



**“Community or Custody – which works best?”
A Make Justice Work National Enquiry
Fourth Session, London 11th July 2011**

The fourth and final session of Make Justice Work’s National Enquiry focused on the work of the Camberwell Green Forensic Mental Health Practitioner Service run by Together, the national mental health charity. The service works with London Probation and Camberwell Green Magistrate’s court to screen people with mental health needs on prison or police remand and provide recommendations and specialist advice to the court based on their assessments. Practitioners provide mental health awareness training to court staff, including magistrates and judges as well as information regarding mental health issues and local borough services. Key outcomes include increased diversion of vulnerable offenders away from the Criminal Justice System (CJS) into healthcare services as well as the reduction of inappropriate court requests for psychiatric reports (and reduction in financial cost to the court) and the reduction in the number of remands or length of time spent on remand of offenders with mental health needs.

In London the panel was chaired by David Barrie CBE, Chair of Make Justice Work, and included:

- Graham Beech, Strategy Development Director, Nacro
- 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:

- Heather Munro, chief Executive, London Probation Trust
- Linda Bryant, Service Manager, Together project
- PC Richard Harwin, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Liaison Officer, Hackney Police Station
- Judge Haydn Gott
- Maria, Service User, Together Forensic Mental Health Practitioner Service
- Tom, Service User, Together Forensic Mental Health Practitioner Service
- Dr Andrew Forrester, Consultant and Honorary Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychiatry

1. Mental health is a key factor in offending

Overall, 90% of prisoners have some kind of mental illness and 45% of London Probation's caseload has mental health issues. 20% of offences have a mental health component. It is essential to reduce ignorance in criminal justice agencies about the extent of the links between mental health and offending. *Together* provide mental health awareness training to magistrates, judges and police – 80% of officers said this training would improve encounters with offenders.

2. Early identification, diversion and management of mental health issues reduces reoffending and costs

There is too little early identification and assessment of offenders with mental health issues, which is key to reducing offending behaviour. Many offenders with mental health issues go undiagnosed for years. Early assessment and sharing of information reduces the need to commission expensive and time-consuming psychiatric reports and to detain offenders on remand while awaiting these reports. Thanks to the court liaison and diversion scheme at Camberwell Magistrate's Court there has been a 30% reduction in requests for psychiatric reports, which represents a clear saving to the taxpayer. These services, which are at present only available in a few areas, should be made available nationwide. Screening suspected offenders at the earliest possible point of contact with the criminal justice system is vital to reducing reoffending and reducing costs.

3. To use community alternatives, sentencers must know about them

More needs to be done to improve awareness among sentencers of the community alternatives to custody that are available to them. Organisations running alternatives to custody should actively engage with sentencers to build greater confidence in them. Building relationships between the courts and other agencies can also improve the sentencing process. *Together* have worked with sentencers at Camberwell Green Magistrates Court to make sure the information they are providing is as useful as possible to those passing sentences. At the very least sentencers should receive general training about alternatives to custody and how they work to reduce reoffending.

4. Organisations cannot work in isolation

Close working between multiple agencies, including local mental health services, prison healthcare, GPs and other voluntary services is key to improving outcomes. *Together's* access to the London Probation database means the project is well informed about the offenders they work with, which also builds trust and confidence with the courts. Close partnerships also ensure offenders a smoother path through the criminal justice system. Too often information about an offender's mental health needs is not passed on and the necessary medical support does not extend across the junction between community and custody. A multi-agency approach would provide a continuity of care which is essential for offenders with mental health problems.

5. Budgets and commissioning

In Camberwell, £2million was ploughed into partnership work so offenders could access mental health services, but where should this money come from - the health service or a criminal justice agency? To address the complex needs of offenders with mental health problems, it was suggested that commissioning must be joined up and budgets brought together. Although difficult, this would encourage the development of the multi-agency teams which are so badly needed.

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