

# **Connecting for Change Strategy Evaluation**

**2019-2022**

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# Executive Summary

The evaluation purpose was to review the extent to which the CJA contributed to a fair and effective criminal justice system through its 'Connecting for Change' strategy during 2019-2022. Findings draw on interviews with 14 stakeholders including nine member organisations of different sizes, two staff, a trustee, a policy maker and a funder, and a survey completed by 86 member organisations.

## The Strategy

The 'Connecting for Change' strategy focussed on how the CJA could work with its members and influence policy makers and the public across four areas including increasing the engagement of its members; building the capacity of small organisations and people with lived experience; influencing policy makers and the public; and adopting a systemic approach to influencing change.

## Key findings

- **Member engagement:** the CJA built an active model with notable communication strengths. Member influencing grew, with consistently good evidence of the CJA co-producing influencing resources with members. There was a notable bias towards national over regional networking and the CJA focussed on improved member engagement rather than growth.
- **Capacity building:** Good progress was made in lived experience influencing through initiatives including establishing the CJA's Lived Experience Experts Group; publishing the 'Change From Within' report; the CJA's role in the HMPPS Service User Advisory Group (now called the Lived Experience Engagement Forum); its co-design of the leadership programme; and the Longford Trust internship programme. The voices of over 30 small organisations were amplified.
- **Influencing:** The CJA performed robustly with strong evidence of its approach to three separate influencing bodies and the public, including through its constructive journalism approach. However, its regional influencing work centred around Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections was delayed by the pandemic.
- **Systematic change:** As the CJA's most ambitious work area, progress has been necessarily slower and incremental. The CJA has started building good practice and areas of expertise across its three cross-cutting themes, with evidence of learning being actively shared and starting to be taken on board by various stakeholders on workforce diversity, a restorative criminal justice system and effective scrutiny and accountability.
- **Ways of working:** The CJA has a high performing staff team. However, two challenges that need addressing are the recognition that the organisation may be spreading itself too thinly, and the need to develop a more comprehensive approach to impact measurement.
- **Covid-19 response:** Despite limited resources, the CJA successfully pivoted its programme to include urgent response work. Over four in five survey respondents said it was valuable.

## Conclusions

*In the full report, I outline a more detailed set of conclusions. Most importantly:* The CJA is commended for punching well above its weight despite the challenges of the pandemic and limited staff resources. The organisation made considerable progress in three of its four core areas (member engagement, capacity building, influencing), alongside emerging progress in one further area (systemic change). Regarding the latter, an incremental approach to achieving systemic change is to be expected as the most ambitious and interconnected area of the strategy.

## Recommendations

*Recommendations are outlined under the four key forward themes recommended in this review.*

### **Towards greater member connectivity**

- Empower members to help initiate and lead pieces of influencing work as part of 'next stage' co-production. Evaluate the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill approach for relevant learning.
- Develop membership recruitment strategy to extend reach in underrepresented areas
- Streamline asks according to member areas of interest. Use regular surveys to check pulse and tweak approach as necessary.
- Identify champions to cascade member learning on key processes and policy areas.
- Develop a co-production accountability framework to build awareness of the opportunities for and evidence of member co-production as a reference tool for the CJA staff and members.

### **Next stage capacity building**

- Develop an incremental approach to move lived experience leadership model to next level through implementing and evaluating the ELEVATE CJS pilot programme.
- Research and develop new ways to actively engage small organisations in:
  - influencing policy, practice and opinion
  - using real-time evaluation tools to measure impact
- Identify internal and external champions to promote recommendations on systemic change.

### **Addressing a new political landscape**

- Undertake dual track influencing strategy planning to prepare for either continuing populist or emerging progressive government scenarios ahead (of whichever political party).
- Undertake regular horizon scanning to determine new relevant external impacts and tweak influencing plan in response.
- Invest in building relationships with a broader range of non-government political actors and think tanks.
- Engage a more active approach to member influencing at a national level.
- Pilot a regional influencing approach in one or two PCC areas and disseminate the learning outputs widely through the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC).
- Develop a more active media spokesperson role – including through linking to real-time news stories - as route to increased profile and reach.
- Reframe the CJA Awards as an opportunity within broader media influencing strategy.

### **Future proofing strategy approaches**

- Expand organisational and public understanding of systemic change approach through developing new narrative tools.
- Develop broad and unusual collaborations to expand systemic change approaches.
- Ensure a broad approach to impact measurement is built into next-stage plan including:
  - An incremental approach to measuring influencing impact including the introduction of a barometer of influence tool.
  - Researching and piloting at least one real-time evaluation tool.
  - A systematic approach to data collection relating to small member activity and current areas of underrepresentation.
- Introduce a broader strategic accountability framework - with senior staff directly accountable for specific strategy areas - as part of next strategy.
- Embed a rapid input framework to facilitate all parts of the CJA to have a say in fast-moving and reactive moments.
- Diversify fundraising to include a broad range of trusts and foundations, with possible expansion to include philanthropists, corporate partnerships and individuals.
- Expand the capacity of the staff team to deliver accordingly across all strategy areas.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose

The Criminal Justice Alliance (CJA) has commissioned its first independent evaluation to assess the progress made towards its three-year 'Connecting for Change' strategy. Through the evaluation, the CJA wanted to test the assumptions, change processes and outcomes relating to its core work areas by consulting with its staff, trustees, members and key external stakeholders. Key evaluation learning to inform the CJA's strategic planning for the next three years has already started.

