USER VOICE

ONLY OFFENDERS CAN STOP RE-OFFENDING

INVITATION TO TENDER: IMPACT EVALUATION

CUSTODY TO COMMUNITY VOICE

FEBRUARY 2014

Supported by:

Cabinet Office

Nesta...

INTRODUCTION

User Voice represents the voices of around **15%** of criminal justice service users in England and Wales, through its representative bodies (Councils) established in prisons and probation areas throughout England. In the past 5 years over **5,000** service users have been engaged, trained and supported to have a voice directly through these Councils and other engagement projects.

User Voice is unique because its work is led and delivered by ex-offenders. We exist to reduce offending by working with the most marginalised people in and around the criminal justice system to ensure that practitioners and policy-makers hear their voices. User Voice is well placed to gain the trust of and access to people involved in crime or who have direct experience of the criminal justice system as offenders and prisoners. Our work aims to deliver a powerful rehabilitation experience for offenders, better criminal justice services and institutions, and more effective policy.

In order to achieve this we do the following:

- *User Voice Councils* developed for use within prisons or in the community for probation, youth offending teams and related services. In whatever context it occurs, the User Voice Council approach is underpinned by democratic models, which seek to engage participants in collective decision making within the confines of the particular service at hand.

- *Bespoke consultations* where we work with clients to design projects aimed at accessing, hearing and acting upon the insights of service users. These projects can include staff and user consultations, qualitative and quantitative work, and primary and secondary research.

- *Peer mentoring* projects in which people use their experience of the criminal justice and associated systems to support others in the transition to successful rehabilitation. These can be established within prisons, probation, youth offending and related services such as mental health.

CUSTODY TO COMMUNITY VOICE

Cabinet Office's Centre for Social Action

In April 2013 the Cabinet Office launched the Centre for Social Action with the goal of encouraging people to make a difference through social action. As part of the Centre for Social Action, the Cabinet Office has awarded a grant to Nesta to manage the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund. Through the Programme, Nesta will provide financial and non-financial support to help grow the impact and reach of innovations that mobilise people's energy and talents to help each other, working alongside public services.[1]

In December 2013 User Voice secured funding from the Programme to run its Council model through the prison gate, from custody to community.

User Voice's Council model

The Council model provides a structured and effective means by which prisoners and other criminal justice service users can voice collective problems and solutions and provides a reference point for the design, delivery and evaluation of new and existing policies, procedures and services. The model distils the myriad of issues into general themes, rather than personal issues, in a democratic process. The model is flexible enough to adapt according to an individual prison (Prison Councils) or community (Service User Councils) environment.

It is based on the following principles:
- Democratic – ensuring that Council members are representative of their community
- Structured – so that all involved are clear about the aims, objectives and boundaries through terms of reference and role profiles
- Issue based – concerned with collective problems and solutions and not personal issues
- Solution focused and value adding – ensuring that the Council does not work against but with the criminal justice system

Through the gate

User Voice's vision has always been to operate its Council model through the gate, so that Council members can be recruited, trained and elected in prison and continue this role and further development on release. Council members would be given either formal or informal peer support in order to assist in this crucial transitional period, as illustrated below.

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[1] More information here www.gov.uk/centre-for-social-action and www.nesta.org.uk/project/centre-social-action-innovation-fund
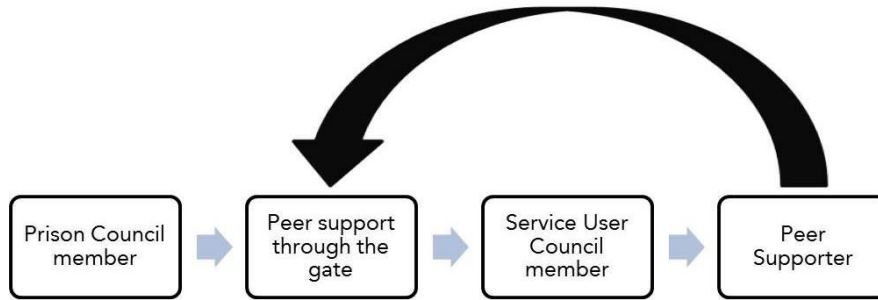
This is especially suited to working in local prisons, even more so in the new Resettlement prisons as planned in the Coalition Government's plans under Transforming Rehabilitation in which every prisoner will spend at least the last 3 months of their sentence in a prison in the area into which they will be released.

