



Justice Select Committee Consultation: Role of the Probation Service

Response by Revolving Doors Agency October 2010

Executive Summary

- Many offenders have multiple and complex support needs including poor mental health, drug and/or alcohol problems, homelessness or unstable housing, poverty and debt, and poor family relationships.
- Probation services should be commissioned to identify and respond holistically to this range of need. This should involve a wide range of partner agencies.
- Probation commissioners should work with agencies from other sectors to identify shared priorities and targets and pool resources in order to address these needs.
- Involving service users in the design and delivery of services can be beneficial to both service provider and service user, but is underdeveloped in criminal justice services. This should be explored by probation services.
- In many areas, services to address this range of needs already exist but offenders, especially those with multiple needs, find them hard to access. Multi-agency partnership working is essential in addressing this issue.
- Partnership working with these agencies can help probation services save resources and work more effectively with people with multiple needs.
- A move away from short sentences will result in more offenders with multiple needs being worked with in the community. This will require probation services to improve their understanding of multiple needs, expertise in responding to this group, and partnership working.

About Revolving Doors Agency

Revolving Doors is a charity working across England to change systems and improve services for people with multiple problems including poor mental health who are in repeat contact with the criminal justice system.

The problems they face often include poverty, mental health difficulties, substance use and homelessness. These problems interact so people end up living chaotic lives of crisis and crime. The problems they then cause impact on us all. We call them the revolving doors group.

We base our work on 16 years of research, service development and service user involvement which has given us a strong evidence base of the unique challenges faced by people with multiple problems. Our three areas of work are policy and research; service user involvement; and partnerships and development.

Our vision is that by 2025 there is an end to the revolving door of crisis and crime, when anyone facing multiple problems and poor mental health is supported to reach their potential, with fewer victims and safer communities as a result.

Introduction

Revolving Doors welcomes this inquiry into the role of probation services by the Justice Select Committee. We particularly welcome the examination of the probation service's capacity to cope with the move away from short custodial sentences, and the recognition of the need for different approaches for different groups.

Members of our service user forum provided verbal evidence to the Committee on 12th October.

Consultation response

Are probation services currently commissioned in the most appropriate way?

Experiences of members of our service user forum have shown that probation services are often unable to respond appropriately to people with multiple needs:

“when I got out of prison I was basically homeless. Probation didn't help me trying to find a place. . . I was released with a £47 giro. I had nowhere to go. I went to probation, said “I'm homeless” and they said, “There's nothing we can do for you”. . . . Every week I go to probation, it's every two weeks now. I get seen for five minutes and none of my problems actually get resolved.”

“Well you go there and all they ask you is are you alright? Well that's all they ask me, ” Are you alright, how you doing?” They didn't reassess any of my offending behaviour. . . . I don't think they knew what to do 'cos my crime was linked to my mental health so I think they found that hard to understand; and I didn't feel comfortable talking to him anyway.”

(Quotes from 'Multiple needs': Service users' perspectives!)

In order to address this, we argue that any probation service commissioning arrangements should consider the following three principles:

1) Focus on addressing offenders' multiple needs

Many offenders, particularly those serving repeat sentences, have multiple and complex support needs, including poor mental health, drug and/or alcohol problems, unstable housing or

¹ Braithwaite T and members of Revolving Doors Agency's service user forum, 'Multiple Needs': Service users' perspectives, Revolving Doors Agency, September 2009 <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/multiple-needs-su-perspectives/>

homelessness, debt, and relationship problems. These needs exacerbate each other and make it more difficult for the person to access the help they need.

Addressing the full range of these needs is vital in order to effectively tackle the root causes of offending and consequently in efforts to reduce reoffending.

Probation, as a law enforcement agency, cannot address these needs in isolation. If the service is to be more effective in reducing reoffending, commissioners should recognise this wide range of needs and work with a corresponding range of commissioners and providers to address them. This should include health, substance misuse, social care, education and learning, criminal justice, and housing agencies.

Both children's and adult services should be involved in recognition of the specific challenges faced by young people making the transition from children's to adult services. (See Revolving Doors' guide to commissioning services for young adults with multiple needs² for more details)

2) Facilitate multi-agency working through identifying shared priorities and targets and sharing resources

The multiple needs of many offenders mean they are often in contact with a range of services. In some cases, this results in service duplication. In others, no one agency takes overall responsibility and the offender's needs remain unaddressed.

Working towards shared targets is likely to be of benefit to all, with improvements in one area influencing improvements elsewhere. Shared targets are also essential in maintaining commitment to joint working,

Case study: Depaul UK Oldham

Depaul UK's project in Oldham, Porter Street, was developed in recognition of a gap in provision for young people with multiple needs. The project provides supported accommodation in a purpose built unit for up to eight young people between the ages of 16 and 23 years with complex needs. Responding to the residents' needs requires a high level of support including some double cover; thus the costs are relatively high.

A foundation of well established partnership working, led by the local authority and including Youth Offending Teams, Supporting People, the Primary Care Trust and substance misuse services enabled unmet needs to be identified and a shared understanding of possible future options developed. The project is jointly funded by the above agencies.

The commissioning objective was to provide more specialist support for young people, which would ultimately enable them to maintain their own tenancies and live as independently as possible. More specifically the service aims to support young people with offending behaviour, mental health problems and substance misuse. There is an explicit understanding between the agencies involved

² Revolving Doors Agency, *Towards a Shared Future*, Revolving Doors Agency, 2010, <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/towards-a-shared-future/>

that a multiagency approach is the only way to deliver the core objectives for young people with multiple needs.

