

**NOTES OF MEETING
REDUCING RE-OFFENDING SCRUTINY PANEL
16TH FEBRUARY 2011**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor J M Hunt)
Councillors Brown, Pacey, Ranson and Sutherland

APOLOGIES: Councillors J. Capleton and S. Jones

The Head of Communities and Partnerships attended the meeting to assist the Panel.

I. SCOPE DOCUMENT

An updated scope document was submitted for the information of the Panel.

AGREED that the information be noted.

2. LOCAL AGENCIES AND CHARITIES INVOLVED IN THE AREA OF
REDUCING RE-OFFENDING

At the invitation of the Panel, two ex-offenders and Scott Wheatley from the Exaireo Trust attended the meeting to assist the Panel with its consideration of the matter.

(i) Rachael

Rachael had been in and out of trouble with the police for fifteen years, since the age of twenty five, with three custodial sentences, in a continuous cycle. With the support of Exaireo, Rachael had not been involved with the judicial system for eighteen months. Prior to being in prison she had lived in Nottingham and believed that had she returned there on her release she would have re-offended very quickly, as she would have reverted to her old lifestyle with the same acquaintances. In the hostels in Nottingham there was no support or guidance available, while at Exaireo there was always someone to talk to and offer support, together with activities and work to prevent boredom.

As an ex-drug user she had been re-directed and enjoyed the work she was able to undertake in catering and voluntary work at Project 5000, at Emmanuel Church in Loughborough.

Rachael chose to remain in prison for an additional month to be able to transfer directly to a place at Exaireo.

Rachel was currently on the CNH list, waiting for a flat in Loughborough and was hoping to get employment in the area.

(ii) Jason

Jason had been offending since he was thirteen years old, when he had been caught shoplifting with a friend from a shop in Loughborough and began to take drugs when he was fifteen. From that time he had been in a vicious circle of offending, just stopping short of being imprisoned. Jason considered that had he been imprisoned he would be in a more difficult situation than he currently was. It took until he was twenty four years old to decide to move on. To do that he moved from Shepshed to Loughborough and while he still had contact with his friends, when there is any sign of trouble he moves away from the situation.

Through G&S Services, Jason had been involved with the Government initiative Future Builders, showing he was a good carpenter. The initiative had been withdrawn by the current Government and Jason was currently applying to the Princes' Trust for funding to work as a self employed carpenter.

In response to issues raised and questions, Jason, Rachael and Scott Wheatley stated:

- (a) 95% of ex-offenders would choose to return to their original area to live. To move to a new area where they knew no one would require a strong will to want to change, and often returning to their home offered the only stability in their lives.
- (b) The support that was available at charities such as Exaireo was needed for those who wished to change.
- (c) Rachael's decision to change was taken while in prison, although she had considered this previously, without the support available at Exaireo it was too easy to return to old habits.
- (d) Friendships had been made away from Exaireo through voluntary work with Project 5000.
- (e) Three girls from Nottingham had been at Exaireo, two had returned to Nottingham while a third, a prolific offender, had stayed and been out of trouble for six months.
- (f) Problem youths especially needed one to one support and mentoring to be diverted away from trouble. Two friends of Jason have become youth workers and were able to connect with other youths, being able to empathise with their position. Rachel meets ladies out of prison and offers her support and help as they try to rebuild their lives.
- (g) Having a criminal record made it more difficult to find employment.
- (h) While being tagged, Jason was able to apply to the court to vary his curfew times, to be allowed to continue to work after 7.00pm.

- (i) G & S Services is underfunded and needed to ensure that it was viable. Therefore, although there are options to establish further homes, the charity was unable to provide the work to support them and chose to remain with the seven current homes.

Councillors made reference to issues and made suggestions as follows:

- currently cuts were being made on Youth Services in Leicestershire and there were concerns in respect of the impact that would have locally.
- ex-offenders could go into schools and speak to 13 year olds about their experience to show how they regret their behaviour and the consequences of that behaviour.

