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Rehabilitation and Resettlement

A Study of Prolific Offender Case Management in Birmingham, United Kingdom

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In 2004, the U.K. Home Office launched the Prolific and other Priority Offenders strategy in England and Wales. This includes a rehabilitative programme with the most prolific offenders case managed throughout their involvement in the criminal justice system. The strategy is a coordinated response by local partnerships, with the aim to reduce reoffending and overall crime rates. This article is based on a review of work in Birmingham to integrate the requirements of the new strategy into existing structures and offender management programmes. Although many of the management structures and referral processes needed for the new strategy were already well developed, there were concerns over communication and clarity of roles. Consistent identification of prolific offenders across all police areas was required. Once targeted, offenders needed equality of access to services. A clear exit strategy was also needed with clear rehabilitation and resettlement criteria for offenders leaving the Prolific and other Priority Offenders strategy.

Keywords: *prolific and other priority offenders; rehabilitation; resettlement; partnership; case management*

It has been recognised for some time that a small proportion of persistent or prolific offenders commits a large proportion of crime (e.g., Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986) with, for example, 10% of offenders in England and Wales committing half of all serious crime (Home Office, 2001). There is also a growing pool of evidence that offender rehabilitation and treatment can be effective at reducing reoffending (e.g., Andrews et al., 1990; McGuire, 2002). Consequently, by targeting resources or giving a premium service to the most prolific offenders—using a rehabilitative model aimed at addressing factors likely to increase the risk of reoffending—a greater impact may be possible on rates of reoffending and on overall crime rates. Certain criminogenic or

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dynamic¹ factors (Andrews & Bonta, 1994; Vennard & Hedderman, 1998) are thought to contribute directly to increased risk of reoffending, including substance misuse, poor educational and vocational skills, poor cognitive and interpersonal skills, and antisocial attitudes. Other factors, such as poor accommodation, can have an indirect relationship to risk of reoffending. By focusing on these risk factors, rehabilitation may become more likely.

Many different projects have been undertaken across England and Wales to address these direct and indirect risk factors, for offenders in prison, those released on licence, or for those on community sentences. However, programmes of work have not always been well connected; for example, cognitive behavioural work in prison has not been accompanied necessarily by postprogramme support in prison (Clarke, Simmonds, & Wydall, 2004), let alone any continued support on release on licence. More broadly, offender supervision can be similarly fragmented. As a result, in recent years, a number of programmes have operated in England and Wales that have attempted to integrate rehabilitative work with persistent or prolific offenders, so that offenders are case managed throughout their involvement in the criminal justice system.

The probation service in England and Wales has had historically a social work emphasis making it an obvious candidate to organize and run such case management work. However, in recent years, there has been a number of changes for probation in England and Wales: first, a change in emphasis from social work to community punishment; and second a managerialist shift (see Nash, 1999) leading to massive structural and cultural change, as demonstrated in the creation of a National Probation Service in 2001 (rather than having regional services) and, just 3 years later, the start of a process leading to the amalgamation of probation with the prison service in a National Offender Management Service (NOMS; Carter, 2003; Dobson, 2004). This merging of boundaries between traditional roles is not unique to probation and prisons. There has been also an increasing involvement of police officers in offender supervision, often alongside existing probation supervision—as some have put it, possibly leading to a future polibation officer (Mawby & Worrall, 2004; Nash, 1999, 2004). Joint working of this nature has its origins in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the resultant creation of local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (henceforth CDRPs) where the police, local authorities, and other related agencies have a statutory duty to work together to reduce crime.

Partnerships have traditionally experienced difficulties (see e.g., Crawford, 1998). However, in a study of multiagency risk management of sexual and violent offenders, Kemshall and Maguire (2001) observed that probation staff, in this context at least, worked in an “extremely close and co-operative relationship” (p. 252) with the police—although maybe too close with a convergence of probation and police officer views in what they called the policification of probation. Of course, this may not be the case in all scenarios and certainly isn’t all negative; the possibility that “professionals

from different, sometimes mutually suspicious, agencies” (Mawby & Warrall, 2004, p. 63) can be effective partners bodes well for programmes to integrate rehabilitative work through the case management of persistent or prolific offenders.

