



Social Justice Outcomes Framework Response from Revolving Doors Agency January 2013

About Revolving Doors Agency

Revolving Doors Agency is a charity working across England to change systems and improve services for people with multiple problems, including poor mental health, who are in repeat contact with the criminal justice system.

Multiple problems experienced by women and men in this 'revolving doors' group often include drug and/or alcohol misuse, homelessness, learning difficulties, physical health problems, poverty, debt and fractured relationships with family.

Each problem feeds into and exacerbates the others, and creates a downward spiral that brings people into contact with the criminal justice system. The police, courts and prisons see people in this group every day, yet they get little or no effective help from mainstream health and other services. We estimate this population to be approximately 60,000 at any one time, with further people at risk of entering it, or in recovery.

Following the launch of our vision paper [Turning the Tide](#) (2011) which we developed with the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) coalition, we have been working together with the Social Justice Team to share our knowledge of solutions for this group, and to help the Social Justice Strategy's aim of giving the most disadvantaged adults a second chance in life.

Our response

This response has been developed through a consultation with members of our National Service User Forum, and reflects the experience of people with multiple needs who have been in contact with the criminal justice system. It is hoped that their experience will be useful when considering how best to evaluate progress on the Social Justice agenda.

In our consultation, we split 20 members of our service user forum into two focus groups, and asked them what they felt were the most important things in helping them to turn their lives around. We then asked about the proposed key indicators in section 4 of the Outcomes Framework, which is concerned with "supporting the most disadvantaged adults".



We aimed to discover, based on their experience, how effective they felt these measures would be in tracking progress, how realistic they were, and whether other measures should also be considered. The issues highlighted by our service users form the basis of this response.

Key Points

- **Many members of the forum were pleased that these issues were being taken seriously, and were positive that measures were being considered to monitor “what is working”.**
- **Concerns were raised that there was no mention of mental health or housing as priorities or indicators in the framework. Both of these were raised as among the most crucial factors for many individuals in turning their life around.**
- **Consideration should be given to developing measures on these issues as indicators, such as number of prisoners successfully housed on release, to add more depth to the data collected.**
- **Alongside these indicators, more in depth monitoring should be carried out using self-reported measures on follow-up with service users to assess health and wellbeing.**
- **There was some concern that a focus on employment over wellbeing measures could lead to individuals being pressured into work too early in their recovery.**
- **An appreciation of steps made towards employment, including education and volunteering, should be considered rather than simply measuring the number in employment after 12 months.**



Introduction

The cross-government strategy [Social Justice: Transforming Lives](#) includes a welcome focus on helping adults who face multiple disadvantages to rebuild their lives. Revolving Doors particularly welcomes the aim “to ensure that people get a second chance, so that they can achieve full and lasting recovery from the problems they face” (HM government, 2012b, p.18).



The [Social Justice Outcomes Framework](#) was published as “the next step in developing the Social Justice vision”, highlighting priorities and how progress is to be measured. It gives more detail about what delivering Social Justice means on a practical level, and without setting targets aims to “give more clarity to commissioners and service deliverers....about what we are trying to achieve and how they can contribute” (HM government, 2012b, p. 3).

The Framework provides a welcome focus on outcomes. We also welcome the recognition in the framework that “many interrelated factors” are important in this area, and that the proposed indicators do not tell the whole story.

Nevertheless, following consultation with our service user forum we have a number of suggestions which could help in development of the final framework and in the ongoing monitoring of progress in the social justice strategy. These suggestions are focused on section 4 of the Framework (which concentrates on “supporting the most disadvantaged adults”) and are grounded in the experience of our forum members.

Housing

We welcome the recognition in the Framework that the measures of addiction, offending and employment chosen in key indicators 5 & 6 are not the only ones affecting people facing multiple disadvantage. While recognising the need for simplicity in the measures, we suggest that other key areas should be considered alongside them to gain a fuller picture of progress, based on what was most important to our forum members.

Housing was the first issue raised by each group independently when asked what the most important things were in helping them to turn their lives around. Going further, secure and lasting accommodation was considered to be important part of a secure and lasting recovery.

Many of the most excluded people find themselves homeless or in insecure housing, which makes it difficult for them to address other problems in their lives. The social justice strategy recognised housing as a key problem for those facing multiple needs (HM government, 2012a, p. 50-51).

Consideration should therefore be given to including a measure relating to housing in the Outcomes Framework, to reinforce this as a priority for the most excluded and ensure that this crucial aspect is measured when considering progress on the strategy.

Forum members particularly raised housing difficulties combined with, and worsened, by their contact with the criminal justice system. Recent MOJ statistics show that 15% of newly sentenced prisoners reported being homeless before custody, while 9% were sleeping rough (MOJ, 2012). Particular problems surround arranging housing on release from custody, with one study suggesting that 30% of people released from prison will have nowhere to live on release (Niven & Stewart, 2005). Housing problems are particularly evident among repeat offenders; 75% of Prolific and other Priority Offenders (PPOs) have been found to have a housing need, compared with 30% of the general offender population (Homeless link, 2009).

Research reflects the experience of our service users that housing is a crucial part of the picture in enabling somebody to turn their life around and stop reoffending. Research from the Social Exclusion Unit suggested that stable accommodation can reduce reoffending by over 20%, while in recent MOJ research 60% of prisoners reported that having a place to live would help them stop reoffending (MOJ, 2012).