## 1.2. Overview

The 'Connecting for Change' strategy was an ambitious plan to harness and share member expertise as a way to tackle systemic change across the criminal justice system (CJS). A four-fold consultative approach was taken to the strategy development which included one-to-one conversations with sector experts; regional roadshow workshops; a survey to actively engage member views and a series of strategic meetings with the CJA Board. The four 'Connecting for Change' strategy goals were to increase member engagement; build the capacity of smaller members and people with lived experience of the CJS; influence policy makers at a regional and national level; and adopt a systemic approach to influencing change using three broad, cross-cutting themes across the criminal justice pathway.

## 1.3. Methodology

The CJA took a 'real-time' learning approach to evaluating the strategy through working with an external evaluator over a twelve-month period. Three summary reports were produced at regular intervals over the nine-month research phase and regular reflective sessions were held with the CJA Director and Chair of Board. The summary reports actively informed the final six months of the campaign.

**Table 1** below outlines the detail of the research approach.

*Table 1 Detailed research approach*

<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Breakdown of stakeholders</b>	<b>Total stakeholders</b>
Mid-term evaluation <i>Interviews phase 1</i>	Nov 2020	6 x members (3 large; 3 small) 1 x trustee 2 x staff members	9
Member survey analysis	March 2021	86 x members	86
Stage 2 impact review <i>Interviews phase 2</i>	July 2021	3 x members (2 large; 1 medium) 1 x policy maker 1 x funder	5
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

Nine in-depth interviews were undertaken with internal and external stakeholders in the initial research phase. Key insights were then used to shape questions for the member survey, which was completed by a total of 86 CJA members of differing sizes from across the UK. Finally a further five

in-depth interviews with a different set of internal and external stakeholders were undertaken to see if anything had notably changed since the first interview phase.

## 1.4. Overview of progress

An analysis of progress towards the CJA's four core 'Connecting for Change' objectives was undertaken, including reviewing each of the strategy's 14 sub-objectives. This process confirmed that the CJA has made considerable progress in three of its core areas (member engagement, capacity building and influencing) and emerging progress in one area (systemic change).

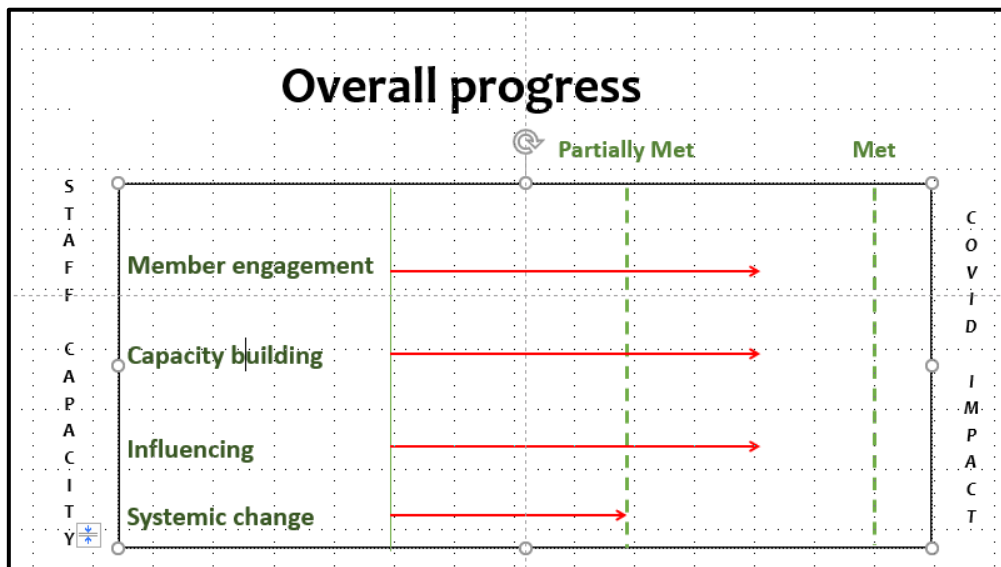


Figure 1 Overall progress towards strategic objectives

These results are particularly impressive when viewed in a wider context. Phase two of the strategy was rolled out as the Covid-19 pandemic hit the UK (Spring 2020) leading to an unprecedented period of political and social turmoil (see page 13 on Covid-19 response for details of how the CJA adapted). In addition, the CJA had limited staff resources throughout the period. In 2019 two staff were in place (namely the Director and Policy Officer) rising to three staff (including a Communications and Engagement Officer) supported by individual paid interns for short-term periods at regular intervals from Spring 2020. The CJA has had additional strategic capacity since May 2021 as a result of recruiting a Deputy Director.

## 2. Key work areas

### 2.1. Member engagement

The CJA built an active engagement model over the strategy period with notable strengths in its communications work. Member influencing grew alongside good evidence of the CJA co-producing policy positions and influencing resources with members. However, there was a notable bias towards national networking opportunities and the organisation lacked an intentional growth strategy.

#### Expanded engagement and networking opportunities

Helping members to feel part of a bigger change network and to understand the broader justice system are two clear strengths of the CJA's approach to member engagement. Underpinning this, the majority of evaluation survey respondents said the CJA delivered relevant information through their regular members bulletin and policy bulletins which were identified as important 'entry level' engagement tools for members with limited capacity to actively engage. Importantly, diverse members indicated their approval with a small member acknowledging that *'the CJA helps elevate our struggles'*, and a large member confirming that the CJA is *'good at playing information back and providing a quick response to members on issues'*.

