



# Diocese of Worcester Criminal Justice Affairs Group

## Annual Report 2019 - 2020



## Foreword by the Bishop of Worcester

*'The Criminal Justice Affairs Group has had another busy and productive year and our shared passion for justice for all remains a driving force.'*

I begin with words from the Conclusion of this report first because I can think of no better way to sum up the effectiveness and the ethos of the group, and secondly because I wish to endorse wholeheartedly the excellent ways in which they engage in a really complex and multifaceted aspect of modern life.

All the members, individually and as a group, are passionate to work for justice and also for change: change in the unjust structures of society, change in the behaviour of those who turn to crime, change in attitudes in society and in the church. That is a huge agenda, and it would be easy to feel overwhelmed, but through events such as the annual service in the Cathedral, through involvement with other agencies, through opportunities for learning and in so many other ways covered by this report, the CJAG is making a real difference.

I owe a huge debt of thanks to the members of this group, as indeed do we all in the Diocese of Worcester. The agenda is huge, there are clear plans of the future, there is more to be done. As you read this impressive report, you might like to consider how you might become involved in working for change for good. I commend this report to you.



## Criminal Justice Affairs Group members

**Doug Chaplin** *Diocesan Mission Development Officer (until May 2019)* **Diana Fulbrook** *Former Probation Chief Executive and Parole Board member, and previous chair of Adult and Children's Safeguarding Boards* **Toby Hooper** *Retired Circuit Judge* **Juliet Horne** *Law academic and Witness Service volunteer* **Catherine Kevis** *CEO of YSS Charity (since July 2019)* **Mark Lister** *Solicitor* **Charmian Manship** *(Chair) Volunteer in HMP Hewell Chaplaincy* **Derek Markie** *Worcestershire Voices* **Hugh McMichael** *HMP Long Lartin Chaplaincy Volunteer (since February 2020)* **Lorraine Preece** *CEO of YSS Charity (until June 2019)* **Keith Stokes Smith** *Magistrate* **Stephanie Watson** *HMP Hewell Chaplain* **Paul West** *Bishop's Advisor on CJ Affairs, former Chief Constable, West Mercia Police*

## Introduction

The Worcester Diocesan Criminal Justice Affairs Group (CJAG) was formed in March 2015 for the purpose of offering a Christian perspective and advising the Diocese of Worcester on criminal justice matters. From the outset the group sought to be proactive in its approach to its two main aims:

- internally within the Diocese to offer a Christian perspective and provide expert advice on criminal justice matters, and
- externally to raise public awareness and be catalysts of criminal justice-related social action

CJAG has been in existence for five years now and this report outlines the activity and achievements over the past year. There has been some movement in membership which continues to reflect all aspects of the criminal justice system from key agencies, the voluntary sector, and those with expertise in CJ issues. CJAG has done much to raise the profile of criminal justice over the past year and has focused on specific issues with more collaborative working with other existing organisations/groups. CJAG presents this annual review that covers not only the Group's activities in its fifth year of operation but also contains its reflections on the way ahead including particular areas of concern for our Diocese and society to consider.

As the year ends, the country is in lockdown from the coronavirus pandemic which has closed down places of worship and sealed institutions off from outside visitors. The impact on prisons and on the criminal justice processes is significant with major worries about protecting staff, prisoners and people who have committed offences living in the community who are most vulnerable to the virus. The future is uncertain and there is a very real fear about the effect on vulnerable people such as the homeless, survivors of domestic abuse, those living in poverty and prisoners. CJAG will therefore, to some extent, have to be flexible about its future focus next year as it keeps oversight of the whole criminal justice system.

