

**Report to the Warwickshire Public Service Board**

**22 September 2008**

**Report of the Chief and Chair of the Warwickshire Probation Board**

**Probation and Partner contribution to reducing re-offending**

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that the Board:

1. Notes the probation contribution to crime reduction
2. Notes the contribution that partners make in the provision of accommodation, employment training and education, mental health services and alcohol treatment
3. Notes the needs identified in these areas, current partnership activity and gaps identified.
4. Notes the need to secure future funding to maintain or expand provision with particular reference to;
  - a) a doubling of existing accommodation provision. It is recommended that a County-wide working group of housing authorities and registered social landlords is established to explore possibilities.
  - b) to develop training places for offenders with public service employers.
  - c) to support development of Mental Health Services for offenders through increasing existing funding, year on year, above inflation, over the next five years.
  - d) to maintain funding in real terms for the existing alcohol treatment programme in future years, and explore the potential to expand community alcohol services for offenders.

**1. Introduction**

Each year, Warwickshire Probation Area

- supervises 1700 offenders given community sentences by the courts
- supervises 300 offenders released from prison under licence

Offenders are required to comply with the requirements of the courts and Parole Board. In the last year:

- 780 offenders undertook unpaid work in the community (61,000 hours worked, valued at £300,000)
- 159 offenders completed an accredited programme

There are 37 places in our hostels (Approved Premises) where offenders are required to live for a period on bail, on a community sentence or on licence following release from prison. The hostels have a night time curfew.

## **2. Re-offending**

Nationally 60% of offenders who have served prison sentences of less than 12 months re-offend within one year. 38% of offenders who have served community sentences re-offend within one year of starting the order. Recent experimental statistics indicate that over a three month period 10.5% of the Warwickshire Probation caseload re-offended. The number of proven offences over the 3 month period was 238.

The majority of crimes are committed by people who have previously offended. So reducing reoffending - the Probation Service's primary aim - can make a big impact on reducing crime - one of the LAA partnership's primary objectives.

However the Probation Service cannot do this on its own. We try to change thinking and behaviour and we have a range of interventions. However national research shows that other key factors that have most impact on reducing reoffending are:

- education, training and employment – 54% of offenders have education, training or employment needs
- improved physical and mental health - 45% of offenders are identified as having problems with emotional well being
- stable accommodation – 37% of offenders have accommodation needs
- reducing drug dependency – 23% of offenders have drug misuse problems
- reducing alcohol abuse – 56% of offenders have alcohol misuse problems
- in many cases offenders have a combination of problems such as drug or alcohol misuse and mental health issues

*(Data from Offender Assessment System October 2006 to September 2007)*

National research demonstrates that meeting these needs will result in a reduction in re-offending. For example research suggests that addressing severe accommodation problems can make a 20% difference in reducing re-offending.

Offenders' access to many services is inadequate although in recent years there has been substantial improvement in access to drug treatment and access to education. Funding for alcohol treatment has been secured through LAA funding up to 2009 although demand is higher than the resources available. The Police, Probation and Health currently joint fund a Mentally Disordered Offenders scheme which provides access to community psychiatric nurses for people arrested in police cells. The scheme seeks to divert appropriate offenders to mental health treatment. The

community psychiatric nurses also provide services to people on community sentences and on release from prison. These services are currently under resourced. Through Supporting People there has been a small increase in accommodation for offenders including supported accommodation. However there is a continued need for additional accommodation and move on accommodation from the approved premises. If offenders have unstable, unsuitable or no accommodation, it can be extremely difficult to work on other problem areas such as alcohol, drugs or employment.

### **3. What we need from partners and our priorities**

#### **3.1 Access to accommodation and additional supported accommodation**

Warwickshire Probation Area is represented on the Supporting People Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group. The current spend on offenders or people at risk of offending is approximately 3% of the overall Supporting People grant. It is likely that offenders are also beneficiaries of other SP supported services such as those provided for people with alcohol, drug or mental health problems.

Current provision for offenders includes 43 bed spaces in supported housing, plus 12 floating support places, in the south of the County. In addition there are five preferred tenancies provided by Warwick District Council (primarily for 'difficult to place' high risk offenders), and a new floating support service for 10 to 14 offenders in the north of the county. A new property in Rugby will provide an additional three bed spaces and offenders will also be able to access the new generic floating support service in place across the county. A review of SP provision for offenders is due to take place in the autumn 2008 as part of the overall strategic review of all SP services.

An ongoing problem for probation is obtaining suitable accommodation for offenders where the lack of it has been assessed as a contributory factor in their offending. Finding 'move-on' accommodation for high risk offenders following a period in probation managed approved premises is also a significant problem.