Previously User Voice's Council model has been funded by prisons and probation trusts and growth has therefore been contractually dictated. As a result this vision has not been realised. Support from the Cabinet Office has now enabled to pilot this approach for the first time and represents an exciting time to evaluate this joined up model, especially given the focus on through the gate services in Transforming Rehabilitation.

The aim of the project is therefore to test the impact of the through the gate Council model in three pilot areas, the **North East**, the **West Midlands** and **London**.

Theory of change

The following theory of change has been developed to understand the key processes, assumptions, intermediate outcomes and long terms goals of the project.
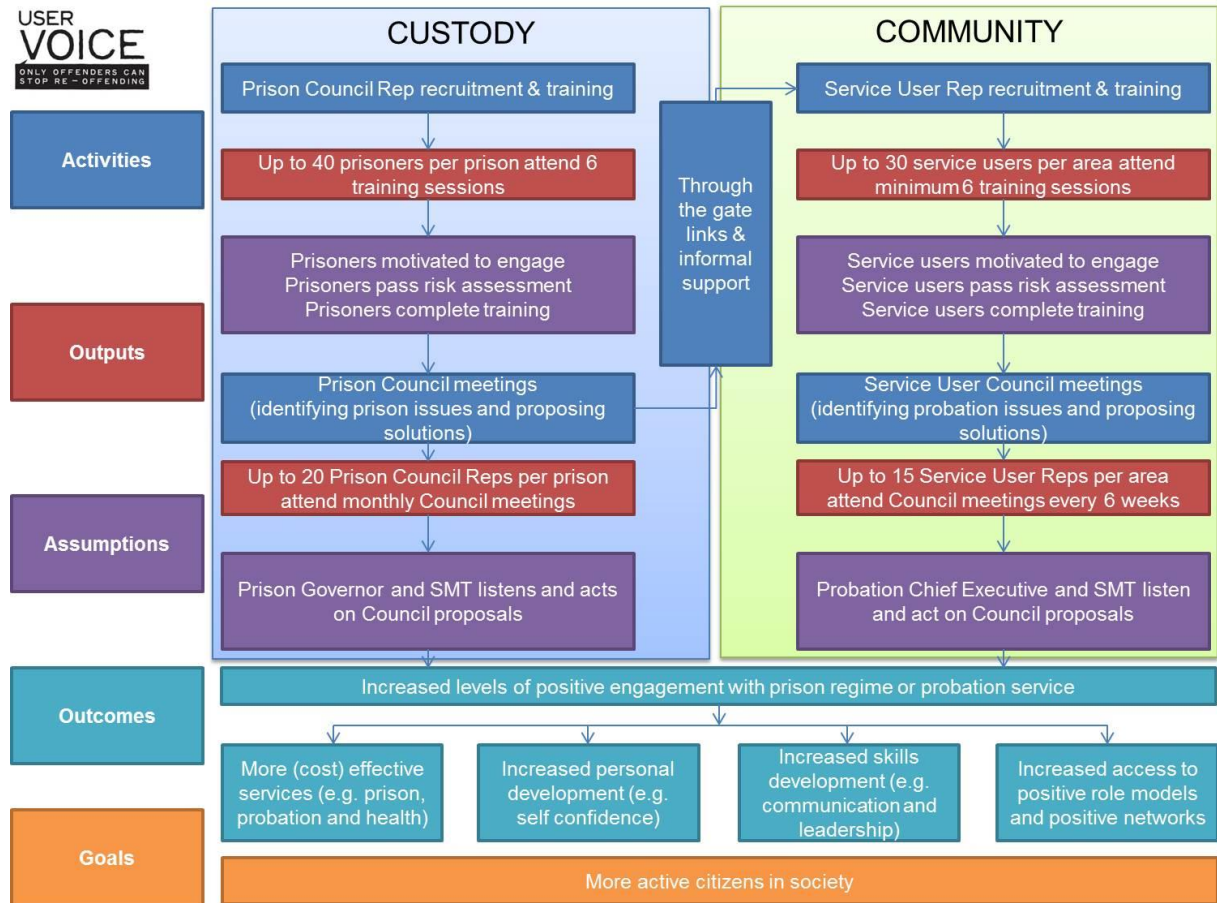
SCOPE & SPECIFICATION OF EVALUATION

In order to understand the impact of this new approach, User Voice will commission an external evaluator.