Such programmes have built on the British what-works literature and highlight the need for a relational emphasis (e.g., Chapman & Hough, 1998; Partridge, 2004; Underdown, 1998) to case management. A relational emphasis—where an offender receives continuity of supervision (Burnett, 1996)—has diminished in some day-to-day probation work (Robinson, 2005); however, it is increasingly popular in community punishment and public protection work (Robinson, 2005) and particularly in work with persistent or prolific offenders. British programmes focusing on persistent or prolific offenders have included Addressing Repeat Criminality (Chui, Tupman, & Farlow, 2003), Persistent Offender Projects (Mawby & Worrall, 2004), and Intensive Supervision and Monitoring Projects (Homes, Walmsley, & Debidin, 2005; Worrall, Mawby, Heath, & Hope, 2003). In addition, various projects have focused on offenders committing specific crimes, such as street robbers, as part of the Street Crime Initiative (Home Office, 2003). These persistent or prolific offender projects were similar in intention to the Intensive Supervision Programming and Intensive Probation Supervision schemes in North America (see, e.g., Pearson, 1988; Gendreau, Goggin, & Fulton, 2001).

Projects have involved intensive probation and police supervision—based on a relational model—with additional support targeting the criminogenic risk factors thought relevant to each offender. The latest initiative has been the Prolific and other Priority Offenders (hereafter PPO) strategy, launched by the Home Office in 2004, and designed to bring these different programmes of work together into a coordinated response to deal with locally identified PPOs. Others have questioned the accuracy of prolific offender identification. For example, Townsley and Pease (2002) in a study of British police practice in one police Basic Command Unit found little evidence that the group of nominated individuals contributed disproportionately to the level of crime. Questions on the effectiveness, or accuracy of prolific offender targeting, were beyond the scope of our study. Instead, this article provides a qualitative review of the processes involved in prolific offender case management in a British city. The aims of the article are twofold:

- to determine how the new PPO strategy fitted into existing structures and
- to identify gaps or potential hurdles to integrated case management.

The review was conducted in the West Midlands city of Birmingham, where the authors were commissioned by the local CDRP to assess current provision for prolific offenders and readiness for the adoption of the PPO strategy (Erol & Millie, 2005a). Birmingham is one of Britain’s largest cities with a population of 975,000; it has also the largest single CDRP in the country covering the whole city region.

Method

A qualitative study was carried out involving in-depth, semistructured interviews with key personnel from different agencies and organizations involved in delivering the new PPO strategy and with a limited number of prolific offenders targeted under existing schemes. Interviews were conducted with representatives of all the key partner agencies ($n = 18$) at both a strategic and delivery level. These included representatives of Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police, National Probation Service, the local Drug Action Team, prison support workers,² employment, training and education providers, and other drugs services and housing providers. Interviews were conducted also with six prolific offenders. Although this number was not representative of the total prolific offender population, their differing experiences of offender management provided useful insight. Research has shown the value of eliciting the subjective views of service users and that their stories can be helpful in forming a fuller picture of programme involvement (e.g., Chui et al., 2003). This group of offenders was chosen for interview as they were participating in existing schemes that were well established and so could comment on concrete experiences.

The prolific offenders were interviewed either in prison (Her Majesty's Prison Birmingham) or as part of the police offender managers' weekly home visits. These interviews were in a bail hostel, in the offender's own home, or the house of a relative of the offender. The interviews were done in close collaboration with local police offender managers, and police officers were present during three of the six interviews. For five of the six offenders, this was the first time they had received intensive supervision on an offender management project; the sixth was in prison, having breached the conditions of his involvement in the project previously. The offenders were aged between 24 and 33, two were female and four male. In terms of ethnicity, five were White and one Asian. All interviews were transcribed and subsequently analysed for key themes.

The study was conducted during the early part of 2005 when the new PPO strategy was being established. Although the study was small and based on experiences in one city, some broad developments and challenges emerged that would be relevant to other areas attempting to instigate a coordinated case management of prolific offenders.

Policy Background

As noted, the national PPO strategy was introduced to build on and replace earlier programmes. The origin of this change was the Narrowing the Justice Gap document (Criminal Justice System,³ 2002a), which assumed that targeting those most prolific meant more offences would be brought to justice. Also, if effective support was provided to those sanctioned that tackled the risk factors behind their offending, persistent offenders will be less likely to reoffend. If they do reoffend, as they are

already being targeted, they are more likely to be caught again (Criminal Justice System, 2002a). A persistent offender was defined as someone 18 years or older who had been convicted of six or more recordable offences in the past 12 months, or another offender regarded as persistent on the basis of local intelligence (Criminal Justice System, 2002b).