## Part 1: Key Events and Activities

### Linkages with other bodies

CJAG has continued to develop links with other bodies and to that end is connected with the following, either through membership or shared activities:

- Diocesan Commission for Social Responsibility
- West Mercia Criminal Justice Board
- HMP Hewell
- HMP Long Lartin
- University of Worcester
- Worcester Cathedral
- Worcestershire Interfaith Forum
- Holland House Retreat and Conference Centre
- YSS Charity
- Police and Crime Commissioner

### Events/Activities

Having concentrated on IPP prisoners (Imprisonment for Public Protection) in 2018/19, CJAG decided to focus on rehabilitation of people who have committed offences living in the community last year, particularly exploring the role of the Church in effectively supporting them. The Group ran a workshop to generate ideas to be discussed in more depth at a conference in early 2020. As it transpired the conference did not proceed as the group is still working on the best way to take forward the ideas generated at the workshop. The events that did take place were as follows:

### Prisons Sunday

CJAG again contributed to the morning service at the Cathedral on 13 October by shaping and leading the readings, hymns and prayers which were written by some prisoners in HMP Hewell. The preacher was Rev Ben Whitaker, chaplain of **HMP Grendon** and **HMP Spring Hill**. Grendon is one of only two prisons in the country dedicated specifically to providing a therapeutic community for prisoners. This annual event provides an opportunity to highlight work in prisons and its impact on prisoners, and to raise awareness amongst the Christian worshipping community. As always, CJAG is grateful to the Cathedral and Dean for the hospitality extended to us which is much appreciated.

### Workshop

The Group ran a workshop in November to consider how the Church can assist in the rehabilitation & integration into their local community of people who have committed offences. This was intended as preparation for a wider conference to explore this issue in early 2020. In addition to CJAG members, attendees included the diocesan safeguarding team, individual churches, police, probation and voluntary sector. It discussed two key questions:

- How can Churches welcome people who have committed offences and support their rehabilitation?
- What are the challenges facing the Church in welcoming high, medium and low risk people who have committed offences (including those subject to a contract, those not, those released from prison and those on a community sentence)?

The workshop explored ways in which professionals could use church communities to re-integrate people who have committed offences and for churches to safely provide a supportive & nourishing environment for people who had committed offences. There was a good deal of synchronicity between discussion groups and the following emerged as recurring themes:

- The need to get the right *balance*
- Good *communication* and *information sharing*
- *Accommodation* is the number one problem area which makes church linkage complicated
- *Mental health* is the second most pressing area in terms of rehabilitation
- *Risk v trust* is a tricky balancing act (rejection is a common theme for people who have committed offences)
- Having the *victim/survivor* voice is essential

Archdeacon Robert Jones' contribution reflected on the need to be "Wise as serpents and gentle as doves" (ie tough minded and tender-hearted). There was a great deal of enthusiasm and support from the professionals to work on a model to safely involve churches in the rehabilitation process. Following the workshop, the Group looked at other models. A small number visited the Caring for Ex-Offenders project (CFEO) at Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London. Its purpose is to connect someone coming out of prison with a local church community to better assist that person's resettlement into society. Whilst impressive, it was well resourced by the Church and was designed for an urban setting, neither of which suited our diocese. What became clear during further deliberations was that full engagement would be required at local parish level for any model to work & this is currently not evident. Plans were developed to pilot a scheme in partnership with probation in two deaneries but this has been put on hold with the pandemic.



## Part 2: The Way Ahead – Reflections and Prospective Thinking

### Reflections

During the year, CJAG has maintained an ongoing system of tracking key changes and developments in the criminal justice system including the follow-through from its cumulative points of action drawn from successive workshops/conferences. It remains essential to see the criminal justice system as a whole and to understand the impact of any changes in one part across the entire system. There have undoubtedly been some significant developments linked to decreasing resources and changes of policy as crime continues to be a major political issue. CJAG has identified a number of issues and challenges for consideration including:



### Societal/Systemic Concerns

- The gaps in public services provision highlighted by the coronavirus response
- The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the poor and disadvantaged
- The impact of resource cuts on all agencies and increasing regionalisation of services
- The increasing politicisation of criminal justice matters leading to continuous change and lack of stability
- Criminal justice agencies nationally are not joined-up either between government departments or strategically which makes it difficult to work together effectively on the ground
- The impact of court closures and the move away from local justice
- Prison numbers, overcrowding, increase in prison violence and use of drugs, insufficient prison staff and the lack of availability of programmes/support for prisoners prior to release
- Rehabilitation in the community particularly the impact of yet further changes to the probation service following the decision to absorb CRC work back into the NPS
- Lack of resources and inconsistencies to support rehabilitation and protect victims eg survivors of domestic abuse, mental health support and lack of accommodation
- Changes in Legal Aid arrangements – the impact this had on equality of access to the courts, and the closure of solicitors' firms
- The very significant increase in historical offences reported for investigation particularly relating to sexual offences
- Issues of staff morale in criminal justice agencies where resource reductions and staff shortages continue to affect the delivery of front line services

