



“Community or Custody – which works best?”
A Make Justice Work National Enquiry
Third Session, Leicester 5th April 2011

The third session of Make Justice Work’s National Enquiry focused on the work of the Criminal Justice Drugs Team (CJDT) in Leicester. The CJDT provides drug treatment to service-users who have had recent contact with the criminal justice system, and alcohol treatment for those who have been given an Alcohol Treatment Requirement at sentencing. The team works as a partnership between the Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Trust, the Police, and Addaction – one of the highest profile drugs charities in the UK.

The CJDT has been involved in the System Change Project, led by the local Drug and Alcohol Action Team, which is one of only seven projects nationally looking at new approaches to drug and alcohol treatment within the criminal justice system. As part of this project an ‘end-to-end’ treatment model has been established, which works with offenders from their first contact with police through to the end of their sentence. The team is responsible for delivering all criminal justice drug and alcohol treatment across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

In Leicester the panel was chaired by Peter Osborne, author, broadcaster and commentator for the Daily Telegraph, and included:

- Lord Blair, former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police
- Roma Hooper, Director of Make Justice Work
- Javed Khan, Chief Executive of Victim Support
- Dame Anne Owers, former Chief Inspector of Prisons
- John Thornhill, Chair of the Magistrates Association

Seven evidence-givers from the local criminal justice system gave testimony:

- Inspector David Beaumont, Central Drugs Testing Team, Leicestershire Constabulary
- Gillian Kelly, former bench chairman for Loughborough and member of the Drug Rehabilitation Requirement Panel
- Kieran Simmonds and Leroy Gatwood, Criminal Justice Drug and Alcohol Team peer mentors
- Sarah Smith, Team Manager of the Criminal Justice Drugs Team, Leicester
- Bernadette Wharton, Criminal Justice Lead for the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Drug and Alcohol Action Teams
- Peter Wright, Governor, HMP Nottingham

Key points from the evidence giving session can be found on page 2.

- 1) **Drugs and alcohol are strongly linked to low level offending.** In Leicester 70-80% of crime is low level and a large proportion of that is drug or alcohol related. Problems of drug and alcohol abuse make offenders harder to deal with – in order to reduce crime, efforts to reform their offending behaviour must be linked with substance misuse treatments. Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRR) and Alcohol Rehabilitation Requirements (ARR) are good examples of health-related sentences. Offenders should also be directed to projects such as CJDT. Statistics from a group of offenders in Leicester showed that after appropriate intervention their offending fell by 44% and the costs of their offending fell by 48%.
- 2) **Where possible drug and alcohol offenders should be treated in the community.** One of the main reasons is that offenders have greater access to drug and alcohol services in the community to help them overcome addiction and reduce their criminal behaviour over the longer term. This can often prove tougher than custody for these criminals – they must learn how to manage their addictions and offending behaviour without the protection afforded by the restricted liberty of prison. Substance misusers are particularly unsuited to short term prison sentences due to the lack of probation oversight and support when they are released from prison. However custody must remain as a last resort for prolific offenders who are either dangerous or show no propensity to change.
- 3) **Contrary to common perception, community alternatives – when robust – are more onerous than custody.** This is particularly because short prison sentences place no focus on rehabilitation. Testimony was provided from offenders who claimed prison was a place to relax, in contrast to the regimented courses, appointments and structure of community alternatives. The new National Offender Management Service proposals, which give probation officers greater discretion when managing offenders, and focus more on outcomes rather than box ticking and processes, were welcomed.
- 4) **Community orders must be made more robust in order to be effective.** One of the ways to do that is to increase the use of residential drug centres. Research by Matrix, commissioned by Make Justice Work, supports this view – finding that residential drug treatment is more effective and less costly than short-term prison sentences. There should also be a clear focus on recovery and elimination, which has been missing from criminal justice treatment programmes until now. For example, CJDT takes a holistic approach to treatment and recovery, focusing not only on the taking of substances but also on the person and the issues behind the substance abuse. Genuine service-user involvement such as peer mentoring was also considered beneficial, as were strong partnerships and continuity, which prevent service users repeatedly changing workers and falling through the gaps.
- 5) **Shortage of funding is the biggest barrier to reducing drug and alcohol offending.** Funding gaps mean current programmes may not continue and the roll out of best practice to other areas of the UK will be hindered. Yet there are cost benefits to early intervention which politicians and public must be convinced of. The usefulness of local priorities determining local spending was also raised.
- 6) **The public is not yet convinced of community alternatives and more must be done to win their hearts and minds.** For example, magistrates in Leicester are required to go out into the community to explain what they do and how they do it. The public often change punitive attitudes when given the correct information. Greater engagement and sharing of evidence by the justice sector, alongside a more responsible, evidence-based approach from the media, is required.

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