

Una Padel writes on children of prisoners, statistics on women and the cjs, and prisoners and the vote.

Every Child Matters?

The last CJM Update featured the main proposals set out in the Government Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' and the accompanying 'Youth Justice: The Next Steps'. One aspect of the Green Paper which was particularly noteworthy was the specific mention made of prisoners' children as a group with particular needs. The consultation asked about them, and all the signs were that at last the DFES was, for the first time, going to consider this traumatised and stigmatised group of children. How disappointing it was to find that this was only a passing interest and, despite the efforts of Action for Prisoners' Families, CCJS and others they are not mentioned at all in 'Every Child Matters: The Next Steps', the publication produced after the consultation.

Women and the criminal justice system

The latest statistics on women and the criminal justice system (2003) were published in March. They show that:

- The peak age for offending for girls is 14, and most women grow out of crime by their late teens.
- Female arrestees identified as having drug problems are more likely than their male counterparts to have received drug treatment, spend more money on drugs, report recent use of more harmful drugs and are more likely to be referred for specialist help.
- The main offences for which women were sentenced to custody in 2002 were: theft from shops (2740 women), wounding (510), robbery (470), burglary (450), fraud (450), production, supply and possession with intent to supply a class A controlled drug (430) and summary motoring (420).
- Recent figures suggest that the rise in sentenced prison receptions for women is driven by a more severe response to less serious offences.
- The rate of increase of women being given a custodial sentence at magistrates' court is higher than at Crown Court.
- Between 1992 and 2002 the average population of women in custody rose by 173% as against 50% for men, reflecting sentencing changes at the courts.
- Among the population of sentenced female offenders the main offence groups are drug offences (41% at June 2002) followed by violence against the person (16%) and theft and handling (14%)
- In mid-2002 ethnic minority groups made up 29% of the

female prison population compared to 20% of the male prison population.

- 20% of female prisoners in 2002 were foreign nationals.
- An estimated 20% of women in prison have experienced some time in care.
- 47% of women reported using crack cocaine and 57% heroin in the year before coming to prison compared to 28% and 35% of male prisoners respectively.
- 15% of sentenced female prisoners had previously been admitted to a mental hospital and 37% had previously attempted suicide.

Prisoners and the vote

A lifer has successfully challenged the ban on convicted prisoners voting, through the European Court of Human Rights. Judges ruled that there had been a violation of Article 3, Protocol 1, (right to free elections) of the *European Convention on Human Rights* in the case brought by life sentence prisoner John Hirst. Initial responses from the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Prime Minister's office were negative and an appeal against the judgement may follow.

The electoral ban on sentenced prisoners voting is contained in Section 3 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983*, amended by the *Representation of the People Acts 1985* and 2000. It dates back to the *Forfeiture Act of 1870*. The only other adults who cannot vote are hereditary peers who are members of the House of Lords, foreign nationals, patients detained in psychiatric hospitals as a result of their crimes and those convicted in the previous five years of corrupt or illegal election practices. Remand prisoners, people imprisoned for contempt of court and fine defaulters held in prison are eligible to vote. Most European countries allow all prisoners to vote. Eighteen European countries, including Ireland, The Netherlands and Spain have no ban. Eight other European countries only ban some sentenced prisoners from voting. In France and Germany, courts have the power to impose loss of voting rights as an additional punishment. The UK is one of only eight European countries automatically disenfranchising all sentenced prisoners, the others being: Armenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Luxembourg and Romania. The Prison Reform Trust and ex-prisoner charity Unlock have been spearheading the 'Barred from Voting' Campaign.

On the spot fines for disorder – early results

Since August 2002 police in four areas have been able to impose fixed penalty notices for 11 disorder offences of the sort that take up large amounts of police time. The 3040 penalty notices issued between August 2002 and March 2003 for either £40 or £80 were mainly issued for 'causing harassment, alarm or distress' or 'disorderly behaviour while drunk'. 53% were paid within the statutory 21 days, though payment rates were lower in the metropolitan areas and for the higher £80 tariff. Most police officers in the pilot areas were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied. There was some concern that repeated penalty notices for disorder were being issued to the same recipients.

Managing a Local Strategy for Youth Crime Reduction in the Metropolis

Roger Grimshaw and Jackie King summarise their research for the London Borough of Camden's Community Safety Partnership.