A single new strategy was announced by the Home Office in March 2004 (and implemented from September 2004; Home Office, 2004a) to encompass and build on the lessons learnt from the different persistent offender schemes, particularly in terms of partnership working and identification and monitoring of offenders. This PPO strategy aims to reduce crime and reoffending by developing a joined-up approach between all agencies dealing with adult offenders. It is to be delivered at a local level—the police Basic Command Unit—and managed by local CDRPs. National guidance documents (Home Office, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d) suggest that each area should identify the individuals who are responsible for causing the most crime and disorder in terms of nature, volume, and impact on the local community. Criteria for inclusion should be agreed locally with partner agencies and offenders identified using local intelligence and the police National Intelligence Model. Resources should then be allocated to reflect the risks posed by these individuals. Three complementary strands to the PPO strategy were developed:

1. Prevent and deter: stopping people, in particular young people, from becoming involved in offending behaviour and becoming prolific offenders.
2. Catch and convict: actively tackling adults who are already prolific offenders.
3. Rehabilitate and resettle: working with identified prolific adult offenders serving custodial or community-based sentences to stop reoffending by offering a range of support services postsentence, delivered through joint agency working.

The main focus for offender management partnership work was the rehabilitate-and-resettle strand of the strategy.

Rehabilitate and Resettle

The National Probation Service and the Prison Service are the main partners under the rehabilitate-and-resettle strand. As noted, both parties are undergoing substantial change under the NOMS banner (Home Office, 2004e). Both would ultimately follow a unified NOMS offender management model (NOMS, 2005) and, as a consequence, both should have been moving already toward closer working in offender management. The other main partner agencies involved in the rehabilitate-and-resettle strand included the police and drug treatment providers, through what is known as the Drug Intervention Programme, coordinated through the CDRP.

Home Office (2004c) guidance states that the rehabilitate-and-resettle strand should build on existing and developing practice and should also be based on the NOMS

approach to managing offenders through a single case manager for all stages of their sentence, irrespective of whether the offender is in prison, out on licence or on a community sentence. All PPOs sentenced to community or custodial sentences of a year or more should have a risk assessment to identify likelihood of reoffending, risk of serious harm and needs related to their offence, rehabilitation, and resettlement. Risk assessment is by OASys (Offender Assessment System) for adults.⁴ This system was developed (Home Office, 2002) to measure offender risks, needs, and likelihood of reconviction. Finally, PPO work should build also on a recent National Reducing Reoffending Action Plan (Home Office, 2004f), which set out a framework under which offender pathways should be developed, both regionally and locally. The aim was to develop Local Reducing Reoffending Action Plan pathways that addressed identified risk factors. In essence, the rehabilitate-and-resettle strand aimed to

ensure that in every CDRP close partnership working is in place, with the result that seamless, effective case management is guaranteed for every PPO. (Home Office, 2004c, p. 5)

This article reviews the existing partnership working and structures in the Birmingham CDRP and identifies where gaps in service provision may hinder such seamless, effective case management, which may ultimately affect the outcome of the PPO strategy.

The Birmingham Study: Overview of Strategies

Birmingham CDRP had already identified drug treatment and offender management as a core priority when the PPO strategy was announced. The priority was managed strategically at the CDRP level by a Core Priority Group, and delivered by Local Delivery Groups, each covering an individual police Basic Command Unit area. At the time of the study, there were effectively three offender management strategies running in parallel, each with its own criteria for involvement; these were the Persistent Offender Partnership Projects (known as POPPs), Project Chrysalis (targeting street robbers), and the developing PPO strategy. Each of these strategies is described briefly in turn. The Core Priority Group had the aim to integrate them into a single coherent PPO strategy across the whole city.

POPPs

The first police-led POPPs scheme in Birmingham was set up in one police command unit area in 2002 with funding from central government and was concerned primarily with managing offenders with drug problems who either lived or offended in that area. Some other command units subsequently set up their own POPPs

schemes, often with project funding from central government. The projects targeted offenders soon to be released from prison on licence, with many referrals to the police offender managers coming from probation or prison support workers. Offenders joining the scheme signed up on a voluntary basis, although involvement was then made a condition of licence. In return, offenders were provided with assistance with finding accommodation, drug treatment programmes and help with education and training, and had to keep weekly appointments with police and probation officers. Two such projects with dedicated police offender managers were visited as part of this study. The projects had each around 10 offenders actively engaged at any one time, the majority of whom were male and aged between 25 and 35.

One of the main issues with the POPPs schemes was that funding and resources available to each Basic Command Unit differed substantially, leading to discrepancies in the services available. The schemes with external funding had dedicated teams of police and other staff for offender management, whereas in others, this role was carried out amongst competing demands on resources. Command units with fewer resources could not generate the number of referrals expected for other agencies contracted to provide services for offenders. From interviews with Core Priority Group members, there appeared to be little central coordination of the POPPs projects, with management and delivery being very much project and command unit based. There was limited cross-over between offender managers from different schemes, although the same service providers worked with projects across the whole city.

Project Chrysalis

West Midlands Police used funding from the Street Crime Initiative to establish Project Chrysalis in October 2003. This aimed to reduce reoffending by targeting all street crime offenders released from custody (Government Office for the West Midlands,⁵ 2003) across the whole force area. Participation in the project was not optional for the offenders. Rather than having single agency case management, it involved joint management of adult street crime offenders by probation, police, and prison service officers. Resettlement needs and the level of intervention required were assessed while in prison, coordinated between the three agencies (Project Chrysalis, 2004a). In each case, a joint action plan around accommodation, basic skills and education, substance misuse, health, finance, and other support was developed. Other interventions for use with higher risk offenders included anger management programmes and curfew and exclusion orders, which could be included as licence conditions where necessary.

In the 15 months since Chrysalis started in October 2003, a total of 1,079 street crime offenders were referred to the project (Project Chrysalis, 2005), far more than was originally envisaged (Project Chrysalis, 2004b). The majority of street crime offenders were male (94%) and aged between 18 and 25 (60%), so targeting a younger group than POPPs.

The Developing PPO Strategy

Unlike previous schemes, the PPO strategy did not attract additional funding. In the Home Office's early research findings (Dawson, 2005), the lack of funding has been identified as the main challenge facing the programme. For example, fixed resources has meant "emergent prolific offenders can be included only as others have PPO status withdrawn" (p. 4)—not an ideal situation. At the time of the study, the Core Priority Group for Birmingham was drafting an offender management manual setting out criteria for identifying PPOs. No doubt influenced by resource restrictions, criteria were to be more selective than for the existing POPPs and Chrysalis schemes.

Decisions about whether to include an offender on the PPO list were to be taken jointly at fortnightly Shared Priority Forums held in each Basic Command Unit area. Statutory representation on the Shared Priority Forums included the police, probation, Drug Intervention Programme team, statutory employment and training providers, and the local authority housing department. Nonstatutory agencies included those covering accommodation, mentoring, drug treatment, social skills training, employment, training, and education. Data protection and sharing is often highlighted as a problem in joint agency working (Dawson, 2005; Homes et al., 2005), and an Information Sharing Protocol was drawn up at the outset for consultation with all the partner agencies.

Problems of tracking offenders through the system were already identified in the existing POPPs and Chrysalis schemes and were being addressed through the development of a performance management framework. Ideally this would include a detailed assessment of needs and an action plan for each client, naming the agencies involved in service delivery and the lead officers responsible for this, with regular reviews scheduled into the action plan. This would sit alongside other databases—such as the Client Information Partnership System (CLIPS)—that hold information about offenders who have tested positive on arrest and have been referred onto the Drug Intervention Programme. Access to information was to be restricted to the level required by each of the partners.

The Birmingham CDRP consists of nine police Basic Command Units, and it was envisaged that each of these would identify around 30 PPOs. In February 2005 (Home Office, 2005), there were 292 offenders involved in PPO-related schemes in this CDRP area. Ninety-nine percent were male and 56% aged between 18 and 25. Nearly half (48%) were in custody, either on remand or serving a sentence, with the rest elsewhere in the criminal justice system, under active supervision in the community, or at liberty (subject to proactive police targeting or basic monitoring). In terms of drug use, under the Drug Intervention Programme, 433 people were drug tested in February 2005. Of these, 13 (3%) were PPOs, and 8 of these PPOs tested positive. (Nationally, 54% of PPOs tested positive for Class A drugs.)

Respondents Views of Offender Management in Birmingham

As noted, under the PPO strategy the aim is to provide seamless, effective case management guaranteed for every PPO. For this to occur, there needs to be a wide range of partners involved. The Shared Priority Forums should provide an opportunity for all the partners to discuss the needs of individual clients. These forums were seen as effective for the existing POPPs schemes, although meetings were sometimes regarded as dominated by the police. This was an issue particularly for the voluntary sector, as one interviewee observed, “The voluntary sector in terms of power, in terms of strength to do things, is always seen as a cheap tag-on” (Registered social landlord officer 1). If a wide range of nonstatutory agencies are consulted, then it is important that they feel their views are valued—otherwise, cooperation and participation in such meetings will not be guaranteed.

Existing offender management examples showed probation and police working effectively in partnership, where a single designated offender manager was clearly established, or where joint case management approaches were used, as in Project Chrysalis. A local authority policy officer that we interviewed thought the PPO strategy could build on this and on other offender management and public protection work more generally—for example,

There are several meetings where I think police and probation work together, the MAPPA,⁶ the public protection panels, where they actually discuss the cases that are presented to them. Probation and police really work well together in that context.

