

## **Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee review of Re-offending February 2012**

### **Introduction**

The Local Government Act 2000 established scrutiny as a means of holding the Council's Cabinet and Executive to account. However, it also intended that scrutiny should also be a 'forward looking' and gather evidence to inform policy development on improving service delivery. The latter role has not been as well developed as the former.

In October 2011 the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Re-offending by adopting a 'field based' approach using small groups of members to:

- Meet with 'key' agencies from the Community Safety Partnership to gather and analyse evidence on how offenders were being managed to reduce Re-offending.
- Critically analyse and challenge the evidence to see how far it met the needs of offenders; and
- Make recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet and Community Safety Partnership for changes to future policy to improve service delivery.

Given that this review was the first attempt to engage ALL members of the committee in going 'out into the field' to meet with agencies and offenders, I have been impressed with the level of commitment and enthusiasm from councillors and host agencies. The agencies have provided information willingly in an open and transparent manner. Without this the review would not have been possible. Councillors, for their part, have provided robust and critical challenge to ways of working and listened carefully to suggestions for improving partnership working. In this context, the views of a group of offenders have been most helpful and informative.

This scrutiny review has been undertaken with a simple, clear terms of reference to guide Members and partnership agencies. Most importantly, the recommendations made in this report are both practical and achievable of being delivered in a continuing climate of limited resources.

**Councillor Brian Sangha  
Chair of Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee**

## **Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee review of Re-offending – February 2012**

### **1 Background**

Reducing re-offending has been a statutory duty of Community Safety Partnerships (CSP) since 1 April 2010.

Dartford and Gravesham Safety Agreement includes reducing re-offending as one of its cross cutting themes woven into its priorities.

Each quarter the Ministry of Justice produces local re-offending rates based on NI18 data. This measures performance in reducing re-offending by comparing the 'predicted' and 'actual' rate of re-offending (see Appendix 1).

Kent and Medway are one of the consistently poor performers and amongst the bottom in the country.

The most recent figures (February 2012) show that Kent's re-offending rate was higher than predicted.

At its meeting on 12 October 2011 Gravesham's Crime and Disorder Committee undertook to carry out a review of Re-offending under the following terms of reference:

- To visit the identified agency and examine how that agency, in the context of the Community Safety Partnership, manages re-offenders i.e. supports them and helps to stop re-offending.
- The aim of the visit/ meeting should be to look critically at methods, resources and most importantly outcomes i.e. what works and what doesn't.
- Members might wish to look for examples of 'Best Practice' to see if that is being applied. This should include looking at how best practice is shared i.e. do agencies learn from others and apply this to their way of working.

The review would examine how re-offending and the management of re-offenders was carried out by:

1. The prison service;
2. The probation service;
3. The police.

An evidence gathering session was set up with each of these agencies.

## 2 Evidence

### 2.1 HMP Stanford Hill

The visit was hosted by Louisa Dordoy, Head of Resettlement and Rehabilitation Services. The councillors met and had very informative discussions with a number of Louisa's officers and peer advisors.

Coming out of these discussions were 4 themes to reduce re-offending:-

1. Become advocates for the employment of serving and ex-offenders.  
**Employment reduces re-offending by one third**
2. Supporting housing of ex-offenders. **Accommodation reduces re-offending by 25%**
3. Mentoring
4. Focus on rehabilitation/ reducing re-offending rather than catch and convict

Expanding on each of these themes the staff put forward a number of suggestions as to how this might be achieved

#### **Become advocates for the employment of serving and ex-offenders.**

- "By asking your planning department to add clauses for 'guaranteed interview schemes' or a percentage of 'work placements' for ex-offenders for all new developments, particularly supermarket chains as National companies allow more opportunities for offenders to re-locate in different areas if they so wish.
- Leading the way and trialling serving offenders in positions within your authority or personal business enterprises as Sami suggested, either on grounds maintenance or customer service or IT roles, we have a number of skills sets available that any employer could benefit from."