The CJA has developed a range of well-received engagement fora including members meetings, expert groups, policy forums and round tables. A significant majority - over 70% of survey respondents - highlighted members meetings as useful, with a small member identifying the rich networking opportunities offered by in-person members meetings (before Covid-19 necessitated social distancing) saying:

*'I met the probation service ombudsman at one of them and am now actively linked to the Prison Reform Trust and the local University. Neither of these links would've happened otherwise.'*

**Small member noting the rich networking opportunities offered by member meetings**

Overall, events were considered to include a good mix and balance of speakers and pivoting to online engagement was welcomed by several interviewees as a route to democratising attendance, in that it enabled non-London members to attend as previous in-person meetings were always held in London. The structured thematic discussions around race and racism were identified as *'very strong'*. Within this programme, the well-attended June 2020 workforce diversity event was a stand-out event with both the Justice Minister, Robert Buckland and the Shadow Minister, David Lammy in attendance. A small member described it as *'impressive'*, and another attendee described it as *'powerful and inspiring'* as part of the event feedback.

The CJA's current engagement approach is well supported. A large member enthused that the organisation has now *'found it's voice and mojo – it should keep on going'*, and a medium member said *'the CJA should keep bringing people together to discuss whether existing designs are fit for purpose and where necessary, how to change things.'* A number of tweaks to the current approach are suggested rather than any substantive changes. Three areas where the CJA could fine tune its approach include formalising a member recruitment strategy, honing in on specific member



interests and introducing a stronger learning focus. The current 'informal' recruitment approach was seen by some as limited in terms of geographical diversity and optics. In addition, the CJA currently operates a horizontal approach to engaging members in activity, with most opportunities advertised in the member bulletin rather than offered to those with expertise in a specific area. A greater understanding of individual member interests could be gleaned through a regular survey. Members have requested specific support in helping them learn and reflect on their work. Of note, a funder directly questioned current connectivity across members. Horizontal networking could facilitate stronger 'member-to-member connectivity', with a corresponding opportunity to engage in active learning experiences including shadowing and sharing best practice. The same funder requested access to member forums to be able to proactively share learning.

In addition, no stakeholders self-identified as actively engaged in the strategy development, although two members acknowledged being part of informal conversations. Proactively engaging members of different sizes through formalised routes is encouraged at an early stage in the next planning process.

### **Strong communications approach**

The CJA's active approach to digital development was identified as a key strength of its current communications work alongside the annual CJA Awards. Expanding organisational narrative work and building proactive media work were identified as key opportunities ahead.

### **Effective routes into digital development**

Digital development is an effective route to expanding the CJA's reach and increasing engagement with members and other stakeholders. A notable increase in the quality of the CJA's 2020 Twitter engagement to a current peak of 2.2 per cent is well above the sector average engagement rate. The new website clearly signposts its work in reframing the media narrative.

An external interviewee spotlighted the CJA's social media strategy around the prison discharge grant as *'impactful'*. In addition, two small members said the 'Meet the Members' blogpost series - where members' work is highlighted through individual interviews - was a welcome initiative. Importantly, one of the members described the series as *'bringing the human touch to the criminal justice space'*. Forward suggestions to diversify voices and tools came from several members. Two small members said the CJA should focus the blogpost series on race equality organisations, as part of introducing *'more diverse voices and perspectives'*, and several other members suggested the CJA should prioritise visual communications, with one saying, *'we should involve younger people's voices on issues like stop and search and get members to produce videos focussing on community perspectives'*.

There is evidence that CJA members are embracing a greater emphasis on visual communications, with EQUAL producing a video explainer as part of its contribution to the communications strategy for the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (PCSC Bill). This is a positive sign, but it should be noted that this more layered communications approach – especially when working with those with lived experience and young people – is necessarily more time consuming and therefore requires more staff resources. For more on the CJA's work on the PCSC Bill see page 15.

## Member influencing

Member influencing noticeably grew but there was a bias towards national networking opportunities and a sense that members don't yet recognise the various ways the CJA engages them in co-producing influencing resources.

### Emerging evidence of co-production

Small members were appreciative of the opportunity to be actively involved in producing best practice resources to influence two targets; the College of Policing and the Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB). Of note, these were the only two examples of member influencing directly recalled as part of the evaluation interviews process, but the CJA provided a profusion of other examples of co-produced work with expert groups ranging from an April 2019 roadmap on restorative justice to a January 2021 consultation response on prisoners education.

A large member suggested, *'I can't remember ever having been asked to engage in active policy development responding to White Paper draft policies.'* It should be noted that in response to the government's White Paper on sentencing, the CJA took a consciously different approach in order to respond quickly whilst simultaneously needing to conduct pandemic response work. A total of 16 organisations were selected for the CJA to support in developing their own responses to key strategic sentencing themes. The CJA then pulled the contributions together into an official response.

An underlying theme of the research was a desire for more qualitative member engagement. A large member suggested that members need to *'contribute as well as to learn'* as *'collective conversations lead to more authentic advocacy'*. The suggestion here was that members assume the next step of leading areas of work, rather than solely participating in them. This would necessarily require members to have the policy and/or communications skills and capacity to do so – something that would more naturally fit with the CJA's larger members. A rapid input framework was suggested as a tool to facilitate the Board, staff and members to have a say in fast-moving reactive moments.

### Bias towards national networking opportunities over regional ones

Increased access to strategic decision makers including relevant Ministers, civil servants and MPs was valued by members of all sizes. In this regard, over four in five survey respondents agreed that the CJA was effective in engaging members in networking with policy makers.

Nearly 80 per cent of members identified Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) as a priority regional influencing target as they hold victims budgets and are an important voice in restorative justice and race disparity debates. In recognition of this, the CJA initiated a strategic approach to influencing prospective PCC targets in the run up to the expected May 2020 elections. This included launching its 'Public Safety, Public Trust' briefing at party conferences and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners' national conference. As a result of the pandemic impact, this work was delayed for a year due to the postponement of the elections until May 2021. At this point, the CJA notably refreshed the report through additional case studies and re-launched it at an online event before the election.

Two members of different sizes suggested *'a potential regional role for local service delivery organisations in directly lobbying their PCCs, which would make the CJA lobbying more distinctive.'* However, three specific challenges were highlighted in terms of resourcing regional influencing including the number and turn-over of targets, alongside their highly localised agendas. Multiple

local targets were identified as potentially more challenging than focussing on a single government department. In addition to the relatively frequent turnover in target appointments, the specific challenge of each PCC controlling its own local agenda was noted. A large member noted in relation to PCC influencing *'it's a postcode lottery in terms of where the focus is'*. Despite these challenges, the CJA sees PCCs as an important target given that increasing powers - including probation, policing and prevention - are held regionally, and feels this increased decentralisation could have the potential to create innovation. A proactive regional influencing role would clearly need additional resourcing. One suggestion is for the CJA to pilot an approach in one or two target PCC areas and then produce learning outputs which could be shared more widely.

The sector infrastructural body, Clinks, is now providing additional regional influencing support. Clinks has secured a sizeable 'stronger voice' grant to expand its regional influencing programme to cover all PCC areas (which is currently limited to the North-East and North-West regions, alongside London and Wales).

Notably, the last evaluation research phase saw some interviewees focus on the specific positive results of societal distancing in causing it to become easier to bring people from across the country together online, resulting in overall communication being *'less London-centric'*.

## 2.2. Capacity building

Good progress was made in building the capacity of people with lived experience to influence policy and practice, including as part of the HMPPS Service User Advisory Group (now called the Lived Experience Engagement Forum). Limited evidence was identified during the evaluation interviews of how the CJA helped small organisations with their influencing efforts, but the CJA subsequently provided supplementary evidence of their broad and active engagement.

### Proactively building a lived experience approach

Importantly, the CJA's approach to working on lived experience was well received by members. A large member welcomed its approach as *'distinctive and new to the CJA'*, whilst a medium member applauded the CJA for showing *'real respect for lived experience voices.'* In addition, a total of 80 per cent of survey respondents said a lived experience leadership programme would be a *'very useful'* next step.

Significantly, the 2019 'Change from Within' flagship report identified people with lived experience as leaders and employees in the criminal justice workforce. The report took an exploratory approach and was co-produced by a volunteer on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) from prison working alongside the CJA Lived Experience Expert Group. It was launched at a well-attended Members Meeting with a panel of lived experience experts. A large member praised the report as outlined below:

*'Insightful, thorough and well rounded – importantly, it wasn't partisan.'*

Large member description of the 2019 'Change from Within' report

'Change from Within' extolled the benefits of employing people with lived experience but identified current structural and cultural barriers impeding progress. It identified the need for more to be done in terms of increasing paid work and leadership opportunities. The report recommendations were presented to the HMPPS Service Users Advisory Group and at a subsequent July 2020 HMPPS Insights event. A large member suggested a more tenacious approach is needed to embed key learning saying, *'the CJA could be necessarily more assertive in presenting the recommendations at key HMPPS leadership fora.'* The CJA is now encouraged to identify specific HMPPS champions to take the report findings forward.

A positive spin-off of the report was the CJA forming a partnership with the Longford Trust (LT), which provided a route for the organisation to model good employment practice and has potentially inspired others to follow. Two interviewees highlighted the CJA as a good role model, with one organisation now interested in using LT interns itself as a result of observing the CJA's positive experience. LT equally recognised the partnership in positive terms, observing that paid interns felt more confident about entering the job market as a result. In addition, small members who are part of the Lived Experience Expert Group advocated viewing lived experience through a regional lens and the need to recognise different community experiences.

### **From an operational to a transformational approach**

The CJA now needs to scale up from an operational to a transformational approach. An interviewee summed up the scale of the challenge as *'we need to facilitate prisoners working alongside police and probation on systemic change – and stop working in silos.'* There was also a call for people with lived experience to be recruited into ongoing CJA staff roles. In response, the CJA has co-produced a plan for an ELEVATE CIS leadership programme working with the Lived Experience Expert Group and the LT intern, for which it is now actively seeking funding. If full funding is secured, the CJA would be able to build in roles for people with lived experience within its staff team, alongside running a two-year pilot to include coaching and residential sessions for 20 people with lived experience as an active step towards helping them progress from frontline service delivery roles into senior leadership and influencing roles in the criminal and social justice sectors.

In addition, a greater focus on lived experience storytelling was encouraged, summarised by one member as *'a chance to represent people authentically rather than just offering up a quick social media soundbite'*. An incremental approach to impact measurement should be integrated into the next stage strategy as several members said they weren't sure of the impact of the lived experience work yet.

### **Broad evidence of building small organisation capacity**

Three examples of the CJA helping small organisations with their influencing efforts were highlighted during the evaluation interviews, including two organisations being actively involved in suggesting best practice to College of Policing and the IMB. The CJA provided broad evidence of a range of small member influencing activity, most notably during the first year of the 'Connecting for Change' strategy implementation. In 2019 small members were engaged in three joint policy forums with the Ministry of Justice; a House of Lords round table; the 'Change from Within' report and best practice approaches spotlighted as part of the annual CJA Awards. A small member talked about being *'blown out of the water'* by seeing their organisation identified as a contributor to the 2019 Stop and Scrutinise report.