One of the key roles for the case manager is to act as a mentor for each offender. The aim is to pair an offender with a mentor so that trust can be developed with assistance and support provided by the mentor. The use of volunteer mentors has been recently evaluated in the youth justice field. The young people involved thought mentoring was a worthwhile and beneficial experience, especially in terms of improving self-confidence, although it was found that it did not have much impact on reoffending (Tarling, Davison, & Clarke, 2004). An earlier evaluation of an education and training programme in London working with adult offenders found difficulty in selling the concept of mentoring to the client group (Sarno et al., 2000). This is not to say that mentoring will not work with adults, just that some may be uncomfortable with the focused attention. Alternatively, an offender who signs up to mentoring may have unrealistic expectations of what can be done for them. Under the existing POPPs scheme, the police offender managers acted as mentors, a role that did not fit necessarily with traditional views of policing. However, within certain caveats, the appropriateness of police officers’ taking this role did not emerge as an issue, especially in schemes where the officers’ time was

ring-fenced. Of the offenders interviewed, all saw the benefits of the mentoring offered by the police offender managers; for example,

They've treated me no different, you know what I mean? Just a little bit of trust. (m2)⁷

At first I wasn't keen on the idea to be honest. . . . It took me a while to trust them. . . . I'm quite surprised with myself [as they've] become good friends. (f3)

A method of building trust in one project was to give the offender the cash to buy a weekly travel pass to get to appointments—and trusting them to do this—instead of giving them the pass directly. The offender manager reported that the majority of offenders did use the money as directed. One offender interviewed commented that the police offender managers could be contacted at any time:

They have helped me with everything. . . . I've got [the police offender manager's] phone number, although I don't need to phone him very often. . . . I can phone him at three in the morning if I want. (f4)

This offender did in fact phone the officer at three in the morning to see if she would get a reply (which she did—although the officer in question noted this wasn't to be encouraged). She also phoned at times when she said she felt desperate for immediate help and had no one else to turn to. Enthusiasm is tempered by the observation that it would not suit everyone and involvement in POPPs was voluntary, that “it wouldn't have worked if I hadn't wanted to be on it” (f4). The success—or otherwise—was also strongly dependant on the officers' personal characteristics.

We interviewed representatives of two charities providing alternative volunteer mentoring to adult offenders, focusing on particular client groups. The first focused on adults with moderate learning difficulties, along with drug-dependant offenders. The second supported the cultural, familial, and other needs of Black and other minority ethnic prisoners. At first, this seemed a duplication of effort; however, this interviewee thought they had a level of trust that may be missing, for example, between police offender managers and certain Black and other minority ethnic groups.

A consequence of a partnership approach is that the offenders themselves have to attend a large number of meetings, and one project provided diaries for clients to keep track of these. Although some of the offenders interviewed had no problem with this and welcomed activity to keep them busy during the day, it did cause difficulties for others:

There's too many appointments with too many different people; if you miss two appointments, you get breached. (m6)

The National Probation Service has increasingly valued tough enforcement, as demonstrated by stricter enforcement of breaches following the introduction of

National Standards (see Hearnden & Millie, 2003, 2004). Keeping a number of appointments is an unavoidable part of this. Offenders have additionally regular appointments with their police offender manager. Some difficulties can be minimised by simple, coordinated case management measures—perhaps holding joint meetings or not arranging meetings in different areas on the same day. In dealing with such a potentially problematic clientele, some discretion may be needed to reward good progress, whilst punishing nonattendance in ways that retains offenders on the scheme (Hearnden & Millie, p. 56).

As noted, there are certain direct and indirect risk factors that are thought to increase the risk of offending. The study looked particularly at the delivery of rehabilitative services addressing drug treatment, employment training and education, and housing. Each of these factors is discussed in turn in the context of delivering the PPO strategy.

Drug Treatment Services

Drug treatment services across Birmingham were managed through a Drug Action Team partnership, which was developing a local Drug Intervention Programme to provide coherent treatment and other services for offenders with drug problems across the city, including PPOs. There were three main official pathways into drug treatment for PPOs in the city: on arrest, when in prison, or on release from prison. In practice, referrals to the main drug services provider were more random, coming from probation, the police, prison support workers, Drug Intervention Programme teams, or from the Shared Priority Forums. Lack of coordination may have meant some PPOs did not receive the service they needed:

If I was absolutely honest with you . . . could I put my hand on my heart and say that every PPO who had a drug treatment need was receiving drug treatment? The answer would have to be “I don’t know at this time.” (Drug Intervention Programme officer 1)

Another concern was in relation to different partners being fully aware of what drug treatment services were available—for example,

Not all the police offender managers realise that they can access the drug treatment services that quick. It’s often the ones that are managed by the probation more that have access to the treatment path. So there’s confusion really. (Drug Intervention Programme officer 1)

All of the offenders we talked to had drug problems and were receiving help to overcome this, including home visits, and regular drug testing. Whilst there were delays for some in accessing treatment under the existing POPPs scheme, access was still comparatively prompt. One offender observed, “I know if I need it I’ve got the

support. If it comes down to medical support, before I'd have to wait 6 months; it's only 2 weeks this time" (m6).

