

## **RESPONSIVE SERVICES AND CUSTOMER CARE SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **POLICY REVIEW 2012/13: REDUCING RE-OFFENDING – HMP Northumberland**

Monday 5 November

#### **1. TRANSITIONS BETWEEN CUSTODY AND THE COMMUNITY**

- 1.1 The National Offender Management Agency (NOMS) is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice, bringing together the Probation Service and HM Prison Service. The two bodies remain distinct but have the same purpose; to protect the public and reduce reoffending. Prison and probation services ensure the sentences of the courts are properly carried out and work with offenders to tackle the causes of their offending behaviour.
- 1.2 The Probation Service assesses offenders and produce court reports; advising as to the most appropriate sentence for the individual concerned. For custodial sentences longer than 12 months, from the point of sentencing, probation offender managers supervise the offender working closely within prisons and with prison staff to identify the most effective programmes and interventions for rehabilitation.
- 1.3 Most offenders do not serve a whole sentence in custody. At a set stage, they are released to serve the rest of their sentence in the community, supervised by probation staff, known as being 'on licence'. All offenders are assessed to determine any risk they might pose to staff, other offenders or to the public after release. Offenders serving prison sentences under 12 months are not subject to any statutory supervision, when they are released, and the Panel had previously noted this as a concern, particularly around offenders not being engaged with appropriate agencies and having access to the necessary.
- 1.4 All offenders sentenced to 12 months or more are supervised by Northumbria Probation Trust when they come out of prison on licence. Offenders must attend regular appointments with probation staff, complete set programmes/work, provide information about where they live and work and comply with any other conditions of the licence. This might include restrictions on movements and behaviour.
- 1.5 Probation staff can ask to include extra specific conditions in some licences, including:
  - Where the offender must live;
  - Attendance on treatment programmes relating to their offending behaviour;
  - Not visiting specific areas or making contact with certain people;
  - Not living in a house with children under a certain age; and

- Any offender who breaks the rules of their licence will be returned to prison to finish their sentence (recalled).

## **2. HMP NORTHUMBERLAND OFFENDER MANAGEMENT**

2.1 HMP Northumberland was formerly two separate prisons; HMP Acklington and HMP Castington. On 31 October 2011, the merged prison became known as HMP Northumberland. HMP houses 1348 prisoners, most of whom are from the North East with a proportion from the North West and other areas of the country. HMP houses a large population of vulnerable prisoners (VPs), 90% of whom are sex offenders.

2.2 HMP Northumberland structures its activities to reduce reoffending loosely around the seven Pathways out of Offending outlined in the National Re-offending Action Plan:-

- (a) Accommodation
- (b) Education, Training and Employment
- (c) Mental and Physical Health
- (d) Drugs and Alcohol
- (e) Finance, Benefits and Debt
- (f) Children and Families
- (g) Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour

2.3 Prisoners are managed according to the Offender Management Model which aims to manage the needs of the offender from court to custody and onto resettlement back into the community. Every prisoner is assessed, the outcome of which is used to form a personal sentence plan which maps out the sequence of required interventions.

## **3. ACCOMMODATION**

3.1 HMP Northumberland works in partnership with charities Shelter and Aquila Way to provide specialist prison housing services, including information and advice to prisoners. The Panel was informed that Sunderland City Council is very proactive in its approach in liaising with Shelter and HMP staff to secure accommodation for prisoners prior to release.

3.2 A key part of the Panel's review has been around accommodation issues for offenders. It was pleased to have the opportunity to speak with two groups of prisoners as part of the visit. Accommodation was a concern for the prisoners who spoke to the Panel, but it became apparent that many were actually worried about being housed in a Probation Approved Premises as part of their license and that this would encourage them to reoffend as they were separated from a support network of family and friends. There appeared to be a generally negative attitude towards probation staff, and the view that Probation could be unreasonable and personal in their dealings with

them. This was not surprising to the Panel, given Probation's role in managing the risk of the offender to themselves, their families and the community. Prisoner's views about what would stop them reoffending were in direct opposition to that of those working with them; for example the IOM reported to the Panel that where accommodation was within the community where the offending had started they would often be more likely to re-offend.

- 3.3 It is important to note that prisoners often referred to being placed into hostels, but for the purposes of this review the terminology they used specifically referred to Probation Approved Premises or other supported accommodation and not the private hostels (HMO's) located within Sunderland. Whilst Northumbria Probation, the Council and other agencies no longer refer to these private establishments; sometimes an offender will have no other option but to seek accommodation in them.
- 3.4 Prisoners also reported that many reoffend intentionally whilst on license in the community and are recalled, simply to ensure that once they are released they have no restrictions placed upon them around where they can and cannot live, reinforcing the Panel's earlier findings.

