for further consideration of the values base of 'what works', and of models for social inclusion of offenders.

Recommendation 1

The Griffins Society should promote a wider debate about the values which underpin, and define the scope of, 'what works' in reference to women ex-offenders

Recommendation 2

The ODPM should consider identifying notional funding through Supporting People for ex-offenders for each local authority in order to help ensure that local spend is not geared to either historic spend or to more politically popular groups

Practice

At a practical level, the SP programme involves some 150 authorities, over 6000 providers and approximately 37,000 individual contracts⁴⁶. It was therefore not surprising to learn from both the national and the local data collected for this research that local authorities entered Supporting People from very different starting points.

Some local authorities already had substantial supported housing provision in their patch, within this demonstrating higher spend on a range of client groups. Other local authorities saw Supporting People as an opportunity to secure valuable additional funding, sometimes to the benefit of their own directly managed provision, sometimes to that of voluntary sector providers. Some new provision, in particular generic floating support, may have been of questionable relevance to client need. Approaches to needs assessment and gap analysis have been varied, particularly for hard to reach groups such as ex-offenders. User involvement in service review and planning has been equally patchy.

The Robson Rhodes Review and Audit Commission inspections lend weight to all these findings. Although the government has already put in place a number of measures to address these issues⁴⁷, the findings of this research indicate that further specific attention to ex-offenders may be required in order to ensure their housing support needs are met effectively through Supporting People.

Recommendation 3

The ODPM should compile a handbook of ‘best practice’ examples of Supporting People planning and provision for ex-offenders

Partnership

The success of Supporting People must rely heavily on effective inter-agency partnerships at local level. This research suggests that commitment to, and experience of, effective inter-agency partnerships has been extremely varied. Despite both central government insistence and much local good will, it has in practice been very difficult to secure both the civic leadership and the front line integration required. The Probation Service in particular seems to have struggled in many areas to sustain a place at the planning table, and involvement of the voluntary sector has been uneven.

Recommendation 4

The ODPM should develop a Supporting People training package to support local authorities’ in their development of effective inter agency partnerships with the NHS, criminal justice agencies and the voluntary sector. The training package should address the needs both of civic leaders and of front line staff.

Promoting innovation

The voluntary sector has the potential to play a key role in promoting innovative provision for ex-offenders through Supporting People. The Liverpool New Bridge project, for example, demonstrates an imaginative response to the geographical mismatch between the prison estate and prisoners’ home local authorities. Similarly, community chaplaincy can provide support both before and after release from prison, and for as long as the ex-offender feels they need it.

However, strong control of Supporting People from central government combined with formidable operational challenges at local level have meant that this potential of the voluntary sector has not yet been fully realised.

There do not seem to be readily available channels for information exchange about voluntary sector projects for ex-offenders funded through Supporting People, and the process for securing funding through Supporting People for new voluntary sector projects can be unduly complex.

Recommendation 5

The ODPM should ensure that its Supporting People capacity building programme recognises and supports the role of the voluntary sector in planning and provision

Recommendation 6

Consideration should be given to ways in successful voluntary sector projects funded through Supporting People, such as the Liverpool New Bridge Project and community chaplaincy, could be replicated more widely

The research suggests that floating support may have particular relevance for ex-offenders, including women ex-offenders, and this view was also voiced by a number of interviewees for this research. In addition, the comparative case studies from Canada and Paris suggest that new thinking about offenders can be embodied as floating support, confirming ex-offenders as fellow members of the community, and as citizens, rather than as irredeemably other, and essentially dangerous.

However, as the Robson Rhodes review indicated, although nationally there has been a massive growth in total spend on floating support as a proportion of the Supporting People grant, data is not yet available to understand the specific nature and type of the service being provided, and to ensure relevant need is met. It is therefore not clear to what extent Supporting People is at present being used as a vehicle to deliver appropriate floating support to women ex-offenders.

Recommendation 7

Consideration needs to be given to ways in which innovative practice with ex-offenders, including new models of floating support, can be encouraged more widely through Supporting People

Recommendation 8

The Griffins Society should organise an event, in partnership with the Prison Service and ODPM, to share local experiences of planning and provision for women ex-offenders through Supporting People. This event should focus on the sharing of good practice in strategic planning and effective involvement of service users

8. Recommendations

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The Griffins Society should promote a wider debate about the values which underpin, and define the scope of, 'what works' in reference to women ex-offenders

Recommendation 2

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Recommendation 3

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Recommendation 4

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- 3 Reducing Reoffending, Social Exclusion Unit, 2002
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Appendices

Appendix 1 - List of interviewees

1. National Perspectives

- Chris Dolphin, Resettlement Coordinator for Women's Prison Estate, Prison Service
- Christopher Smith, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- Derek Kettlewell, National Probation Directorate Supporting People Advisor (excluding London) – seconded to National Housing Federation from West Yorkshire Probation Service
- Helen Cash, National Advisor, Supporting People, London – based in Association of London Government (ALG)
- Joy Dalkin, (Policy Advisor, Adult Offenders and Rehabilitation Unit), Home Office

2. Local Perspectives

- Kezia Crew, Lead Officer and Acting Head, Supporting People, LB Camden (also speaking on behalf of Stephen Conroy, Supporting People lead, Camden PCT)
- Lourdes Keever, London Probation Service
- Liam Hughes, Chief Executive, East Leeds PCT
- Kate James, Research Officer, Supporting People Team, Leeds City Council
- Clare Henderson, Supporting People Manager, LB Islington
- Elizabeth Clowes, Assistant Director of Commissioning, LB Islington/Islington PCT
- Joy Taylor, Prisons Liaison Manager, New Bridge Project, Liverpool
- Bronia Benecki, Head of Resettlement, HMP Low Newton
- Liz Griffiths, Chief Executive, East Potential

3. Comparative perspectives

- Lawrie Brown, Community Chaplaincy Coordinator, Churches' Criminal Justice Forum
- M. M Barnet, Directeur, Soleillet

Appendix 2 - Questionnaire

Content and Roles

1. Describe the role of your organisation with regard to Supporting People

(a) in general

(b) with regard to women ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending

Planning and Provision Before Supporting People

2. Describe planning processes for supported housing provision for women ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending prior to Supporting People

3. Describe supported housing provision for women ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending prior to Supporting People

Implementation of Supporting People

4. Describe the overall planning processes now in place for Supporting People

5. Describe provision planned for or in place through Supporting People for women ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending

6. Identify the prime movers promoting innovation and good practice for women ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending through Supporting People

Evaluation and Next Steps

7. Overall, with regard to provision for women ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending, what have been the positive aspects of Supporting People?

8. Overall, with regard to provision for women ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending, what have been the negative aspects of Supporting People?

9. What next steps is your organisation planning with regard to provision for women ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending?