

Supporting People A five-year national inspection programme



This bulletin describes the key findings from the *Supporting People* programme; a national five-year inspection programme lead by the Audit Commission (Housing Inspectorate), partnered by HMI Probation and the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

In this joint inspection programme we examine how the National Probation Service (NPS) seeks to ensure the needs of offenders are addressed, that appropriate support services and accommodation are made available, and that the promotion of social inclusion and community safety remains paramount.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Strengths

- We have seen some positive examples of partnership working within the programme and how, in certain administering local authorities, probation has operated as a key player in joint working arrangements.
- Supporting People has provided a greater focus for the continued development of strategic links between the NPS on wider Government agendas, particularly with regards to Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Drug Action Teams and Community Safety Initiatives.
- National Probation Directorate (NPD) guidance issued earlier in the year has been welcomed by probation areas: the challenge now is to see this readily being used to inform practice and thereby increase the influence of the NPS within the programme.
- Some probation areas have evidenced their commitment to diversity by adapting existing services to meet the particular needs of offenders locally.
- Offenders interviewed as part of the inspection have articulated some of the benefits of the programme, such as greater access to mainstream support services.
- Improvements were found in all eight probation areas that participated in last year's pathfinder and pilot inspections, arising from follow-up work carried out earlier this year.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Evidence from inspections to date indicates that the priority and resources afforded to the programme by the NPS has been determined by the focus on achieving national performance targets. Consequently, the absence of an accommodation target has resulted in a reduced priority being attached to Supporting People issues by senior level probation staff. The resulting impact has been a lack of strategic level engagement in the programme in some areas. Most critically, the lack of appropriate representation at the Commissioning Body level threatens to undermine probation's contribution to the programme overall and, in particular, to the service review process.
- The lack of strategic level engagement has meant that senior level probation staff have not been consistently contributing to the local Supporting People Five-Year Strategies that are currently being finalised. This key document sets out the local priorities for the planning and development of support services for vulnerable people over the next five years. It provides the only opportunity to champion the particular needs of offenders, thereby ensuring that an appropriate range of services is in place. A pro-active approach is required to influence the outcomes in order to reflect the concerns and priorities of the NPS.
- Differential use of information-sharing protocols has produced inconsistent risk management arrangements within probation areas, particularly with regard to the involvement of other partners in the joint-working process.
- Cross-authority working has been patchy, with few probation areas working closely with neighbouring authorities to both enhance services for offenders locally and develop best practice.

- Limited data are available from probation areas to evidence outcomes for offenders arising from the Supporting People programme. This information is critical for the ongoing service review process, thereby evidencing the need for particular services for offenders, and effectively demonstrating strategic relevance around the crime reduction agenda.

CONTEXT & OBJECTIVES

- **Supporting People** is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services in order to promote independence amongst vulnerable people. The aim of the programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local need.
- The programme brought together significant funding streams, including transitional housing benefit, the Housing Corporation's Supported Housing Management Grant, and Probation Accommodation Grant Scheme, into a single pot to be administered by 150 local authorities.
- Inspections commenced in September 2003, with all 42 probation areas being subject to inspection at various points during the five-year cycle. By the close of September 2004, we will have participated in 50 Supporting People inspections nationally, including four pilots and four pathfinder inspections.
- The involvement of the NPS as a key partner is critical to the success of the programme, and recent guidance issued by the NPD has reiterated this message. The probation element of the inspection therefore aims to examine how well the NPS is engaging in the programme, the leverage it has demonstrated in strategic joint working with other partners, and the outcomes evidenced for offenders resulting from the programme.

METHODOLOGY

- Four pilot and four pathfinder inspections took place in early 2003 with particular administering local authorities, following a request from the Audit Commission for voluntary participation to test its methodology. Reports were written for all eight inspections, with the four pathfinder reports becoming published documents. Follow-up work was carried out earlier in 2004 to chart progress on all participating authorities and to determine progress against original recommendations.
- Overall, performance for Supporting People inspections closely follows the established scoring system currently used by the Audit Commission for Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) within local authorities. Authorities are awarded a 'star' rating for performance based on a two-part judgement: 'How good is the service now?' and 'What are its prospects for improvement?'. This is informed by the Audit Commission's Key Lines Of Enquiry (KLOE) inspection methodology framework.
- Nineteen additional 'value for money' inspections took place throughout the year, focusing on particular local authorities with high unit-cost services. Interim findings were reported to the Parliamentary Select Committee, which identified learning disability services in the main as being the most costly.
- Interviews are carried out with a range of staff within the local authority, including Directors, Councillors, senior managers, front-line and partnership staff. Specific interviews are also undertaken with staff from Health, Social Services and the Probation

Service. Service users, carers and providers have a key role in informing the inspection process through participating in interviews and focus groups.

- Visits to services funded by the Supporting People grant are inspected as part of the methodology, with staff and service user meetings undertaken.
- We have made continued contributions to the Audit Commission's revised methodology for the inspection programme, ensuring that a clear inspection focus remained for the probation service, and the level of joint partnership working overall.
- Probation areas are fully assessed on their level of engagement and leverage, both strategically and operationally, within the programme. We seek to find evidence of joint partnership working and shared targets with the other partners involved. Management of risk and information sharing is a key focus for the inspection programme.
- Evidence of the impact of the programme for probation areas locally, and the resulting outcomes for offenders, form a critical basis to assess its success. We also collate examples of positive practice found within the inspection and publish these as part of the final report.