In modern metropolitan centres the social diversity and mobility of the population poses challenges to the sense of order that has been stereotypically associated with stable and monocultural areas. The London borough of Camden is similar to many other inner London boroughs in facing problems in satisfying the expectations of its mixed urban communities and of an array of transients, commuters and visitors. The development of statutory crime and disorder partnerships has been a test of the ability of urban local administrations to bind their disparate agencies together in order to meet the concerns and priorities expressed by local populations. Yet youth behaviour continues to be a visible object of anxiety: for example, there are widely expressed concerns about antisocial behaviour by young people, drug dealing and crime in Camden's public places. Research commissioned from CCJS by Camden Community Safety Partnership last year attempted to audit its strategies for reducing youth crime.

National government demands have complicated the strategic context. A recent Audit Commission evaluation suggested that there are tensions concerning the determination of local priorities as envisaged by the *Crime and Disorder Act* and the centrally determined priorities in relation to burglary, vehicle crime and violent crime. The Audit Commission report found that service delivery appeared most effective where it was focused at the local level, with police sectors and beats aligned with political wards and locally based staff given responsibility for a geographic area. A major challenge for local decision-makers concerned with youth crime is to respond to pressures from agencies at the centre in constructive and coherent ways while keeping faith with local interests and views – not least, with those of young people. This research highlighted the importance of facing up to the challenge openly and not taking on the impossible task of 'squaring circles'.

There were three distinct areas of the research. One was examination of strategy documents: Crime and Disorder Strategy (CDS); Camden Youth Justice Plan (YJP); Camden Policing Plan (PP); Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (NRS); Children and Young Person's Strategy (CYP); Drug and Alcohol Strategy (DAS); and the Community Strategy (CS). The strategic aims and planning targets of the main strategies were analysed and compared.

The second area of research consisted of interviewing practitioners working within the

borough's departments and agencies, for example current and recent heads of borough-based strategic planning groups and representatives of the main bridging organizations.

Strategy and partnership

The main themes for change that were highlighted by the research were in relation to structure, membership and working of the Partnership. Interviewees made a number of recommendations for structural change to the partnership, including the provisions of a central coordinating body; changes in the thematic groups of the partnership, as well as reassessing the Partnership's place in the borough. Responses to the issue of membership were mixed. On the one hand, some people felt that the membership of the partnership was too large and unwieldy; on the other hand, some felt that there was room for it to grow in terms of increased representation from various groups. In terms of working, the general sentiment was that good work often came out of the partnership and that the multi-agency approach was the correct one. However, it was suggested that it should be more focused, define the roles of the parties better, reduce duplication and increase communication between partnership agencies.

The research found that there was not sufficient focus on youth crime separate from crime in general in the Strategy. There currently existed no unified children and/or young persons strategy in Camden. The various strategies generally failed to provide sufficient baseline data, referral processes and risk factors relating to youth crime. Further, none of the strategies had an express definition of youth crime. While all dealt with the issues of victimization/safety, only half actually consulted with young people. The research further found that there was little cross-referencing between the various strategies that relate to young people and youth crime.

One of the most interesting findings of the research was the clear absence of a set definition of youth crime and disorder. There was no consistent approach across the borough in identifying risk factors in a qualitative way. There was very little to suggest that such factors are even able to be related to need and service provision. In fact, a number of interviewees suggested that the whole concept of risk factors, as well as the assessment procedure itself, was problematic.

The issue of targets was an important one for the research. Interviewees felt that: targets were too great in number; needed to be more focused; needed to

relate better to targets in other strategies; needed to be broken down more; and were often hard to measure. It was also felt that work was too target-driven and funding-driven rather than outcome-driven and that it was hard to prioritise local and national objectives.

One of the major gaps in service provision was the fact that there are few monitored referrals between departments and projects. There did not appear to be any consistent method or criteria of referral between the agencies dealing with young people. In particular, the absence of strategy for 11-15 year olds, the gap between leisure services and youth services, and the transition from primary to secondary school were considered very problematic.

Interviewees largely acknowledged the deficiencies in the provision of and access to data. However, the advent of the Information, Referral and Tracking pilot (IRT) provided some hope about having a baseline dataset. The research found that institutional barriers acted as a constraint to efficient and effective information exchange.