### Role of the Church/Diocese

- Understanding the impact of the societal/systemic concerns on local communities, people who have committed offences, victims/survivors and agency staff
- Recognising the strong link between offending and poverty/social problems
- Encouraging distinctive Church thinking in parishes, and increasing public awareness of the issues
- Working together in the Faith Community, harnessing congregational resources to contribute and influence at Parish, Deanery and Diocesan levels
- The Diocese to provide appropriate support and links to CJAG following the central changes

### Criminal Justice Affairs Group

- Continue to focus on a small number of issues whilst keeping track of new developments and the overall picture
- Use the group's GDPR compliant contact database to keep as wide a range of people informed as possible, and use the diocesan website to communicate
- Provide some focused direction/activity on key issues
- Identify funding/resource support when required
- Bring interested parties together to discuss a specific issue and to identify potential improvement actions

## Part 2: The Way Ahead – Reflections and Prospective Thinking...cont.

### What next?

#### Continuing points of interest to CJAG include:

- Imprisonment for Public Protection prisoners (IPPs)
- How Churches can welcome people who have committed offences and support their rehabilitation
- Community Chaplaincy / mentoring schemes
- Equality of access in the criminal justice system to those from black and minority ethnic communities
- The future of Transforming Rehabilitation (Probation) and the impact on people who have committed offences
- Sentencing Council/policy
- Mental health provision
- Support for victims/survivors
- Foreign national prisoners (about 10% of the prison population)
- Police and the community – engagement and consent
- Historical sexual offences
- Youth Justice

#### Key focus points for the coming year

In order to best manage the Group's work over the next year, CJAG will continue to focus on just a few issues whilst also keeping in mind the bigger picture.

In the coming year, the main area of interest will be on exploring the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the criminal justice system and considering how we can be most effective in advising the Diocese and raising public awareness.

Indications include, for example:

- that there will be an enormous backlog in court cases
- more prisoners may be released early
- there will be more pressure on community services
- prisoners are being locked down & activities and visits restricted
- staff on the front line are vulnerable to catching the virus and are under stress
- the virus is affecting people disproportionately eg those from a Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) background, elderly prisoners and those living in poverty
- there is a rise in domestic abuse

In view of the current crisis, it may be that the activities of CJAG will be limited in the forthcoming year. Nevertheless our role will be to monitor what

arises over time, link together the various impacts on the system, and look for ways to increase awareness and to influence thinking/policy if relevant.

The Group would like to explore the learning from the pandemic in respect of communication, use of technology and new ways of working that have emerged in both the CJS and Churches.

In addition the Group will progress the pilot in churches to support the rehabilitation of people who have committed offences in the community as and when this is pursued in collaboration with the probation service.

The group will also keep a watching brief on:

- The developments in the re-shaping of the Probation Service
- The link between crime and poverty
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) issues, particularly the implementing of the Lammy Review recommendations
- Community Chaplaincy/ mentoring developments
- Interfaith linkages through Holland House's programme of interfaith events

Activities and achievements for 2020/21 will be reported at the end of the year

### Conclusion

The CJAG has had another busy and productive year and our shared passion for justice for all remains a driving force.

The focus during the year on the role of churches in rehabilitation has highlighted the importance of encouraging the engagement of local parishes/clergy and supporting professionals and partners to increase understanding about the impact on those in the criminal justice system.

We are beholden to support those working with people who have committed offences as well as with victims/survivors and with perpetrators, and we remain committed to finding ways to do this effectively. Not least, people of faith have a responsibility to encourage local communities to support those vulnerable to offending, those wanting to change their lives for the better, and to take responsibility for creating an inclusive approach to communal living.

CJAG welcomes ideas to promote this approach, and values engagement with those wanting to support these aims. We thank all those who have worked with us to pursue them.