#### **4. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT**

- 4.1 Offenders face significant barriers to entering the labour market upon release from custody, not only can a criminal record be an obstacle to overcome, just under half of prisoners nationally (47%) have no qualifications and 13% have never had a job.
- 4.2 The contractor for the curriculum within HMP is The Manchester College, funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Education and training is delivered to a convicted population within two separate HMP locations utilising a large number of classrooms and vocational work areas. The department has approximately 40 teachers.
- 4.3 A diverse range of courses are available to prisoners including functional skills; employability; business admin; and creative techniques, as well as more challenging vocational training courses including motor mechanics, bricklaying, painting & decorating, plastering, woodwork, catering and hospitality (basic skills are embedded within all vocational areas).
- 4.4 Out of scope accreditation is available within the kitchen, gardens/horticulture and physical education. Other areas include a careers information, advice and guidance service available to all prisoners provided by the National Careers Service
- 4.5 The Panel were given the opportunity to observe prisoners undertaking vocational training within a workshop making prisoner garments as part of a national contract of HM Prison Service. Prisoners are given

appropriate training and can access industry recognised qualifications. It also gives them the opportunity to develop required workplace skills, such as team working and communication.

- 4.6 The green paper Breaking the Cycle highlighted the intention to make prisons places of hard work and industry, with more prisoners engaging in a longer working week. At the time of the Panel's visit an inspection report revealed that whilst provision was good, there wasn't enough of it and up to a third of prisoners remained in their cells during the core hours of the day which HMP Northumberland recognises as an issue to be addressed. The Panel were interested to note that some links had been made with employers in the local area to develop training and work release programmes that lead to employment on release. HMP Northumberland is partnered with Working Links in order to progress this agenda, and the Panel highlighted an opportunity for the Council to assist with this by providing opportunities to link with business within the city.

## **5. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH**

- 5.1 HMP Northumberland works closely with a regional commissioning unit working on behalf of the Primary Care Trusts in the North East. Care UK provide health care provision within HMP. All prisoners are screened on arrival to identify immediate physical or mental health needs. Advice and support is given to those with disabilities however the ongoing support of those with disabilities is something HMP considers it needs to improve upon. The Panel was informed that the prison population is an ageing one, the oldest prisoner being 84, therefore there is a need to ensure it is properly equipped to support the needs of prisoners with long term health issues.
- 5.2 The mental health team refers prisoners to a range of services within the community including St Nicholas hospital. The team also provide advice and guidance for staff dealing with mental health issues.
- 5.3 The Panel considered the mental and physical health of offenders a key issue to be addressed within the city and was therefore pleased to note that referrals to community health services, including GP appointments, are secured prior to release.
- 5.4 It was clear to the Panel that physical education at HMP plays an important part in purposeful activity and engagement with prisoners. It has a major contribution to the physical, mental and social well being of prisoners and contributes to safety, order and control. The P.E. department supports workplace delivery of education and vocational training and contributes to strategies for the resettlement of prisoners and promotion of healthy lifestyles including support in the delivery of offending behaviour programmes. Appropriate qualifications are offered to prisoners to address deficits in basic education through activity based key skills.

- 5.5 There are three gyms which consist of a range of cardio and resistance machines with a large range of free weights. Gyms 1 and 3 have sports halls attached where range of sporting activities are delivered including team building sessions for offender behaviour programmes. There are three football pitches and one rugby pitch. The Panel was impressed by the level of provision available and considered that physical activity and education around healthy lifestyles is a vital part of providing offenders with the skills they will require within the community.
- 5.6 Positively, the prison worker seconded to the North of Tyne IOMs has engaged with local gyms, sports providers and community venues to increase the opportunities for prisoners to continue physical activity upon release. The seconded worker to the South of Tyne IOMs has recently been appointed; therefore an opportunity existed to extend this arrangement to Sunderland. The Council could help the IOM worker in the identification of such providers.

## **6. DRUGS AND ALCOHOL**

- 6.1 Substance misuse is strongly associated with offending. The Panel had already learned that only 20% of offenders on the IOM programme did not have any drug or alcohol issues. The perception that drugs and alcohol are always the only cause of offending can be misleading, and often substance misuse issues are only part of a much wider range of complex needs.
- 6.2 There are three elements to addressing substance misuse at HMP Northumberland:-
- (a) Reducing supply;
  - (b) Reducing demand; and
  - (c) Continuity of treatment after release.
- 6.3 The Panel were informed that preventing drugs getting into HMP population required sustained vigilance, security measures and drug testing programmes. Whilst every effort is made by HMP, prisoners can be very creative in the methods used to get drugs in, and also make 'hooch', a form of alcohol, which can be deadly. The Panel noted that for every successful prevention there would always be failures, and this substantiated in part the view previously given to the Panel that for some offenders, issues with substances actually begin in custody.
- 6.4 The Government approach to recovery through abstinence, rather than ongoing medical substitution is mirrored in HMP's strategy to address drug and alcohol issues. The DART (Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team) delivered by Phoenix Futures and Care UK manage the treatment framework within HMP. Interventions include:-