Perceived difficulties in evaluation included: the ability to attribute a particular program to a real reduction in youth crime; dealing with offenders who come from outside the borough; the need to give more credibility to anecdotal, qualitative evidence; the need for more examples of good practice; absence of a standard assessment tool; absence of longitudinal studies of young people.

Recommendations from research on strategy and partnership

Our main recommendations for an effective youth crime reduction strategy were that an integrated strategic approach should be developed. Models of strategic integration should be considered, and a mechanism should be developed to respond to government policies and papers in an integrated and flexible manner.

A youth crime reduction working group should be established, with representatives from the CSP, police, schools, YOT, Social services, Play and Leisure, Children and Young Persons Strategy Group and DAT. Other representatives on the CSP should be consulted when necessary.

A crime analyst, perhaps in conjunction with other strategy group/agencies should be employed to provide more holistic data on youth crime, risk factors and need. Training should be given about the role of the CSP and any youth crime strategy and how it links with the work of other agencies.

The CSP should be a co-ordinating body rather than a direct provider of services. It was recommended that the Community Safety Partnership should develop a wide definition of youth crime and disorder, incorporating people at risk, offenders and victims, and also including anti-social behavior, illegal activity, reported and unreported crime. This definition should be used in all Community Safety Partnership work, to ensure consistency and to help Camden youth understand what acts constitute youth crime. A youth crime reduction strategy should have a limited number of general aims, focusing on people at risk, young offenders and victims. The development of these targets should be premised on a thorough investigation of risk and need of youth in Camden. A section on risk factors, and how need is determined on the basis of those factors, both qualitative and quantitative, should be included in the strategy.

The strategy should coordinate a response to gaps in service provision, rather than duplicating services that are already

provided under other umbrellas. It should focus on areas which other agencies are unable to adequately deal with, and detail a mechanism for facilitating increased referrals between agencies. Better strategic links were needed between the various multi-agency partnerships, such as the Community Safety Net and the Domestic Violence Forum. A youth crime reduction strategy should contain a section on prevention.

In the area of information collection, access and exchange, it was recommended that the development of IRT should be seen as an opportunity to develop a baseline data system for the most vulnerable. Qualitative and quantitative evidence should be incorporated into analysis of youth crime, and mapping should be developed and used to allow detailed local analysis of risk factors and crime. Training on data exchange, what is available and how to access it should be provided across the borough. IRT could provide systemic data from across a wide range of borough agencies.

It was noted that the monitoring system needed revising to allow for quantitative and qualitative information, as well as example of good practice.

Baselines should be publicized among the partners and should be used as the basis for any reporting. Recruitment of a data analyst/consultant would inform a better understanding and provide methodological advice about how to analyse a particular problem.

Consultation with Youth

The third aspect of the research involved gathering young people's views through a short school-based self-completion survey on their worries, experience of crime, community safety and services, and their opinions on strategic options. At-risk groups of young people were interviewed through small groups and opportunity sampling at key venues.

School surveys

Surveys of the youth population can help to identify how problems are defined and the priorities in resolving them. A short school-based self-completion survey using pre-tested questions on young people's worries, experience of crime, policing, offending and victimization, community safety and services, and their opinions about strategic options was developed by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. Questions were drawn from well-known sources such as the MORI Youth Survey (2002). All pupils in years 8 and 10 at two mixed secondary schools were asked to fill out the forms and 520 did so. The school surveys showed that significant proportions of pupils felt unsafe while travelling – using the Tube, in particular. Among the locations, Camden Lock emerged as the most frequently described 'scary' place followed by Camden Town.

Just over half of the young people had been victimised in some way in the previous 12 months. Of these, two thirds had been victimised in up to two ways. Theft, racial abuse and being threatened were the most frequent forms of victimisation. Much of the victimisation was carried out by other young people. Young people's responses indicated that schools were major sites for offending and antisocial behaviour, particularly for threats, theft, bullying, property damage, and racial and homophobic abuse.

Over two-thirds of respondents reported having committed an offence. Year 10 pupils were more likely to admit offending than those in Year 8. The results showed that the Year 10 pupils

again had a significantly higher rate of shop theft, drug purchase, and attacks than those in Year 8. Burglary and weapon-carrying rates for young men were significantly higher than for young women.