#### **Support housing of re-offenders**

- "Through your housing policies
- Through your points system and choice based letting arrangements
- Through advocating an increase in supported accommodation schemes within your Borough where possible
- Through using serving offenders to assist in regenerating derelict properties (although I understand you currently have none in this category but perhaps something for the future)"

#### **Mentoring**

- "Outside mentoring for those on release or on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) (business or other specialisms based)
- Through the Gate mentoring for those with chaotic lifestyles who are most at risk of re-offending
- Official Prison Visitors scheme, which provides mentors to those in prison who have no family or support networks"

## **Focus on rehabilitation/reducing re-offending rather than catch and convict**

- “For this we need to be very broad thinking in our endeavours as we have offenders who come from far and wide within the Kent jails, many of whom may not originate from, or be returning to, the Gravesham area. We would ask that you consider working with all of our men on merit (rather than planned discharge address) whilst they reside with us here on Sheppey, and urge other Councillors from other Boroughs to do the same, so that we may offer chances to all of our men equally when it comes to being out on temporary licence and having access to any mentoring or work experience scheme we may put in place together.
- Allow members of my team to come and present to your colleagues/ staff/ associates on rehabilitation so that we may spread the word and increase the number of advocates for this topic.”

The Councillors also spoke with peer advisors Stuart, Sami and Jo and asked:

### **What would help to break the cycle of re-offending once you have left prison?**

Jo said that “It is up to the individual and the choices they make but education and having interests really help. However, I think training should not be given at the start of a sentence, better to have it towards the end so you can remember it.”

Stuart added that “We need outside organisations to engage with us and provide opportunities in order to restore our hope and self esteem.”

### **How useful would it be for an ex-offender to have an independent ‘mentor’ who provides a network in the community?**

Jo agreed that this would be a valuable tool. Stuart felt that trust and public perception are massive issues/barriers so a mentor would be good. Both Sami and Stuart thought that perhaps the council could initiate a pilot mentoring scheme and they would be more than happy to visit the council to put forward this idea.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1. The Council should consider setting up a ‘pilot voluntary scheme’ in which Councillors become ‘community mentors’ for offenders seeking employment, housing and support to reduce potential for Re-offending.**

**Recommendation 2: The Community Safety Partnership should engage with the management of ‘Bluewater’ Shopping centre to encourage offenders to be considered for permanent and seasonal employment.**

## **2.2 Community Safety Unit - Gravesham**

In 2009 Kent Probation and Kent Police set up 6 Integrated Offender Management Units (IOM) with other partners including the Youth Offending Service, the Drug Interventions Programme and prisons. The introduction of IOM units provides a real opportunity to utilise and share partner’s expertise to identify and manage offenders.

One of the aims of IOM units is to “Reduce crime and reoffending, improve public confidence in the criminal justice system and tackle the social exclusion of offenders and their families”.

In November 2011 IOM's were replaced with Community Safety Units, their aims remain the same with a clear focus on rehabilitation and the prevention of re-offending.

Members of the committee met with the following members of the Community Safety Unit - Gravesham: Sarah Watson – Joint Family Management Programme Coordinator  
Kam Condolla –Resettlement Officer, Sgt Jim Walker – North Kent Police.

The key message from the meeting was that early intervention and improved information sharing between agencies is an integral factor in the prevention of re-offending.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 3: The Community Safety Partnership should actively encourage enhanced data sharing between agencies to ensure early intervention and prevention of re-offending e.g. GBC Housing service attend regular meetings with the CSU to better understand accommodation needs of offenders.**

### **2.3 Probation Service**

Members of the committee met with Maurice O'Reilly, Director North Kent, Liz Simpson, Community Payback Manager and Karen Dorrell.

Dartford and Gravesham Probation caseload figures showed that there were

- In Custody – 13 Women and 250 men
- In Community – 51 women and 355 men
- Community payback – 10 women and 97 men

Kent probation delivers a range of interventions directly targeted at reducing offending behaviour including Integrated Offender Management (IOM), Child protection (CP) and Specified Activity Requirements.