Going forward, the CJA could consider how best to monitor activity across its membership. One suggestion here is to actively identify members by size in the new member consultation tracker.

## 2.3. Influencing

The CJA performed robustly against its influencing targets. Strong evidence was presented of its approach to three separate influencing bodies and the public, alongside the CJA producing a high quality super-complainant application. Whilst it consistently performed highly in terms of national influencing, the CJA's regional influencing work centred around PCC elections was impacted by the pandemic as outlined on page 5.

### Consistently strong national influencing approach

The CJA met regularly with national policy makers, officials and commissioners, including the Ministry of Justice, relevant parliamentary targets, HMPPS and the Victims Commissioner. As a result, over four in five survey respondents cited it as *'effective'* in terms of its influencing approach and more than 40 per cent of members rated it as *'very effective'*. Members highlighted three particularly impactful, evidence-based reports produced during the strategy period including the *'Change from Within'* and *'Stop and Scrutinise'* reports in 2019, and the *'Roots to Recovery'* report in 2020.

Whilst the CJA has good relationships with current relevant Ministers, it is recommended to broaden its sphere of political influence to prepare for any eventualities ahead. A large member suggested that the Prisons Minister has a commitment to workplace diversity in having *'a massive interest in employing offenders'* and a partner in the CJA-IMB community scrutiny of prison project cited how *'the Ministry of Justice are very interested in our emerging work on ethnicity and gender.'* Moving forward, the CJA is encouraged to invest in a broader range of non-government political relationships alongside think tanks including the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and Reform. Of note, the CJA are now working with CSJ as part of the *'Positive Pathways from Prison'* project on employment and family issues. The latter are suggested as useful channels through which to influence ministerial ideas, with the caveat that similar opposition party policy alignment would be needed to avoid alienation. Notably, a large member suggested that the current administration's influence may already be waning, in that it *'now feels tired, like it's already ending its term.'* A suggested pragmatic response for the CJA in the current climate is to *'find quick wins for Ministers, such as tweaks to Restorative Justice legislation in favour of victims, rather than broader systemic issues.'*

### Broader collaborations and a bolder forward policy stand

The CJA is also encouraged to broaden its approach to collaborative working and take a bolder stand on challenging detrimental policy areas, including racial disparity in the next strategy phase. The CJA was recognised for its conscious collaboration work to date, with a funder citing evidence of the organisational commitment to diversity, saying, *'the CJA have always cited the views of young adults and people of Muslim faith in their contributions to better justice solutions for young adults'*. However, moving forward the CJA is encouraged to actively collaborate at all levels, including developing its global role through the Incarceration Nations Network. At a national level, several stakeholders suggested the CJA convene other issue champions to mitigate against longer prison sentences. This could include engaging less usual suspects such as medical professionals for deeper

credibility. Finally, a small member suggested the CJA work with Stop Watch and networks for Black and Asian lawyers on police accountability to *'pack a stronger punch'*. Of note, the CJA have recently collaborated with Stop Watch and other agencies on lobbying against Section 10 of the PCSC Bill. They produced a November 2021 joint briefing calling for Section 60 on suspicion-less stop and search to be repealed.

The CJA is suggested to take a conscious stance on the issue of racial disparity. It should be noted that a range of views were expressed on this, ranging from some members urging a necessarily bolder stance, to other stakeholders (notably a funder) urging caution. A large member recommended a strategic approach as outlined below:

*'We know that less stop and search and a more nuanced court approach is needed, but how does that play out in practice? Policy makers want to move beyond semantics – looking at the intersection between racial disparity and economic inequality – is that a debate the CJA could be a player in?'*

**Large member considering the forward options for the CJA's work on the issue of racial disparity**

The changing composition of the CJA team and its constructive approach were appreciated with a small member positively spotlighting the emerging diversity of the organisation as outlined below:

*'There has been notably more representation of youth, diversity and lived experience.'*

**Small member noting the changing make-up of the CJA staff team**

However, a separate small member suggested that the CJA are currently viewed in some black and minority ethnic spaces as a *'white washed'* organisation. Although the CJA employed black, asian and ethnic minority staff and interns for most of the 'Connecting for Change' strategy implementation period, and half of its paid interns were black, the organisation recognises it has a lot more to do.

The same small member advocated that *'the organisation needs to take every opportunity to speak truth to power authentically'*, a role that would require active member voice. This member went on to suggest the CJA missed an opportunity to highlight its members' direct experience of the excessive use of stop and search during Black Lives Matters protests and subsequent societal debate. A funder cautioned the need to balance facilitating discussions at pace with keeping the membership on side, advising the CJA to *'be challenging, but run at the pace of the slowest members on issues like Black Lives Matter'*.

In lieu of national influencing challenges, the same funder recommended a forward approach based on smaller cumulative gains saying, *'we need to sustain and build on gains – it's not just about the high-level 'new' gains.'*

## Emerging efforts to reframe the media narrative

The annual CJA Awards event was identified as a stand-out moment in terms of helping reframe the media narrative and celebrate best practice. Importantly, the event was acknowledged for engaging key journalists and a medium member summed up its positive impact as outlined below:

*'Setting the gold standard and showing the sector what can be done.'*

**A medium member describing the impact of the annual CJA Awards event**

Feedback from 2020 winners was unanimously positive, with several mentioning positive spin-offs. One winner identified a *'phenomenal Twitter response'* to their win, whilst two others highlighted specific work that they were able to carry out with their prize money, including a lived experience-led workshop and organisational research.

A clear majority of survey respondents acknowledged the annual CJA Awards event as a positive contribution to the CJA's communications work. The online event (adopted as a result of the pandemic) was applauded as also allowing the CJA to live stream the event on YouTube. The range of award categories has expanded during the Connecting for Change strategy period to include additional awards for outstanding local or regional organisations; digital media; and documentaries. Most poignant are two new 2021 categories focusing on race equity work and work supporting victims in memory of Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones who were tragically killed in the 2019 attack at Fishmongers' Hall in London.

Over two-thirds of survey respondents regard working with journalists on constructive reporting as *'very important'*, including the CJA's role in contributing to national media opinion pieces. The annual CJA Media Awards helped launch the CJA's good criminal justice reporting. The November 2021 *'Behind Closed Doors'* report outlines the case for more constructive media reporting and will be followed up by practical guidance on criminal justice reporting for journalists. Seeking out opportunities to build on the CJA's narrative work through real-time news stories was encouraged by a small member who notably felt the CJA had missed an opportunity to broaden the recent debate on food poverty. The same small member describes how *'the CJA was silent on Marcus Rashford's war on food poverty – we could have correlated hunger and criminality and created waves that way.'*

### **A proactive media role**

With a Deputy Director now in post, the CJA has significantly more strategic capacity and could consider building a sectoral commentary role. Of note, a partner organisation supported a future role for the CJA as *'a one stop media shop across criminal justice pathway'*, acknowledging that Clinks' role is limited to engaging with the voluntary sector press. A large member said, *'it would be great to see the CJA using their weight to maximise media opportunities.'* This drive to see the CJA take a more public role may in part be driven by sectoral frustration at the current political populism which is actively seeking to restrict civic space.

## 2.4. Systemic change

This is the CJA's most ambitious work area and as such, progress has been necessarily slower and incremental. The CJA has started building good practice and areas of expertise across its three cross-cutting themes, but there is less evidence of actively sharing learning; the publication of some specific reports was delayed due to the CJA pivoting to urgent reactive work including pandemic response and coordinating sector lobbying on the PCSC Bill, as outlined on pages 13 and 14. It should be noted that the outstanding work - involving various reports to build good practice and contribute to lasting change - is on track to be completed before the end of the 'Connecting for Change' strategic period.

### Building good practice

The CJA's work across Restorative Justice, scrutiny and equality was identified as 'very effective' by 40 per cent of members who participated in the survey. Considerably fewer members (under a quarter) judged its work on a diverse workforce as effective, although as cited on page 10, some work in this area was delayed due to the CJA pivoting resources to pandemic response work.

Strong evidence of the CJA's policy contributions on Restorative Justice was identified, ranging from a 2019 UK-wide roadmap of learning to a 2021 peers briefing co-produced with a CJA member in relation to work on the PCSC Bill. To build a sense of shared ambition on Restorative Justice, the CJA facilitated a series of well-received stakeholder forums, including the 2020 consultation on improving the Victims Code. In addition, the CJA actively engaged with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice through sharing examples of good practice and contributing to recommendations. A large member suggests that a real moment of progress may now be possible as outlined below:

*'A stable government will allow us to finally make progress on the Victims Bill which was promised six years ago.'*

**Large member citing the potential moment of progress on restorative justice**

An impressive range of reports and consultation responses showcase the CJA as having built good practice on effective scrutiny during the strategy period. The 2019 'Stop and Scrutinise' report highlighted four key principles which have now been taken on board by the College of Policing and were embedded into the most recent scrutiny report targeting the Independent Custody Visitors Association (ICVA) below. The CJA actively contributed to the 2019 Action Plan on Transparency, Accountability and Trust produced by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), and the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities March 2021 report on race and ethnic disparities. Both pieces of work notably built on the CJA's previous 'Stop and Scrutinise' briefing. In addition, the CJA's 2020 Strengthening Independent Scrutiny consultation response urged the Ministry of Justice to look more thoroughly at the scrutiny issue. Finally, a recently released December 2021 'Just Visiting' report calling for more effective monitoring of treatment of minority ethnic groups and women in police custody, was greeted positively by the ICVA who published their own anti-racism action plan as a direct response to the report recommendations. Notably the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) publicly welcomed the report findings.



Identifying attribution was highlighted as a challenge in terms of the CJA's contribution to partnership efforts on workforce diversity including the HMPSS workforce strategy (as outlined in section 2 on capacity building on page 5). Horizon scanning for further opportunities was identified as a step towards strengthening the CJA's role here.

### Contributing to lasting change

Although a broad commitment to contributing to lasting change was outlined, differing views were expressed about the CJA's forward path in the current populist political climate. A funder focussed on pragmatism, whilst two members championed the need for innovation. A mixed role combining a focus on both pragmatic planning and horizon scanning was suggested by a funder, saying the CJA could *'fight the courts backlog and make the system work better'* in the short term, whilst considering the criminal justice response and forecasting the needs of the people most affected once the PCSC Bill lands and policies are operationalised in one to two years' time. In contrast, some members advocated for change at a systemic level. A large member argued that *'social change on a transformational scale needs to come a different way – we can't just rely on pushback'*, whilst a small member suggested that *'the criminal justice system can't build back better unless it arrives in the twenty-first century.'* Further debate as part of the strategic development process will help unpack the organisation's next-stage direction.

## 2.5. Other relevant areas

Ways of working and the CJA's response to the fast-changing external environment were other key areas identified in the research as outlined below.

### Ways of working

An identified CJA strength was its high performing small team. However two challenges that need addressing are the recognition that the organisation may be spreading itself too thinly and the need to develop a more comprehensive approach to impact measurement. Of note, the CJA Director was widely recognised for her personal commitment to the organisation's work and her ability to bring others with her. A small member said, *'the CJA Director cares about the work we do – she offers authentic moral support'* and a large member highlighted, *'the will to work together is strongly there under the Director'*. In addition, a medium member characterised the CJA staff team as *'personal and responsive'* reinforcing a positive approach to actively engaging with members and beyond.