*Probation assessment data from (Offender Assessment System October 2006 to September 07) indicates at least 253 offenders in Warwickshire with accommodation as a contributory factor towards their offending – 37% of the assessed caseload.*

A doubling of existing provision would go some way towards meeting the identified need. It is suggested that a County-wide working group of housing authorities and Registered Social Landlords is established to explore possibilities. This would provide a similar but county wide approach to the existing forum in Nuneaton and Bedworth.

#### **3.2 Access to training and job opportunities**

Warwickshire Probation Area employs a small number of information, advice and guidance workers who are able to assess offender needs for education, training and employment. The IAG workers then 'signpost' offenders towards provision. The National Offender Management Service allocates £70k to purchase offender provision through the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) and this is

provided through a local partnership with Warwickshire College, and the county adult learning services. Our staff also work with other organisations, including JobCentre Plus, to place offenders into employment. Over the years Probation has been successful in obtaining European Social Funding to support this area of our work.

There is the potential for considerable further development in raising the educational standards of offenders and equipping them for employment. In order to do this Probation would require further assistance in ensuring that offenders can access mainstream educational provision. This might involve education providers increasing their direct contact with offenders whilst subject to probation supervision. There are significant opportunities to provide tuition to offenders as part of community payback (unpaid work) initiatives. Contacts established during the supervision period are more likely to be developed further post-supervision within mainstream education.

*Probation assessment data from (Offender Assessment System October 2006 to September 07) indicates at least indicates 371 offenders in Warwickshire with a lack of employment, training, or education as a contributory factor towards their offending – 54% of the assessed caseload.*

A possible means of increasing employability of offenders would be to develop training places for offenders with public service employers so that when job vacancies arise, ex-offenders would be in a stronger position to compete for them.

### **3.3 Improved access to mental health services with funding secured.**

The Warwickshire Multi-Agency Mentally Disordered Offender Scheme has been in existence for several years. It is jointly funded scheme (police, probation, social services, health, and for the current year courts services) that acts as a court diversion scheme as well as providing assessment and treatment of mentally disordered offenders. The scheme is staffed by 2.5 (fte) community forensic psychiatric nurses. Such schemes are recognised nationally as being an important resource although their availability is limited.

Although the service has been operating in Warwickshire for several years there has been no significant increase in funding from partner agencies over this period. This is currently raising concerns about the future viability of the scheme. There is a real need for a specialist mental health service to work with offenders who through their behaviour present a risk of harm to themselves and others at a significant cost to local communities. This type of intervention can help assure that offenders receive the treatment they require. However, existing funding from current partner agencies will not be sufficient to maintain this service.

Within the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 it is possible for courts to sentence offenders with mental health problems to a mental health treatment requirement. This provision is rarely used due to the limited availability of suitable treatment options.

*Probation assessment data from (Offender Assessment System October 2006 to September 07) indicates at least 309 offenders in Warwickshire with emotional difficulties (an indicator of mental health needs) as a contributory factor towards their offending - 45% of the assessed caseload.*

PSB support in development of Mental Health Services for offenders would be welcomed, in particular to increase existing funding year on year above inflation over the next five years.

### **3.4 Improved access to alcohol treatment services with funding secured.**

Within the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 there is also a sentencing option of an alcohol treatment requirement. This can be used where alcohol has been assessed as a significant contributory factor to offending. Warwickshire is one of a minority of probation areas in the country where this option is available. At present £35,000 is provided through the LAA Safer Block to fund this intervention but this funding is not guaranteed for future years. The current provision is available to offenders who are assessed to require the intervention by both probation staff and the treatment provider – Swanswell Trust. The requirement involves an offender attending 12 treatment sessions within a six month period. There were 79 requirements made in 2007/08. The treatment is a non-clinical intervention. There is very limited availability of tier 3 and 4 services. In addition to the alcohol treatment requirement offender managers advise Offenders with identified needs to attend Community Alcohol Services. However, without a specialist offender referral scheme there is no guarantee of attendance.

*Probation assessment data from (Offender Assessment System October 2006 to September 07) indicates at least 383 offenders in Warwickshire with alcohol problems as a contributory factor towards their offending – 56% of the assessed caseload.*

The PSB is invited to maintain funding in real terms for the existing alcohol treatment programme in future years, and explore the potential to expand community alcohol services with specialist provision for offenders.

## **4. Conclusion**

Probation works with offenders on Community Orders or Licence from prison to address their offending behaviour and attitudes and thinking that supports the behaviour. Research also shows that addressing accommodation, education, training and employment, mental health and substance misuse will have a significant impact on reducing re-offending and overall crime levels. Partners can make a valuable contribution towards crime reduction by working with Probation to provide these services. It is unlikely that giving offenders priority access to services would be the public's priority but reducing crime is, and if we can reduce reoffending by giving all offenders good services then we will make a significant contribution to crime reduction.

**Liz Stafford Chief Officer of Probation, Robin Verso Chair of the Probation Board (5 September 2008)**