Lack of accommodation, lack of employment opportunities and drug and alcohol issues were common problems when tackling re-offending. The probation service was looking to improve its already good working relationship with Gravesham's housing department.

The lack of accommodation made it difficult for offenders to move out of their area and their low income meant that they were limited to the cheaper part of town which didn't help them in changing their ways.

The discussions touched on mentoring. The probation service does offer mentoring but the offender has to be motivated to change. It was suggested that the councillors themselves could be mentors.

On the subject of employment the railway companies were happy to take offenders and the council was well placed to influence local employers such as Bluewater.

The probation service was looking to setting up a re-offending sub-committee as part of the CSP with the council, police and probation taking the lead.

Karen Dorrell spoke about Prospect which was a project targeting women offenders and had been piloted in Medway. This project was soon to start up in Gravesham. Premises had been secured and it should be up and running in April 2012. This project sought to offer a holistic approach and support network to address behaviour and reduce the feeling of isolation of women offenders.

The facility would be also available to women offenders from Dartford and linked in with the Community Safety Unit (CSU) at Gravesham.

Liz Simpson spoke about Community Payback whereby courts have the power to sentence offenders of certain crimes to undertake between 40 and 300 hours of Community Payback. This work is unpaid and demanding that is aimed at giving something to local communities and forcing offenders to repay the community for the wrong they have done.

Liz was looking for more placements in the Gravesham area and suggestions included setting up a lunch club and working with wardens and faith groups.

Overall coming out of the discussions were

- Setting up a re-offending sub group within the CSP
- The council take on its community leadership role and work with employers and the voluntary sector.
- The council to look at itself and see what opportunities there were for it to work with offenders
- Councillor's themselves acting as mentors.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 4: The Community Safety Partnership should consider asking Dartford and Gravesham Councils to make more use of the Community Payback Scheme to undertake voluntary work on 'short lived' specific projects which do NOT replace permanent employees.**

**Recommendation 5: The Community Safety Partnership engage with the voluntary sector to explore opportunities to extend the Community Payback Scheme to assist community groups.**

**Recommendation 6: The Community Safety Partnership considers proactively supporting new initiatives aimed at reducing re-offending, such as the 'Prospect' project which is targeted at female offenders.**

## APPENDIX 3

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee Working Group – Review into re-offending  
Visit to HMP Stanford Hill on 24 January 2012  
Interview with Peer Advisors & Staff

**Present:**

Peer Advisors: Stuart, Sami, Jo.

Prison Staff: Louisa Dordoy - Head of Resettlement, Sean Talbot – Senior Resettlement Officer, Richard - Working Out Scheme Manager, Rose – Employment Training Officer, Kris – Accommodation Officer, Keith – Children and Families Officer, Leslie Tribal Careers Advisor.

Cllrs: Senja Compton, Colin Dennis, Sara Langdale, Brian Sangha, Derek Shelbrooke

GBC Officers: Wale Adetoro, Chris Wakeford.

**Key Points identified for the prevention of re-offending:**

- **Community Leadership:** The Council has a role to play in promoting and supporting ex-offenders in communities and changing public perceptions.
- **Education & Employment:** Outside organisations/businesses need to engage with ex-offenders and provide opportunities in education and employment to restore hope/self esteem and prevent re-offending.
- **Accommodation:** Securing accommodation before release is key in the prevention of re-offending.
- **Mentoring:** Ex-offenders would benefit from an independent 'mentor' who provides a network in the community.
- **Reformation & Rehabilitation:** There is too much emphasis on 'catch and convict' instead of reformation and rehabilitation of ex-offenders.
- **Sentence Sequencing:** The sequencing of sentences needs to be reviewed. Training is pivotal to employment and should be concentrated at the end of a sentence rather than at the start.

**Key Questions:**

**What would help to break the cycle of re-offending once you have left prison?**

**Jo:** It is up to the individual and the choices they make but education and having interests really help. However, I think training should not be given at the start of a sentence, better to have it towards the end so you can remember it.