Underlying this is a strong sense that the current Director was a pivotal part of the CJA's success during this strategy phase. Indeed, two interviewees go as far as to suggest that the current strategy is synonymous with the Director, including a funder identifying that *'the strategy is right for the Director's leadership of the CJA'* and the same funder citing the current Director's *'overview, networking and creativity'* as a big part of the CJA's success to date. A broader strategic accountability framework is recommended with other senior staff directly accountable for specific strategic areas. This is something the CJA have already started to do as part of their new strategy. A third of those interviewed gently questioned the longer-term sustainability of the current approach, due to a perceived tension between the CJA's ambition and limited resources. The CJA could consider deprioritising some areas of work as part of achieving a tighter strategic focus on areas where it could offer a clear evidence base, or continue to expand their staffing capacity as they have

already begun to do. A Deputy Director role was recruited in 2021 to focus on fundraising and good governance in order for the organisation to grow. A Senior Policy Officer has also been recruited to add influencing weight and take on proactive relationship building.

Direct attrition was identified in a few specific areas including 2020 work with the College of Policing and on the Victims Code. However, members highlighted the need for the CJA to identify its specific contribution to areas including lived experience leadership and workforce diversity, not least because they want good practice examples to help build their own learning and reflection. A barometer of influence tool may be helpful in tracking influencing impact, recognising that the CJA's role is often in incremental steps, such as adding to the evidence base; getting an issue on the agenda; networking key players together; and sharing good practice.

### Response to changes in external landscape

The CJA demonstrated its strategic adaptability in responding to two unexpected shifts in the external landscape during the strategy period, namely the Covid-19 pandemic and the speedy introduction of the government's PCSC Bill.

#### Covid-19 response

The 2020 pandemic had a catastrophic impact on the criminal justice system. By March, a societal lockdown was imposed and following early concerns that prisons could see a rapid spread of Covid-19, many prisoners were locked in their cells for 23 hours a day, having limited or no visits from family or friends and deprived of legal advice. One medium member highlighted the resulting impact that *'society will need to deal with their (prisoners) collective trauma when they come out.'* A large member described the knock-on impact at community level as outlined below:

*'It's really negative as there's been a huge rise in stop and search by police, in an area where over half the population is black and minority ethnic.'*

**Large member describing the impact of the pandemic at a community level**

Despite its limited resources, the CJA swiftly pivoted its programme to include urgent Covid-19 pandemic response work. Importantly, over four in five survey respondents identified its response as valuable. Two areas of pandemic response work appreciated by members and a staff member respectively, were the CJA's amplification of the campaign on prisoner release run by the Howard League and Prison Reform Trust, and the CJA's ongoing *'watchdog'* role which was viewed as stopping the government taking more punitive action. During April 2020 alone, the CJA participated in two Select Committee inquiries (Women and Equalities and Home Affairs) and submitted two briefings to the Justice Select Committee.

The CJA ran a series of member meetings during June and July 2020 to discuss pandemic challenges and gather evidence of emerging good practice. Two reports were produced in August 2020 as a direct result of member input. The *'Roots to Recovery'* report clearly identified the five key challenges thrown up by the pandemic, namely poor communications with prisons; an increase in the digital divide and mental health challenges; the need for longer-term funding; and member organisations necessarily working outside their normal remit to meet urgent needs. The *'Responding Restoratively to Covid-19'* report drew additionally from an online meeting with 10

organisations delivering restorative services. It included multiple examples of creative response work and called for mutual healing and learning ahead. A senior HMPPS official identified the positive contribution of the CJA during a well-attended online follow-up meeting with members to discuss the report recommendations, saying, *'you are a mirror for us, and you give us a fresh perspective'*. In addition, the CJA was co-opted onto the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Specialist Interest Group to assist with sector pandemic response, as another membership body. This was a further opportunity for the CJA Director to feed in member recommendations from the August 2020 reports.

Considerable forward challenges remain. A large member described how, *'the whole system is gummed up with Covid and it's hard to get traction'*. This includes current Covid-related court backlogs as an impediment to sentencing reform. Prisoner trauma has been exacerbated by the pandemic and a small member pinpointed the need for good mental health support ahead. The CJA also held a 'virtual cuppa' event for victim focussed organisations to feed in the challenges they faced during the pandemic. These were included in the CJA's Responding Restoratively briefing and consultation responses.

### **Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill**

The CJA coordinated a speedy strategic response to the March 2021 government proposal to introduce a PCSC Bill through proactive member engagement to inform policy positions and lobbying. An active response was important as key proposals in the Bill would have a disproportionate impact on black, asian and minority ethnic people in equality assessments, effectively deepening existing racial inequalities. Through its Race Disparity Expert Group, the CJA coordinated a broad 'alliance of alliances' response, which saw over 75 diverse organisations co-sign an open letter to the Prime Minister. This achieved coverage in three news outlets including The Voice newspaper (significant as it has a more diverse readership). During the passage of the PCSC Bill through parliament, the CJA has coordinated regular policy and communications staff meetings to facilitate members in co-producing responses. The CJA notably piloted a 'next stage' approach to member engagement here, which involved a more even distribution of work across members, with resulting outputs not branded as the CJA. In May 2021, the CJA co-produced a report on how the PCSC Bill will entrench racial disparity with members including small specialist race equality organisations. The CJA Director drew on the report when she was asked to give oral evidence to the Parliamentary Bill Committee in May 2021 alongside other criminal justice organisation leaders. The report was disseminated to relevant Peers and also used in meetings with senior officials, the PCSC Bill team and with Ministers.