Purpose and audience

The purpose is to undertake an evaluation and to produce interim and final evaluation reports that assess (in order of importance):

1. The impact of the project in addressing the desired outcomes and goals as detailed in the theory of change (impact evaluation) relating to the participant journey, including:
   - Increased levels of positive engagement with the prison regime, for example fewer incidents of violence or adjudications, or the probation service, for example increased levels of compliance or reduced number of breaches
   - Increased personal development, for example self-confidence, self-worth and behavioural change
   - Increased skills development, for example communication, leadership, and negotiation
   - Increased access to positive role models and positive peer networks, both in custody and the community
   - More active citizens in society, including re-offending rates and social capital/quality of life of individual participants and the Council as a whole

2. The success of the project in meeting commissioners' objectives and priorities, including:
   - Improving key performance indicators
   - More (cost) effective services, for example prison, probation, health, education and training

3. The effectiveness of the methodologies used in the project (process evaluation), including:
   - Assessing the operational and administrative processes
   - Assessing the model itself

The primary audience for the reports will be those who have commissioned the service and other external commissioners seeking to understand the impact of the Council model and how it might be beneficial in their areas. User Voice also wants to use the evaluation to enhance our own learning and to develop the through the gate model and its implementation both in these pilot sites and for the future. Finally, the reports will be used for other funders and key stakeholders, such as policy makers.

Existing evidence

To date User Voice has some evidence of impact on individual participants (using Outcomes Star methodology) and services (using key performance data) for both the prison[2] and probation Council models.

Some localised studies have also be undertaken including Social Return on Investment analyses, before and after participant and provider surveys and interviews and using the Measuring the Quality of Prisoner Life (MQPL) survey.[3]

While these studies provide evidence of impact across various projects and have been used to inform the development of our theory of change, this has not been collected on a consistent basis.

The most robust evidence is that undertaken by a PhD student at Cambridge University on the Prison Council model, using the MQPL survey. The initial findings of that study indicate that: "The key theme emerging for prisoners, staff, and User Voice employees was that 'the council is good for everyone'."[4] Four main areas were identified:

- Prisoner identities – "for many prisoners, the council and participation in it assisted them in conceptualising a positive and productive identity with future-oriented aspirations."
- Community – "by establishing a Council that allowed prisoners to be recognized through constructive dialogue, efforts centred on community betterment allowed a sense of collective responsibility to be developed. This created an environment of inclusion and purpose, and impacted on the wider prison culture."
- Staff prisoner relationships – "were reformulated on increased levels of recognition and trust, and many developed long-term faith that these relations would continue to get better, aided by the collaborative work needed to sustain the Council."
- Wellbeing – "the Council enabled prisoners to feel more secure and certain in an often unstable atmosphere, lessening tensions, anxiety, and increasing overall feelings of wellbeing."

There are two main areas that the current evidence doesn't achieve that this evaluation needs to address:

1. Consistency: Ensuring that broadly similar evidence is collected across User Voice projects to substantiate or moderate broader claims about impact; and to identify any relevant differences between Councils that impact on processes and outcomes.
2. Participant Journey: Collecting data in a more systematic way that allows us to measure impact on individual participants over time and importantly through the gate; to identify any particular contextual influences, processes

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[2] www.uservoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/User-Voice-The-Power-Inside.pdf
[3] Bethany E. Schmidt, User Voice and the Prison Council Model, Prison Service Journal, September 2013 No. 209, available at www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/psj/prison-service-journal-209
[4] As above

or mechanisms that effect impact. This should be done in such a way that individual contexts, processes and outcomes allow for aggregation so as to contribute to assessing overall service effectiveness.

Methodology

User Voice is keen for interested organisations to suggest an approach or approaches that would be most suited to this evaluation.

Having said that, we would be interested in responses to consider the following elements, although we do not wish to be prescriptive:
- Both quantitative and qualitative elements
- Interviews with key stakeholders and participants at suitable points during the project
- Collection and analysis of existing key performance data, such as (mis)conduct reports and levels of engagement and compliance
- Cost benefit analysis, especially in a period in which finances are at the forefront of most commissioners' decision-making, in order to understand the cost benefit of having a Council in place and through the gate
- Control or comparison group, where possible and if appropriate, User Voice would be keen for responses to consider how a control or comparison site/group may be deployed in this evaluation

In terms of the scope of the evaluation it is assumed that evaluators would collect data from all through the gate Council sites in both custody and the community. The following table provides an estimate of the number of Councils, their location and the number of participants, from which estimates of cohort size for evaluation purposes can be made.