According to Home Office figures for February 2005, up to 40% of PPOs may not require drug treatment services at all. Many of the agency interviewees had only dealt with offenders accessing wider services through drug treatment programmes, although service provision is intended to be the same for all PPOs regardless of drug treatment needs—as noted by a local authority policy officer:

There are schemes in place that actually provide a mechanism to move drug offenders into independent living. . . . The non-drug user, unfortunately, is unlikely to receive that.

Employment, Training, and Education

The second risk factor to be considered was the availability of employment, training, and education opportunities. The provision of such opportunities for PPOs was being reviewed. In Birmingham, a national charity provided assessment and delivery of services around basic skills, education, training, and eventually employment for offenders under the PPO strategy. This charity accepted clients with existing drug problems—who may have led more chaotic lifestyles—which other agencies would not necessarily accept. Referrals were made when a PPO was released from prison; however, referrals were not always being made directly.

It's a real struggle to get probation officers to see the value in referral and supporting that referral into employment, training and education. . . . We're not getting referrals through, it's as simple as that. (Employment, training, and education support officer 1)

We can't generate in any way referrals, or in any way influence what's happening. We're dependent on what comes through from the police and there's no consistency basically, they all seem to manage it in different ways. (Employment, training, and education support officer 2)

Guidelines are clearly needed to ensure that referrals are made via the correct pathway. Police offender managers indicated that they made direct referrals to employers or other agencies due to frustrations about the time taken to assess needs and find suitable employment or training. It was thought that clarity of roles to avoid duplication of effort was important and to make the best use of available expertise.

The problem is that we are the experts in education; they are the experts in criminal justice. . . . We wouldn't advise someone about getting treatment or we wouldn't advise someone about their licence; we leave that to the experts and I think maybe that could be a good thing for other people to do as well. (Employment, training, and education support officer 3)

PPOs often followed some form of work or training whilst in prison, and often this was not sustained when they leave.

We pick people up who've probably started some sort of course in prison; they come out, and there's no care plan that travels with them. We've got very dependent on the client's understanding of what he's had and trying to pick that up again and it all seems to be lost. (Employment, training, and education support officer 2)

Although there was communication between offender managers and the prison support workers within prisons, there could be scope for a more consistent joined-up approach. This would have to be implemented on a national level to include offenders detained in prisons away from home.

According to the 2003 Resettlement Survey of England and Wales (Niven & Stewart, 2005), just 30% of surveyed prisoners had employment, training, or education arranged on release. Only half of these opportunities arose through using voluntary or statutory agencies, including the Prison Service (the remainder through personal contacts). Of the offenders we interviewed, none had employment arranged on release, although all were referred to the main national charity employment, training, and education provider, or other similar agencies, usually within the first 2 to 3 weeks after release. All said they wanted to work or do some form of training, primarily to keep them busy and out of trouble, although only two of the six were actually looking. The apparent suitability of opportunities was an issue raised, with one offender recalling a computer course he had been put on, "I didn't want to do it so I knew it wouldn't work" (m1).

Housing

The third risk factor was the availability and accessibility of suitable housing postrelease. The majority of those surveyed in the 2003 Resettlement Survey (Niven & Stewart, 2005) said they had accommodation arranged on release from prison. However, just 19% of all prisoners, and a third with no accommodation arranged on release, received help in looking (p. 3). In Birmingham there were a number of agencies that assisted with the housing needs of prolific offenders. The most obvious was the local authority Housing Department, which had developed policy for rehousing high-risk offenders, linked to offender management in terms of public protection structures and the PPO strategy. Other provision was mainly via registered social landlords, bail, and other hostel provision, and the private rental sector. Effective partnership working has been important for housing issues to be resolved. However, a general lack of available housing was identified as one of the main problems facing the PPO strategy.

We like to go in [prison] at least 3 months before they're released, as that gives us time to get the forms for [the local drug services provider] if drugs is an issue. [However], the main reason is basically the housing because there's absolutely no housing whatsoever. So we need to get them on to the list as soon as we can. (Police offender manager 1)

This problem was similarly recognised by the housing providers, as one housing officer observed, "There just isn't the property available" (Registered social landlord officer 1). However, he also noted that the police sometimes have a demand mentality leading to frustration. Private landlords had been approached to try and fill the gap, but according to one police officer, "Many [private landlords] are dropping out of the scheme as they do not want offenders living in their properties" (Police officer 1).