- (a) Detox and/or reduction focused prescribing;
  - (b) Psychosocial intervention;
  - (c) Clinical intervention; and
  - (d) Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Programmes.
- 6.5 DART manage the treatment process from start to finish and therefore link different departments within HMP, with different prisons (should a prisoner be transferred) and with community services to ensure continuity if treatment upon release.
- 6.6 The Panel were given the opportunity to meet a group offenders within the treatment programme, consisting of prisoners who were relatively new to the programme, as well as several peer mentors. The group very much advocated the approach and were informed there were strong levels of trust and support within the group and a feeling that everybody is 'in it together'.
- 6.7 When asked about plans on release and optimism for continued success in the community there was a feeling among the group that a similar model to the treatment programme would be helpful to them. They highlighted the effectiveness of the peer mentor scheme. The Panel was aware that a peer mentor scheme was in operation in Sunderland; however the group was not aware of this. Again, the Panel observed a level of apprehension among prisoners about being accommodated in Approved Premises or other supported accommodation upon release; however there was no consensus from the group as to whether they would have greater chance of successfully abstaining from drugs and alcohol if they were with family, or separated.

## **7. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF OFFENDERS**

- 7.1 Children and families play a significant role in supporting an offender to make the changes to stop re-offending. Relationships can often be broken by offending and families are significantly affected by the offender's behaviour.
- 7.2 Visits play a vital role in strengthening and maintaining links with families, supporting resettlement upon release. HMP works with the charity NEPACS (North East Prison After Care Support) who help it to facilitate Father/Child days and Family Days in which families can have lunch together and engage in positive activities together. The Visitors Centre has approximately 200 visitors per month and 50 children per month. Panel considered the Visitors Centre to be welcoming and comfortable and was pleased to find families have access to support and advice both between visits, before the visit and afterward. NEPACS reported this support may be around concerns that the prisoner is subject to bullying for example.

- 7.3 Visits are held 6 days of the week in the afternoon to allow for travel by public transport. The Panel noted that HMP Northumberland's location must make travel very difficult for families, however there wasn't much more that could be done about this, other than make the visiting arrangements as flexible and tailored as possible.
- 7.4 HMP Northumberland sees itself as a key stakeholder in the national 'Troubled Families' agenda (which in Sunderland is named Strengthening Families). This is a programme to reduce the criminal and anti social behaviour of 120,000 families in the country. It is keen to offer support with this agenda. The Panel agreed that many of the families identified in Sunderland may, at some point, receive a custodial sentence and be detained at HMP, therefore it has an opportunity to undertake some specialised work with the men and families concerned. Approaches have been made to all local authorities to highlight this possibility, but responses to date have been few, possibly due to the project being at an early stage. The Panel recognised that whilst this was an excellent opportunity; there may be some difficulties in local authorities jointly funding work by HMP due to the very different approaches to the agenda across the region.

## **8. ATTITUDES THINKING AND BEHAVIOUR**

- 8.1 The Programmes Unit delivers a range of interventions including an anger management programme, Thinking Skills Programme (TSP), sex offender treatments and psychology services which attempt to reduce re-offending rates by addressing thinking and behaviours.
- 8.2 The aim of the TSP is to develop thinking skills through methods such as:-
- Stop and Think
  - Emotional Awareness
  - Problem Solving
  - Perspective Taking
  - Offence Free Relationships
  - Goals and Values
  - Seeing the whole picture
- 8.3 A group of prisoners undertaking the TSP, reported that the programme made them think about things 'they didn't really want to think about', such as impact on their victims and their families. They also stated that they have to want to, and be ready to change before any intervention would make a real impact on them.

## **9. THEMES FROM THE EVIDENCE**

- 9.1 Whilst the Panel was impressed with the range of services in place for offenders within HMP Northumberland, throughout the visit it became apparent that it has great difficulty in measuring its specific impact upon

reducing reoffending. This is for a number of reasons, not least because very often an offender leaves custody and is subject to further supervision, support or interventions. This was considered to be detrimental to measuring the effectiveness of the programmes in place and could hamper improvements/changes to the way programmes are delivered in the future.

- 9.2 There appear to be good links with statutory and other agencies within Sunderland and there is an emphasis on effective communication in order to manage the offender journey from custody to the community.
- 9.3 Throughout the visit the Governor, and his management team emphasised the willingness to work in partnership with Sunderland City and Council and other authorities to improve reoffending rates by further joint working and cooperation.
- 9.4 The Panel considered the recruitment of prison officer secondment to the Integrated Offender Management units South of Tyne to be crucial to strengthening the transition arrangements for offenders and fostering joint working. HMP emphasised that Sunderland can and should work with the worker to develop the tailor the role to meet Sunderland's requirements.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- HMP Northumberland: Reducing Reoffending Strategy
- Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Northumberland, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons - June 2012