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1. Executive summary

- KSS CRC faces challenges engaging with a range of restorative justice (RJ) schemes with different delivery models and expectations.
- The focus on victim led RJ may lead to missed opportunities to work restoratively with perpetrators, to reduce re-offending.
- The absence of a consistent funding stream does not support effective partnership working.
- Outline of KSS CRC approach to model RJ.

2. Introduction

2.1 This evidence is submitted in my capacity as Director of Rehabilitation (Interventions) and Restorative Justice lead for Kent, Surrey, Sussex CRC (KSS CRC)

2.2 CRC’s have been invited to submit evidence on the effectiveness of delivery of restorative justice across the range of service providers and funding arrangements.

3. Issues

3.1 KSS CRC covers three distinct areas, each of which have a very different approach to the delivery of restorative justice (RJ). The policy of the individual PCC and the influence of key criminal justice agencies e.g. Local Criminal Justice Boards, Police, National Probation Service and Prisons has led to the development of a diverse landscape. Within local schemes there is a multiplicity of cross sector stakeholders. The CRC has worked hard to develop a coherent internal approach to RJ which has the capacity to respond to a range of models and varying expectations of how it will be delivered.

3.2 There are information sharing challenges to overcome. Sensitive information needs to be exchanged not just between the criminal justice agencies but with the many charitable / voluntary organisations who may not have the required level of IT security or the funds to commit to a shared case management system. These organisations are key to the success of the RJ initiatives and provide a valuable resource which enhances the role played by statutory agencies.

3.3 RJ has evolved as overwhelmingly victim lead, perhaps driven by changes in funding mechanisms. The CRC recognises that the needs of the victim must be put first, and any process should be victim centred. However, RJ cannot take place without the perpetrator of the offence and as such, the individuals’ willingness to engage is essential. There are also benefits to be gained through indirect work with perpetrators to raise awareness of the impact of their actions, on the victims of their crimes. There is a risk that the current emphasis on victim led RJ will detract from the potentially powerful impact of restorative approaches on reducing reoffending, and by implication a reduction in repeat victimisation and the creation of fewer new victims.
3.4 Funding for RJ is not ring fenced and yet it requires cross sector partners with differing objectives, financial arrangements and internal pressures to work collaboratively together. In our experience, there is a general willingness to invest resources, in terms of people but the ability to make a direct financial contribution is becoming increasingly difficult for many organisations. A clear funding stream, e.g. from the PCC provides critical financial support and enables the partnership to focus on delivery.

3.5 The CRC is not mandated to deliver RJ - the contract is permissive, if we choose to deliver RJ we are required to comply with mandatory outputs, to ensure a quality intervention. KSS CRC are committed to supporting RJ because the available evidence indicates it is effective in reducing re-offending and it fits with our ethos of enabling individuals to make positive changes in their lives. However, wide scale evaluation of the effectiveness of RJ on reducing re-offending is limited and local delivery models vary.

3.6 During the last year we have developed an internal approach to RJ which is designed to meet our responsibilities to our local partners and embed a restorative approach throughout our work, within the constraints of the resources we are able to invest.

4. KSS CRC approach to Restorative Justice

4.1 KSS CRC has adopted a restorative approach to our work. Consideration is given to restorative opportunities at each stage of the service user journey. This begins with the initial assessment of victim awareness for each individual, on commencement of statutory supervision. For service users who receive Unpaid Work, there is a strong restorative element albeit to the local community. Where there is an indentified need, a service user may progress through individual and/or group sessions, to referral for a face to face conference.

4.2 Indirect restorative activities include a Victim Awareness Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR), a restorative justice pilot at one of our Senior Attendance Centers and individual work using the My Solution Rehabilitation Programme (MSRP) practitioner toolkit.

4.3 The Volunteer Mentor Unit acts as a single point of contact to provide operational support for CRC staff and partnership agencies. This provides a one-stop shop for external information sharing requests, which are passed to the appropriate Responsible Officer (RO) and provides advice to RO’s who wish to make a referral for service user led conferencing. This confines the need for knowledge of different referral routes, networks and processes, to a small group of staff. This will also assist with future monitoring and evaluation.

4.4 The CRC has a pool of volunteers who have undertaken training as RJ facilitators. This provides a development opportunity for experienced probation volunteers and enables us to contribute a facilitator resource to local RJ partnerships.
5. Recommendations

5.1 To consider the need for a clear, consistent and ring fenced funding stream that supports the delivery of RJ by complex and diverse partnerships.

5.2 To rebalance the current focus on victim led conferencing, to emphasise the wider value of restorative approaches, as a means of reducing re-offending – while keeping the needs of the victim central to the process.

5.3 To work with CRC’s to support further evaluation of the effectiveness of restorative approaches in reducing re-offending and the sharing of best practice.

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