A further issue raised was the different conditions on accommodation. For example, one offender interviewed could keep his hostel place if unemployed but would have to move elsewhere with work. Also, this individual, who saw the benefits of weekly meetings with his police offender manager, did not want officers to visit him at the hostel as he thought other residents would assume he was an informer.⁸ Many PPOs will have other multiple needs, particularly around drug use and mental health issues. This vulnerability can result in chaotic lifestyles and unpredictable behaviour for some. Another offender interviewed at a bail hostel had acute problems obeying rules, feeling intimidated by staff, and being aggressive toward staff. In her own words,

It's doing my head in being here. . . . The staff here just wind me up . . . if I don't let it out, I just get even more wound up. (f4)

She wanted to move; however, experience of such cases can have a greater impact on the willingness of other housing providers to take on PPOs in general.

The Birmingham Study: Gap Analysis

There were many positive aspects about the provision of services for prolific offenders within the Birmingham CDRP, and the development of the new PPO strategy would build on this. There was evidence of effective partnership working between agencies at a local level and offenders benefiting from the high level of case management support provided by offender managers. In addition, many of the management structures and referral processes needed for the new strategy were already well developed (through Project Chrysalis and the POPPs schemes) compared to other areas with less experience in focusing on intensive offender management. The offenders participating in existing projects were generally satisfied with their involvement in the programme and the level of support they received. However, this study uncovered a number of gaps in the existing delivery systems and processes that needed to be resolved to implement a coherent strategy.

Primarily there appeared to be confusion amongst some interviewees about the nature of the PPO strategy and how this integrated with existing offender management programmes. Alongside this, problems may arise if partners work within different geographical boundaries, although this could be resolved by careful planning through the CDRP. The main issues to be resolved for a coordinated PPO strategy were identified as

- effective communication;
- clarity of roles and partnership working;
- access to services (and improved links to work already done in prison);
- consistent identification, tracking, and referral of PPOs;
- monitoring of performance; and
- a clear exit strategy for offenders.

Although hardly a new observation (e.g., Underdown, 1998), effective communication is needed both within and between agencies for case management to be effective. Communication is also essential for different agencies to understand the strategy and what is expected from them. It was apparent that some of those working to deliver offender management services did not necessarily see the overarching PPO strategy as having much impact; they would carry on with what they would have been doing anyway. Others did not see it as being relevant at all. It is clearly important to communicate the changes to those involved in delivery.

For effective case management, use of resources, and partnership working, clear guidance is needed over the roles and expectations of each agency in managing and supporting prolific offenders. Related to this is concern over access to services; for instance, measures should be taken to ensure offenders without drug problems have equal access to relevant services as those with drug problems. Access needs also to be equal across different police Basic Command Unit areas. The difference in scale and resources available previously in different Basic Command Units meant that more people could be identified and targeted in some areas than in others—the number of PPOs targeted and resources channelled into PPO management ought to be consistent with the scale of the problem in each area. This lack of consistency led to some confusion about where offender management responsibility lay.

The one thing that seems to confuse is when someone lives in one area, offends in another area, spends time in custody, then comes out and moves to another area, perhaps with a relative. . . . I do think it causes confusion across the [Basic Command Units] as to who should actually have him. (Employment, training, and education officer 2)

The PPO strategy is designed to follow targeted offenders both within and outside of prison, and as noted, agencies were often unaware of the training or treatment an offender had already received in custody. A care plan could be introduced covering support in prison that, on release, can be passed on to support agencies to provide

continuity and consistency, and hopefully avoid duplication of effort. Identifying PPOs at all stages is important in ensuring they receive the intended treatment and services and can then be tracked. For example, there should be mechanisms in place so that when an arresting officer or arrest referral worker is dealing with an offender, it is clear whether they have been identified as a PPO.

One of the things that we've got to get really clear is that at this time the offender is not always identified as a PPO or a non-PPO in the custody suite with the arrest referral worker. Hence, you can get them going off down the wrong route. (Drug Intervention Programme officer 1)

The local Drug Intervention Programme was being restructured to provide a single point of contact from which offenders would be referred to the appropriate services and then tracked. It was anticipated that this would be extended to include prolific offenders not receiving drug treatment. A single referral form, delivered within the terms of an agreed process to the service providers, would ensure all relevant information is shared—dependant on an agreed protocol.