**Stuart:** We need outside organisations to engage with us and provide opportunities in order to restore our hope and self esteem.

**How useful would it be for an ex-offender to have an independent 'mentor' who provides a network in the community?**

**Jo:** Yes, it would be a valuable tool.

**Stuart:** Trust and public perception are massive issues/barriers so a mentor would be good.

**Cllr Sangha:** I think Community networks are very important. Ex-offenders need support to get back into the community. Without support, more money is spent catching and placing re-offenders back in prison. I think the Council could promote support and connect people.

**Sami:** Perhaps the Council could consider employing an ex-offender to help break down the barriers/perceptions. Negative views need to be removed; a sentence should not determine a person's future.

**Stuart:** Perhaps a pilot mentoring scheme could be initiated through the Council. We would be happy to visit Gravesham Borough Council and present the idea.

**Cllr Sangha:** We'll take those ideas back.

#### **Is it hard to find accommodation for ex-offenders?**

**Kris:** We do struggle to find accommodation; most Councils say there is nothing available.

**Wale:** We prioritise housing needs for local people and usually ask for 28 days notice so we can look at availability within the Borough. We encourage our tenants to give up their tenancy when they go into custody and then we find somewhere else in the Borough when they're released.

#### **How do you work with families in the resettlement process?**

**Keith:** We have a six day course that covers: Communication, Childcare and Finances. We encourage families to come together and talk. We have a course on parenting skills called 'Distant Dads' and run a 'Storybook Dads' course where a father can record a story for his child. We also have 'Family Days'.

#### **When people are released back into society, do you assess their progress?**

**Richard:** The National Probation Service do checks and carry out risk assessments. The Probation Service is very stretched, temporary release is based on a huge raft of risk assessments. Bureaucracy can stall an ex-offenders progress in society.



Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee Working Group – Review into re-offending  
Meeting with Community Safety Unit - Gravesham on 17 April 2012

**Present:**

Cllr Brian Sangha  
Cllr Lesley boycott  
Cllr Rob Halpin

Sarah Watson – Joint Family Management Programme Coordinator  
Kam Condolla –Resettlement Officer  
Sgt Jim Walker – North Kent Police  
Chris Wakeford – Committee Services officer (Scrutiny)  
Ravy Sarin-Busbridge – Committee & Scrutiny Assistant

The representatives from each agency gave a background of their involvement in regards to offenders and how their agency is involved in preventing re offending. It was concluded that the early intervention and the information sharing between agencies would be and is an integral factor into offenders re offending.

The following points were raised:

A good foundation laid for offenders on release of custody – on the basis that the offender is committed to change and progression.

- Housing

Many offenders have has previous problems with holding a tenancy and rent arrears. On release of custody, when approaching housing needs their application more than likely is rejected due to intentionally making themselves homeless due to rent arrears.

There is limited supported housing in the borough in comparison to the number of offenders being released. Offenders are resorted to sofa surfing leading to re offending in time as a result. Sensitive rehousing for ex-offenders so as to ensure ex-offenders are not exposed to crime and drug use to commit again.

A change or development in housing policy in relation to offenders following the localism act?

- Employment

Many employers would not consider ex-offenders with previous convictions.

- Early intervention of potential offenders before they offend.

Greater resources and funding should be made available for prevention and intervention as well as the rehabilitation and re settlement of offenders.

- Joint agency meetings – information sharing

- Educating young people in relation to drugs and crime in schools

Kent police currently attend local schools in the area to educate school children on issues such as drugs, crime, knife and gun culture crimes, prison; tailored programmes in accordance to the age years and locality problems.

- Training on tenancy management and rent arrears either to ex-offenders and/or to agencies.
- Education and training, life enhancement to new release ex-offenders

From the review the following recommendations should be considered to facilitate in the prevention of re offending.

- Improved Information sharing between agencies.
- Housing to consider attending CSU meetings to better understand accommodation and offenders issues