Through identifying patterns of service use by offenders, commissioners can identify where duplication is taking place, and hence where budgets could be aligned. Funds from multiple sources can be joined together effectively to work towards shared priorities and targets.

Evidence around cost savings to local and national budgets can be useful here in backing up decisions to pool or align budgets.

Through our national development work³ we have identified the following elements as necessary for targeting and addressing the needs of this group:

- Local leaders who take responsibility for multiple needs and act as champions to find solutions
- A local strategic steering group bringing together relevant agencies
- Joint commissioning or partnership working
- A lead professional who can support the client to access the range of services they need
- Breaking down barriers between services
- Information sharing
- Evaluation and monitoring of outcomes
- Service user involvement

Case study: Milton Keynes Link Worker + service

The Milton Keynes Link Worker+ project is a partnership between Milton Keynes Community Safety Partnership, charity P3 and Revolving Doors Agency. Probation are represented on the steering group and refer to the service.

The scheme focuses on people who are in crisis because of a combination of mental health needs, accommodation problems, substance misuse, offending or anti-social behaviour. It facilitates the engagement of clients with services which can maintain their long term well-being. Link workers support clients who have traditionally struggled to engage with services to access appropriate support. The project works closely with the police, probation and other partners in the city.

3) *Involve service users*

Service user involvement is under-developed in criminal justice, not least due to the conflict between punishment and empowerment. However, we are keen to emphasise its importance and benefits. Involving service users in the design and delivery of services is beneficial for both the service user and service provider and is an essential step in ensuring services are genuinely focused and effective.

Probation services have much to learn from other sectors such as health and voluntary agencies where involving service users has become more embedded.

³ See <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/partnerships--development/programmes/ndp/> for more details.

What role should the private and voluntary sectors play in the delivery of probation services?

As outlined above, offenders frequently have multiple and complex needs, and hence require support from a range of services. Our development work⁴ has demonstrated that the services that people with multiple problems need already exist but they are unable to access them or receive a poor service from them.

Often, what is required is a reshaping of existing services or pathways to better engage people with multiple problems in contact with the criminal justice system. Voluntary, private and public sector services should all be included in this approach, which may be cost neutral or require only small amounts of funding.

Many of our development projects have focused on this kind of reshaping. Often they have involved an individual or organisation taking a lead in navigating people with multiple problems to services that can support them.

Case study: Navigator Project, Watford

The Navigator Project in Watford is exploring how the police can better respond to people with mental health problems and other issues such as homelessness or substance use when they are arrested using volunteer navigators from a local voluntary organisation to offer support and guidance on services available in the community

Multi-agency partnership working has been essential in our development work. The success of many of our projects is predicated on the inclusion of a steering group drawn from a range of local health, social care and criminal justice agencies. Local leaders in health, social care and criminal justice contribute to the convening of partnership groups, make resources available and are able to make the case for the mainstreaming of services after the pilot period. Much of the success of projects is attributable to their leadership and willingness to innovate.

We learned that the success of the projects was to a large degree attributable to local ownership and consensus; in other words, to the ‘permission’ given by several commissioners and organisations to projects operating according to a more flexible and responsive set of rules.

Does the probation service have the capacity to cope with a move away from short custodial sentences?

Those who are currently sentenced to short custodial sentences typically suffer multiple social disadvantages. This is demonstrated by the 2009 report *Health Needs Assessment of Short Sentence Prisoners*⁵. This found that short sentenced prisoners “are likely to: have truanted from school; half are unemployed and possess no formal qualifications; 15% were homeless or in temporary accommodation; nearly all used illegal drugs in the 12 months prior to a sentence and 40% were problem drinkers”.

⁴ See <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/partnerships--development/programmes/ndp/> for more details.

⁵ Brooker C, Fox C, Callinan C, *Health Needs Assessment of Short Sentence Prisoners*, University of Lincoln, December 2008, <http://www.lincoln.ac.uk/cjmh/HNA%20Short-Sentences%20FV.pdf>

A move away from short sentences is unlikely to be matched by a change in this profile of need. Those who are currently seen in prison will instead be under probation supervision. While the probation service already has some degree of expertise in responding to this complexity of need, the move away from short sentences would need to be accompanied by increased understanding and capacity for working in multi-agency partnerships.

In order to respond effectively to these offenders, probation services will need to take a holistic multi-agency approach to address a range of needs. They will need to improve partnership working with other agencies that can help address a range of needs (public, private and voluntary). As outlined above, these agencies may already provide services that could help address offending related needs, but those with multiple problems may have trouble accessing them. Joint working is required to explore the reasons behind this and break down barriers.

It is essential that criminal justice reforms recognise that women face specific challenges. They are often more likely to breach community sentences and the consequences of imprisonment can have more severe effects especially on children. The importance of gender-specific sentences is outlined in *The Community order and Suspended Sentence Order for Women*⁶.

Does the probation service handle different groups of offenders appropriately, e.g. women, young adults, black and minority ethnic people, and high and medium risk offenders?

Young adults are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and have needs and characteristics, which are different from those of the general adult population. The probation service and criminal justice system more widely often fails to recognise the need for a distinct approach. Revolving Doors is a member of the Transition to Adulthood Alliance and refers the Justice Select Committee to the response to the Alliance for further details on this.

⁶ Patel, S. and Stanley, S. *The Community order and Suspended Sentence Order for Women*, CCJS, May 2008