The Social Justice Strategy already mentions efforts to increase the range of housing that offenders are able to access on release from prison (HM government, 2012a, p. 53). **We suggest that the proportion of offenders successfully housed on release from prison or at the end of their community sentence should be included as part of key indicator 6, measuring improved outcomes for ex-offenders. This should be followed up at six and twelve months with a sample to check sustainability of the housing.** This would reflect the centrality of housing to achieving improvements in both reoffending and employment outcomes.

Of course, housing is only part of the picture. A common theme, expressed here in a quote from a forum member, is the need for a robust plan and structure on release from prison:

“Its not just giving them a house or a flat...they need something to focus on, so they need a plan to focus on...see what they need and what help they need”

A release plan should be built on a holistic assessment of the individual’s needs, with a range of support and signposting available to reduce the chance of reoffending. However, as housing is often one of the more difficult factors to arrange for on release, the above measure of housing on release could be used as a useful proxy to see how well planned prisoners release is.



Mental health & wellbeing

Mental health support was raised strongly in both focus groups as a key factor in sustaining recovery. One of the outcomes that the Social Justice Strategy listed as important over the longer term was “more people with mental health problems living independent lives, in sustained work” (HM government, 2012a, p. 59). **Consideration should be given to including a measure in the Outcomes Framework that would track progress towards this goal, and reaffirm mental health as a**

priority in the government’s Social Justice agenda.

Links between reoffending and a lack of mental health or wider emotional support were also raised by members of our forum. As one member suggested:

“A lot of people reoffend and it’s all to do with stress and not being able to cope, a lot of people who turn round and reoffend its because of a lack of coping mechanism”

As noted above, forum members suggested that this was best addressed when a broad package of well-planned and structured support, which looks at all of the individual’s needs holistically, was available to prisoners as they are released.



Contrary to this, it was felt that the emphasis of the Framework was not as holistic as it could be. Concerns were raised that the focus on measures of addiction, offending and employment meant that the health and wellbeing of those trying to turn their lives around was not being prioritised.

One forum member suggested that alongside the selected key indicators, **attempts should be made at evaluating progress using more in-depth, selfreported measures.** These could be used to gain assessments of wellbeing from the perspective of the service user:

“Just looking at those [indicators], that’s not going to give you an accurate answer. I think personally the best way...is to speak to the people themselves. If they’ve moved on, give them 6 months, give them a call or visit them at home, speak to them...then you’ve found out, is this guy successful or not? That’s the most accurate way you can do it”

While we understand that this may be beyond the capacity or remit of the Outcomes Framework, we suggest that it would be useful to make attempts to gather this more in-depth, qualitative information from at least a sample of the population targeted by the social justice strategy as part of any progress assessments. This could involve collating work already done in other departments, or encouraging services to improve follow-up and evaluation practices. This would be an important part of ensuring that the approach to measuring progress in social justice reflects the complexity of the subject. As one member of the forum stated:

“There’s no such thing as tick-boxes in life, you’ve got to look at the whole situation”.

Emphasis on employment

Employment is an important outcome of recovery, and can provide the stability and financial security to help people turn their lives around. We recognise that employment is a key part of the picture. However, it is also important to acknowledge that for many of the most excluded people, living the most chaotic lives, sustained employment is a more distant and long-term aim.

Concerns were raised that the strength of emphasis on employment in key indicators 5 and 6 (combined with the dedicated focus on welfare-to-work in section 3 of the strategy and framework) could lead to people being rushed into work before they are ready. There was also concern over the timing in key indicator 6, which aims to measure the proportion of ex-offenders who are in work 12 months later. This 12-month cut off point was considered unrealistic by some:

“You need to deal with the alcohol issues, your drug issues, your behaviour issues before they can put you into employment”.

Concerns were also raised that this measure would not be looking at the most important thing, as people who had otherwise made a good recovery from their problems and reduced or ceased offending behaviour may not be able to find employment in the current economic climate. This

would be compounded for ex-offenders due to difficulties finding employment with a criminal record:

“employment is not exactly a yes/no thing either, because its very hard for anyone who has come out of prison, within 12 months, to find work at all”.

“I don’t think the number in employment [is the best measure] because a lot of people can’t find employment, so that could be pretty low”.

Some were concerned that good progress could be considered failure due to not achieving employment outcomes. It was suggested that broader “meaningful occupation”, rather than just paid employment, should also be considered:

“One thing that also helps is not just employment...one thing that can help is finding meaningful occupation, whether it be volunteering or whatever...something you can focus on”

Many service users stressed that becoming involved in service user groups or other activities such as volunteering and college could be useful steps on the journey back to work:

“If you start by voluntary work, often you can get paid employment through doing voluntary work”

We suggest that the Outcomes Framework include a broader measure of “meaningful occupation”, including education and volunteer work, which can represent important progress in its own right as well as a useful step towards paid employment. This need not replace a measure of the proportion in employment, but it will provide a more rounded picture, particularly as employment figures for ex-offenders after 12-months may be low.

Conclusion

We welcome the intention of the outcomes framework to ensure that progress on the social justice agenda is measured. We also appreciate the importance of keeping these measures as simple as possible, and working within some existing data. However, it is important that measures of progress reflect the complexity of issues faced by the most disadvantaged adults. While successful treatment for addiction, reductions in offending and improved employment outcomes for both offenders and those receiving drug or alcohol treatment are important, the Framework would benefit from the inclusion of other measures, in particular a focus on the housing situation of these groups. It is also important that a greater depth of information is pursued around health and wellbeing outcomes for these groups, including mental health.

References

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If you would like to discuss any of these comments, or to arrange for further input from members of our service user forum at any point in the future, please contact:

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