POSITIVE PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Below, we highlight some probation good practice examples taken from earlier published inspection reports.

Diversity

Some probation areas have evidenced their commitment to diversity by adapting existing services to meet the particular needs of offenders locally.

Merseyside Probation Area – Responding to local need

A specialist hostel and a tenancy support service provided particular support for offenders in the local community. The local probation service was involved in developing a new floating support scheme for 40 offenders funded by Supporting People, thereby extending the specialist work further. The tenancy support service had a focus on basic skills & employment, training and education, and supporting offenders to effectively resettle within the community. Gaps had been identified for provision for mentally disordered offenders within the area and, as a result, two bedspaces within the hostel were specifically designated for future referrals for dual diagnosis offenders. The hostel was also able to accommodate offenders with mobility needs. Here, the Supporting People programme had enabled effective partnership working, including meeting identified gaps in services for offenders.

Partnership working

- We have seen some positive examples of how, in certain administering local authorities, probation is viewed as a key player in joint working arrangements.

Derbyshire Probation Area – Strategic working arrangements

The engagement and commitment from probation service staff was found to be exceptional, with effective joint working evidenced at operational, tactical and strategic levels.

Knowledge and expertise in respect to offenders and those at risk of offending were readily shared with the local authority.

This common understanding was evidenced as driving up the quality of services for this offender group.

Management of risk

- Initiatives to develop schemes for supporting high-risk offenders in the community had been developed in only a small minority of probation areas, with positive results.

Leicestershire & Rutland Probation Area – Risk management

Through positive partnership arrangements with the Housing Department, the local probation service had developed a floating support scheme for high-risk offenders, part-funded by the Supporting People programme. This built on and strengthened the existing local Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). An Information Sharing Protocol for high-risk offenders was developed to support this partnership with Housing. The creation of a floating support scheme for this particular category of offender was a very positive initiative, particularly given the complexities of risk managing this offender group in the community, and the associated public protection considerations.

Community Re-integration

- Some probation areas had creatively used the Supporting People programme to initiate preventative work in tackling repeat homelessness by offenders.

Northumbria Probation Area – Access to service and information

The Partnership & Accommodation Manager in the local probation service had evidenced positive practice by developing a tenancy support and awareness pack for prisoners prior to release from custody. This initiative was funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and aimed to support the prevention of repeat homelessness by offenders and increase community reintegration. Positive outcomes had been identified.

Adding Value

- Examples of how the probation service added value to services provided locally was evidenced through visits to supported accommodation schemes.

Greater Manchester Probation Area – Value for money

Evidence from the inspection demonstrated that specialist offender services supported people with high levels of need, and that positive outcomes were being achieved. The work of one specialist scheme for mentally disordered offenders was innovative and delivered value for money.

Current Emerging Issues and Future Developments:

- An Independent Review of Supporting People funding was commissioned by the Government and reported in February 2004, at the same time as it was announced that the programme was costing 1.8 billion in 2003/2004, an increase of 0.4 billion estimated two months earlier. The aim of the review was to establish exactly how the funding was being used and particular issues such as transparency in costs, and value for money and was addressed. Government agencies such as the Department of Health and the Home Office were required to provide additional funding to support the continued implementation of the programme.
 - Nineteen additional 'value for money' inspections were undertaken, focusing on local authorities with high unit-cost services. Interim findings have been reported to the Parliamentary Select Committee, which identified learning disability services in the main as being the most costly.
 - The creation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) will impact on the future direction of the programme for the probation service. Areas would welcome further guidance from the NPD as to how this will affect staff tasked with Supporting People responsibilities.
- NPD guidance on the Supporting People programme has been welcomed by areas, particularly since the demise of the Supporting People Advisor posts.
 - Both the new national Accommodation Strategy for High-Risk Offenders and the national Reducing Reoffending Action Plan have raised the profile and significance of offender accommodation nationally and the Supporting People programme. We need to look to the implementation of these documents as a guide for joined-up and strategic working with other relevant agencies, thereby ensuring that the key issues social inclusion and community safety remain paramount.
 - HMI Probation is engaged in two research projects with the Audit Commission. The first aims to summarise learning from the inspections, to highlight particular issues for the probation service, and to make links with wider work on preventative Government agendas. A separate piece of work coordinated by the Housing Inspectorate, involving HMI Probation and CSCI, will focus on outcomes from the inspection programme to date and will be published in early 2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The NPD should:

- Issue a Probation Circular to support areas in the implementation of the recently published guidance on the Supporting People programme.
- Provide guidance on Supporting People matters through a named contact to promote effective probation engagement in the programme.
- Promote and disseminate good practice from the published inspection reports, and support areas to benchmark performance locally and develop outcome measures.
- From April 2005, work with the Prison Service to make use of data captured through Probation and Prison accommodation Key Performance Indicators, to ensure appropriate and timely information exchange to support offenders being resettled in the community.

Boards should:

- Ensure that all aspects of the resettlement agenda, including Supporting People, are sufficiently prioritised in order to achieve the aims set out in the Home Office 'Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan'.
- Develop a culture of learning through the digestion of published Supporting People inspection reports, draw on positive practice cited in other probation areas and applying the learning, where relevant, locally.
- Provide training for all staff, where relevant, in the assessment of accommodation needs for offenders, in order to ensure that risk of harm issues and community reintegration are appropriately addressed.

Full reports from the Supporting People inspection programme are available from HMI Probation's website, in addition to the Audit Commission's website www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

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