Location	Number of Councils	Estimated total Prison Council participants	Estimated total Community Council participants	Estimated through the gate participants
North East	4 (2 prison and 2 community)	70	50	15
Midlands	3 (2 prison and 1 community)	70	25	15
London	3 (2 prison and 1 community)	70	25	15

Establishing Councils in prison and the community follow the same outline timeframes as below:
- Months 1 – 3: Council set up phase, including recruitment, training and democratic process
- Months 4 – 12: Council meetings on a regular basis (every 4 to 6 weeks)
- Months 5 – 12: Prison Council members supported through the gate in order to become Council members in the community

Ethics and values

The participants of User Voice's projects are almost always defined as vulnerable adults. We have significant safeguards in place to ensure that in any involvement with us, participants are protected and should always be in a better place from when we first meet them. Any evaluation would clearly need to show how it would respect this approach, including how the sample group would be protected and how any issues raised with regards to safeguarding or illegal activity would be referred.

User Voice is a charity led by its values (see Appendix A). We appreciate that potential evaluators will not necessarily share exactly the same values or be able to evidence this in their work. However, they will need to respect and demonstrate how they would work within similar parameters and towards similar goals.

Outputs and timeframe

These outputs would need to be delivered to the following outline timeframe, although there is flexibility if evaluators have required, which should be detailed in the response.

Date	Activity
May 2014	Commence evaluation (project initiation meeting)
December 2014	Draft interim evaluation report submitted
January 2015	Finalise interim evaluation report
September 2015	Draft final evaluation report submitted
October 2015	Final evaluation report submitted

Budget and resources available

A total budget of approximately £70,000 is available, inclusive of VAT. This is the upper limit and we would welcome bids that find ways of minimising costs whilst maintaining maximum rigour.

The selection of the successful bidder will reflect (1) the methodological quality of the proposed evaluation; (2) bidders' understanding of prisoner resettlement, of desistance and reintegration processes, of the project's model of change and of User Voice more generally; (3) the track records of bidders; (4) value for money.

To ensure that the necessary resources are available to the organisation or individual undertaking this piece of work, User Voice would also provide access to stakeholders, project documents, research and evidence, as well as members of staff. It would be expected that whoever is commissioned to undertake this evaluation will sign a full confidentiality agreement.

TENDER PROCESS

Interested parties are requested to respond to this tender outlining their response to the following areas:

- Proposed methodology and reasoning for the approach
- How the data will be reported, including novel ways in keeping with User Voice's innovative and inclusive approach
- Project plan including a proposed delivery timetable and controls to ensure this will be met
- Brief information about the organisation, including experience and track record in undertaking this type of evaluation and understanding of the criminal justice context
- At least two case studies and examples of previous similar pieces of work, including referees
- Values of the organisation and how these align to User Voice's
- Key ethical considerations for the evaluation and how these would be addressed
- Itemised budget

Responses should be no longer than 5,000 words (Arial 12pt) including appendices and should be sent to daniel@uservoice.org with the subject 'Evaluation ITT response' by 12:00 pm on 3 March 2014. Documents received after this deadline will not be accepted. You will be notified of receipt.

The tender process will be as follows:

Date	Activity
4 February 2014	Invitation to tender published
3 March 2014	Deadline for responses
14 March 2014	Shortlisted organisations notified
Late March (potentially 20 or 21 March) 2014	Presentations from shortlisted organisations
2 April 2014	Successful organisation notified
23 April 2014	Contract signed
2 May 2014	Project initiation meeting

For any further information or questions please contact daniel@uservoice.org.

Appendix A – User Voice's Values

Ordering chaos:
- We embrace chaos but strive to be ordered
- If it doesn't work, we work with people to change it
- We challenge ignorance, misconceptions and prejudice

Optimistic:
- Individuals can change
- The system can change
- And we can help people to change it

Resilient:
- We know we won't succeed every time, but we always give our all
- We learn from our failures
- We bounce back and keep on going
- We support each other in the face of adversity

Authentic:
- We bring our experiences to the table
- We are the evidence base
- We provide a safe space for debate and change

Democratic:
- We provide opportunities for everyone at the sharp end
- We are accountable to these people
- We are honest, challenging and critical both of ourselves and others