### 3. Conclusion

The CJA is commended for punching well above its weight despite the challenges of the pandemic and limited staff resources. The organisation made considerable progress in three of its four core areas (member engagement, capacity building, and influencing), alongside emerging progress in one further area (systemic change). Regarding the latter, an incremental approach to achieving systemic change is to be expected as the most ambitious and interconnected area of the strategy.

Over the last two years its member engagement approach has developed significantly, from a centralised 'think tank' model to a well-received decentralised model with key fora including members meetings, expert groups, policy forums and round tables. Importantly, the CJA has also developed 'entry level' tools including a regular members bulletin and a regular policy bulletin to help small members with limited capacity feel part of a bigger change network. In addition, there is good evidence of members actively contributing to policy development and influencing resources.

The CJA has a clear talent for strategic influencing but should be realistic about where traction is likely under the current populist administration. Opportunities are identified for the CJA to grow its impact through strategic political influencing, targeted external collaborations and broader communications work including with the traditional media. There is a sense that members would welcome more active engagement in influencing through co-leading policy development initiatives and regular opportunities to 'be in the room' with policy makers. To achieve long-term sustainability the organisation should consider options such as an issue focus in fewer areas where the CJA could offer a clear evidence base, or building its staff capacity. The lived experience leadership and Restorative Justice work are impactful areas that the CJA is known for, which could be expanded as part of the next strategy phase. An ambitious approach which would see the CJA scale new heights in lived experience leadership is currently seeking to secure funding. As budget holders for regional work supporting victims and access to Restorative Justice, PCCs are a key regional influencing target. To avoid spreading resources too thinly at a time when the CJA still has limited capacity, a pilot programme roll-out is proposed in one or two PCC areas to allow the CJA to build on its 'Public Safety, Public Trust' work.

The CJA has started to embrace a bolder policy stance in its response to race disparity through its work on the PCSC Bill and the submission of a policing super-complaint calling for the repeal of section 60 suspicion-less searches. Learning from missed opportunities, a bold stance ahead on racial disparity could position the CJA well as an occasional strategic media spokesperson, whilst increasing its profile and reach.

A clearer forward focus on impact measurement is recommended, including more use of real-time as well as systematic tools built into the next plan. Members notably expressed interest in 'learning better' too, through more sharing of good practice and support in their own learning and reflection. Recording detailed evidence of member engagement activity would build up a valuable picture of where the CJA has increased member capacity including its stated aim of enabling small members.

This limited review has strongly reaffirmed member support for the CJA's forward direction but recognises a current mismatch between ambition and resources. The CJA now has more dedicated fundraising resource through the appointment of its Deputy Director. A priority should be to diversify fundraising opportunities from a broad range of trusts and foundations, with possible expansion to

include philanthropists, corporate partnerships and individuals. The CJA should however seek to maintain its independence, enabling it to continue to take a bold approach to speaking truth to power.

# 4. Recommendations

Recommendations are outlined under the four key forward themes recommended in this review.

## Towards greater member connectivity

- Empower members to help initiate and lead pieces of influencing work as part of 'next stage' co-production. Evaluate the PCSC Bill approach for relevant learning.
- Develop a member recruitment strategy to extend reach in underrepresented areas.
- Streamline asks according to member areas of interest. Use regular surveys to check pulse and tweak approach as necessary.
- Identify champions to cascade member learning on key processes and policy areas.
- Develop a co-production accountability framework to build awareness of the opportunities for and evidence of member co-production as a reference tool for the CJA staff and members.

## Next stage capacity building

- Develop an incremental approach to move lived experience leadership model to next level through implementing and evaluating the ELEVATE CJS pilot programme.
- Research and develop new ways to actively engage small organisations in:
  - influencing policy, practice and opinion
  - using real-time evaluation tools to measure impact
- Identify internal and external champions to promote recommendations on systemic change.

## Addressing a new political landscape

- Undertake dual track influencing strategy planning to prepare for either continuing populist or emerging government scenarios ahead (of whichever party).
- Undertake regular horizon scanning to determine any new relevant external impacts and tweak influencing plan in response.
- Invest in building relationships with a broader range of non-government political actors and think tanks.
- Engage a more active approach to member influencing at a national level.
- Pilot a regional influencing approach in one or two PCC areas and disseminate the learning outputs widely through the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC).
- Develop a more active media spokesperson role – including through linking to real-time news stories – as a route to increased profile and reach.
- Reframe the CJA Awards as an opportunity within broader media influencing strategy.

## Future proofing strategy approaches

- Expand organisational and public understanding of systemic change approach through developing new narrative tools.
- Develop broad and unusual collaborations to expand systemic change approaches.
- Ensure a broad approach to impact measurement is built into next-stage plan including:
  - An incremental approach to measuring influencing impact including the introduction of a barometer of influence tool
  - Researching and piloting at least one real-time evaluation tool

- A systematic approach to data collection relating to small member activity and current areas of underrepresentation
- Introduce a broader strategic accountability framework - with senior staff directly accountable for specific strategy areas - as part of next strategy.
- Embed a rapid input framework to facilitate all parts of the CJA to have a say in fast-moving and reactive moments.
- Diversify fundraising to include a broad range of trusts and foundations, with possible expansion to include philanthropists, corporate partnerships and individuals.
- Expand the capacity of the staff team to deliver accordingly across all strategy areas.