AGREED

1. that the witnesses be thanked for the insight they had provided to the Panel and that the Panel wished them well in the future;
2. that the following matters be referred to Leicestershire County Council:

It was of concern that the youth provision is at risk;

In many instances young people required one to one mentoring to be available to them;

Young people required education at an early age in schools in respect of alcohol and drug abuse and rehabilitated ex-offenders could play an import role in that area;

3. that while recognising pressures on budgets, there were concerns for young people most at risk of offending/re-offending.

3. DRAFT REPORT

The Panel and the Head of Communities and Partnerships considered the draft report and made the following comments and recommendations:

- (i) Although a representative of the Probation Service had been unavailable to give evidence to the Panel, the work of that service had been covered by witnesses from TurnAbout and Leicestershire Constabulary.
- (ii) In respect of the background information, reference should be made to the positive work Charnwood Borough Council already achieved, the reputation it

had, in respect of partnership working, an award winning anti-social behaviour team and its focus on priority neighbourhoods.

- (iii) Reference was made to the differing styles of management of the two Local Police Units which is based upon the different challenges and resources available to both LPUs. In Loughborough there was a strong focus on Neighbourhood Policing, while in Charnwood there was a greater emphasis on dealing with crime detection and the LPU had the highest detection rates in the County.
- (iv) It was of concern that representatives from different charities working in the area of reducing re-offending had been unaware of each other's work. Officers acknowledged that that was an area to be addressed and would be discussed with representatives from the Police and Probation Service.
- (v) During the consideration of Integrated Offender Management, reference had been made to the lack of support from the Primary Care Trust to the scheme. It was proposed that an additional recommendation be made to the Cabinet to liaise with the Director of Public Health requesting its assistance with reducing re-offending around the areas of alcohol and drug abuse and mental health.
- (vi) In order for Housing officers to be able to anticipate the needs of Ex-offenders from Charnwood on release from prison, it would be of helpful if they could be alerted prior to the event, as happens with the LPU Commanders.
- (vii) In respect of a Fair Debt Policy, Charnwood Borough Council had a flexible payment plan to support ex-offenders, what was still required was a policy that was acceptable to social landlords.
- (viii) In respect of recommendation 3.8 additional wording be added as follows:

'and consideration be given to the potential to look at void properties with a view to re-housing ex-offenders';
- (ix) Reference was made to the Work Clubs referred to by the witness from Job Centre Plus. It was proposed that a further recommendation be included in the Panel report to include the inclusion of ex-offenders in those 'work clubs'.
- (x) Reference was made to Section 6 – Mental Health. It was proposed that the matter be referred to the Charnwood Community Safety Partnership to be considered in greater detail.
- (xi) Reference was made to the Carpenters' Arms and the fact that it did not accept local people directly from prison, but was available to support ex-offenders from other areas.

- (xii) Consideration was given to void properties in the Borough and the possible use them to house ex-offenders.

Minor word changes within the report were agreed during the course of the consideration of the draft report.

AGREED

1. that an additional recommendation be made at 2.7 in the report to request that the Communities and Partnerships Team arrange meetings with organisations involved in reducing re-offending twice a year to share information;
2. that the Head of Communities and Partnerships confirm how wide spread prison release on a Friday is;
3. that an additional recommendation be made at 2.7 in the report that Cabinet liaise with the Director of Public Health, requesting his assistance with reducing re-offending around the areas of alcohol and drug abuse and mental health.
4. that an additional recommendation be made at 2.7 in the report that officers investigate how the Borough Council can anticipate which Charnwood ex-offenders are being released from prison and when, in order that Housing Needs officers are able to anticipate their needs;
5. that in respect of recommendation 3.8, additional wording be added 'and consideration be given to the potential to look at void properties with a view to re-housing ex-offenders';
6. that in respect of recommendation 5.4 a further recommendation be added that the Job Centre be requested to include ex-offenders in its newly formed 'work clubs';
7. that in respect of Section 6 – Mental Health, an additional recommendation be added that the Cabinet Lead Member be requested to refer the matter to the Charnwood Community Safety Partnership to consider the issue in greater detail.