A similar set of suggestions for ways of reducing youth crime emerged when young people selected from a list of different options and when they were asked for their own ideas on ways to reduce youth crime. These highlighted 'police on the streets', 'youth activities', 'CCTV cameras', 'support for offenders' and 'jobs for young people'.

Interviews with excluded youth

School populations, however, fail to contain those excluded from school, which form a high-risk group for offending. Such youth were contacted through a Pupil Referral Unit and a range of youth services. 32 individuals were interviewed about the risks they are aware of, the quality and accessibility of services, and what would help young people to reduce their offending. Ethical procedures were clearly followed so as to maximise informed consent.

According to the interviewees' self-completion questionnaires, their rates of offending in the past year were high.

The responses showed that while there was no unanimity, many of the young people could see a difference between a youth disturbance and a crime. While young people could see harm arising from antisocial behaviour it was not agreed that this amounted to 'crime'. Judgements about what was crime were influenced by the perception that adults' attitudes to the young were not favourable.

Interviewees described drug markets such as Camden Town, Mornington Crescent and King's Cross as being 'scary' places in the borough associated with threats, weapons and violence. Worries about youth crime were about a mixture of serious and less threatening matters. It appeared that young people consider it irrelevant to report inconclusive incidents to the police, perhaps because the police were seen as unresponsive to a number of actual incidents. Contacts with the police were sometimes problematic, particularly when young people were arrested. They were upset if their version of events was not taken seriously. It appeared that several interpretations of the factors driving crime were based on close acquaintance with, or personal involvement in, crime. Perceptions of families' financial needs; educational problems; negative experiences of leisure and consumption; lack of money; boredom; cultural influences arising from drug misuse and music were all mentioned.

Individual guidance was valued by young people as a result of their positive personal experiences. Other suggestions included: moral and parenting education; deterrence measures and protective surveillance of public space; better facilities for youth; better communication between cultures and groups.

Recommendations from the consultation research involving young people

It was recommended that the various proposals for improving youth consultation should be considered. Children's versions of documents should be made readily available, their views should be passed on through a local website and collated to be fed through the strategic process, and consultation should be documented in the strategy.

Victimisation of young people should be taken more seriously as a major component of the youth crime problem. Victimisation in school and while travelling to and from school is a substantial part of the youth crime problem that needs increased attention from multi-agency initiatives. Young people's anxiety should be examined as part of a strategic review of transport and mobility in Camden.

Consideration should be given to increasing the accessibility of protective services for young people, thus reducing the helplessness and anxiety felt by a significant proportion. A charter for young victims should be considered, so that feelings of safety are monitored. As there is little evidence to suggest that young people's offending rates in a school within the Behaviour Improvement Programme were outstandingly different from another school outside it, it was recommended that young people in schools across the borough should be seen as a target group for crime reduction initiatives, though the intensity of the challenge may differ from school to school. Strategic attention should be given to the results of consultations that show young people's own priorities. Interviews with excluded youth gave rise to the recommendation that consultation processes should be developed with vulnerable youth that focus on the whole range of adolescent interests and concerns including crime and antisocial behaviour, services for youth, leisure and the use of public space. A strategy should be developed that addresses the causes of conflict and discontent among youth in need, especially in public spaces.

Street patrols should be aware of the factors that promote discontent and conflict and seek to establish better processes of communication. Schools should be equipped to deal with the tensions and discontents that exist within the school population but emerge outside schools. Individual guidance programmes should be fully incorporated in an effective strategy for youth crime reduction.

Provision for leisure should be strongly incorporated in the partnership's strategic planning, and community plans should address youth access to leisure facilities.

Conclusions

A children and young persons' strategy is a prerequisite for a viable youth crime reduction strategy. The youth crime reduction strategy should be a logical extension of it as a means of ensuring that all young people's developmental needs are comprehensively addressed and shortfalls in mainstream provision are signalled. Only if the mainstream agencies sign up to it can there be even a nominal guarantee of accountability. The membership of the Crime and Disorder Partnership can then act as a parliament for the development and auditing of the strategy. The Partnership should act as a broker for the development of strategic approaches and one that calls the strategic leaderships to account. Further, a youth crime reduction strategy that is informed by proper consultation should have a head start on one that lacks a firm basis provided by ongoing consultation.

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