The success, or otherwise, of the PPO strategy will depend on the targeted offenders actually turning up for appointments and responding to the treatments and services provided. Cooperation of offenders within the POPPs projects was relatively good—the offenders were an older cohort (aged 25 or older) and had signed up to the scheme on a voluntary basis. From the interviews, it appeared that they had decided they wanted to change their lifestyle and get out the cycle of reoffending and were willing to try and accept the help available to do this. The same level of cooperation may not be found with a younger target group or if intensive offender management is compulsory.

Monitoring should therefore be in place to flag up nonattendance by offenders and whether any follow-up work to re-engage offenders is needed. Whilst not always popular with practitioners, performance measures or targets may be useful to produce tangible measures of success or pointers for further development. This should, of course, be supported by appropriate analytical support, although the lack of additional funding for the PPO strategy may hinder this. The performance measures attached to the PPO strategy will develop as the strategy develops; early suggestions (Home Office, 2005) included the proportion of PPOs completing their community order, the proportion needing drug treatment receiving and completing the course, and the proportion with accommodation on release from prison. Whilst all these measures are potentially useful in pointing toward success, if the aim of the strategy is to reduce reoffending and ultimately reduce crime rates, then analysis of reconviction rates and local crime rates will also be helpful. As the PPO strategy is very resource intensive, an assessment of cost-effectiveness may be also beneficial, although ironically the lack of additional funding may rule this out.

Offenders remained on POPPs projects for between 3 and 6 months—although this was extended if there was an obvious need for further assistance. For the PPO

scheme, there has been nationally less consideration given to deselection than to selection to PPO status, and practitioners have expressed concern about the consequences of offenders leaving the scheme (Dawson, 2005). Although the length of time spent working with PPOs needs to be time limited, we think there should also be some flexibility, while taking account of the needs of other partners. Nonetheless, the criteria for removing an offender should be as clear as for identifying who should be included.

Conclusion

The thinking behind the PPO strategy is that by providing a premium service to the most prolific offenders, reoffence and overall crime rates will be reduced. More specifically, the rehabilitate-and-resettle strand of the strategy aims to provide seamless, effective case management guaranteed to every PPO. This is certainly commendable. However, this study found that if the new strategy was going to build on existing practice, certain structural and managerial issues needed to be resolved.

The work in Birmingham was certainly ahead of other areas because of the city's history of prolific offender partnership working. However, the systems in place were not perfect, and careful management will be needed to ensure that the lack of funding associated with the PPO programme does not hinder improvements. Issues were chiefly around effective communication and having clarity of roles across the partnership. Better linkages across agencies, especially between work done inside and outside of prison, will be important for any prolific offender strategy to work effectively. For the PPO programme, this will also assist effective identification of suitable pathways and tracking of individual offenders through the system. One interviewee suggested a care plan to keep track of what rehabilitative and other work individual PPOs had done with all agencies. This seems sensible and could be managed by the dedicated offender manager.

Access to suitable housing was a real concern, and more proactive involvement of alternative housing agencies would be beneficial whilst we recognise the difficulties in selling the idea to some agencies. A further issue was equality of access to rehabilitative and other services for all PPOs. It seemed that those without drug problems did not always get the same service as those with drug problems. For this, improvements were needed in performance monitoring. Monitoring was also required to assist scheme evaluation. If the ultimate aim was to reduce reoffending and crime rates, then analysis of reconviction and crime rates was needed.

The length of time spent on rehabilitative work with PPOs needs to be time limited; however, we think there was scope for some flexibility of involvement. The relational aspect of case management appeared to be critical and some more vulnerable offenders seemed to benefit from continued contact with their offender manager beyond the official end of the scheme. As this was a small study, further research

would be needed to confirm this. Funding restrictions may also limit ongoing support. What was certain was that an exit strategy was required with clear rehabilitation and resettlement criteria for offenders leaving the PPO programme.

Notes

1. Along with dynamic risk factors there are static risk factors, such as criminal history, which cannot be altered (for a useful summary see Harper, Man, Taylor, & Niven, 2005).
2. Known as CARAT workers—Counselling, Advice, Referral, Assessment and Throughcare.
3. Criminal Justice System of England and Wales—interdepartmental publication.
4. The equivalent for younger than 18 is known as Asset.
5. The Government Office for the West Midlands coordinates the delivery of Government policy in the region. England and Wales is divided into nine English Government Office regions and the Welsh Assembly.
6. MAPPA: Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements for public protection from dangerous offenders (see Erol & Millie, 2005b).
7. Each offender has been coded *m* or *f* for gender and numbered 1 to 6.
8. Homes, Walmsley, & Debidin (2005) found that offenders preferred having meetings in probation offices rather than at police stations because of the risk that others would think they were still offending.

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