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British Journal of Community Justice
 ©2016 Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield
 ISSN 1475-0279
 Vol. 14(3): 89-96



COMMUNITY JUSTICE FILES 40

Compiled by Ross Little, De Montfort University

Quality and Impact inspection - The effectiveness of probation work in the north of London (HMIP)

A Quality and Impact inspection report into the effectiveness of probation work in the north of London has been published by HM Inspectorate of Probation in mid-December. This is their first inspection of adult probation services in the capital since 2014, when services were managed by one organisation, the London Probation Trust. On this occasion, they inspected in eight boroughs in the north of London. The London CRC manages 11% of the total 258,748 people subject to probation supervision across England and Wales.

The foreword by Dame Glenys Stacey, the HM Chief Inspector of Probation, notes that "Probation services in London have long struggled with high workloads, and workload pressures have been a regular feature in the most notorious of cases where a supervised individual has committed a Serious Further Offence." Dame Stacey wastes no time in stating that they found the work of the Community Rehabilitation Company, owned by MTCnovo, to be poor.

Some CRC staff were found to be working "heroically" in difficult circumstances, sometimes working long hours. However they were often 'fire-fighting' rather than enabled to deliver a professional service consistently or sufficiently well. The National Probation Service (NPS) was found to be delivering services better, but with plenty of room for improvement.

With respect to overall recommendations, the report considers how well probation partners were in protecting the public, reducing re-offending and in relation to how well service users abided by their sentence. The work of the CRC was found to be poor in all respects, with fewer than half the service users in their sample complying with their sentence. In contrast, in this respect the performance of the NPS was found to be good. The NPS performance in the other two respects (protecting the public and reducing re-offending) was found to be mixed. The following recommendations for probation partners are made, the following being taken directly from the report (p.11):

The Community Rehabilitation Company and National Probation Service should:

1. Produce easily accessible information to enable all staff to make swift contact with relevant colleagues in each.

2. Require all staff to work together to solve individual problems and focus on the desired outcome.

The Community Rehabilitation Company should:

3. Make sure that all functional departments prioritise the operational delivery to service users.
4. Obtain and regularly scrutinise relevant management information to support effective operational delivery.
5. Make every effort to reduce caseloads to manageable levels, setting clear priorities for casework activities.
6. Manage the impact of sickness absence effectively.
7. Provide all staff with supervision and support in accordance with experience and workload.
8. Procure sufficient resource within the supply chain to deliver consistent services to all service users.
9. Provide the rate card to the NPS without further delay.

The National Probation Service should:

10. Make sure that all work is sufficiently focused on public protection.
11. Improve the quality of information at allocation from the NPS court staff to the CRC.

Some media reports, notably in The Guardian, have interpreted the report as highlighting how the privatisation of probation has put the public more at risk.

To read the report by HMIP in full:

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/12/North-of-London-QI.pdf>

Proven Re-offending Statistics

The latest proven re-offending statistics were published by the Ministry of Justice at the end of October for both adult and juvenile offenders, including both those released from custody and those who received a community sentence in 2014.

The figures are for 2014 and therefore predate the split of the probation service in the Transforming Rehabilitation initiative.

Adult offenders had a proven reoffending rate of 24.5%, representing a small decrease of 0.9 percentage points compared to the previous 12 months and also a fall of 0.9 percentage points since 2004. This rate has been fairly flat since 2004 fluctuating between 24.4% and 25.4%.

Adult offenders with 11 or more previous offences have a higher reoffending rate than those with no previous offences: 45.2% compared to 7.5%.

The reoffending rate of adults starting a court order in 2014 - all of whom were supervised by public probation at the time - was 32.6%, a fall of 4.8 percentage points since 2004, and a fall of 1.7 percentage points compared to the previous 12 months.

To read the Proven Re-offending Statistics Quarterly Bulletin (January to December 2014) by the Ministry of Justice:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/563185/proven-reoffending-2014.pdf

Former offenders face 'cliff edge' in support when leaving prison

A report by the Work and Pensions Committee states that government's "own assessment of the prison system is that it fails to rehabilitate criminals or prevent them from reoffending, and the cost to the taxpayer of reoffending stands at around £15 billion per year in the criminal justice system alone."

Ministers giving evidence to the committee admitted that there is no one person in government responsible for getting prison leavers into work. The Committee says there is "no clear strategy for how different agencies, in different prisons, should work together to achieve the common goal of getting ex-offenders into work."

HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons did not encounter a single prisoner who had been helped into employment by Through the Gate provision when conducting research on resettlement services for short-term prisoners.

The Committee recommends that:

- All prisons be required to demonstrate strong links with employers, including local businesses.
- All prisons be required to offer workshop courses, apprenticeships or similar employment opportunities with real employer.
- JobCentres should have a specified person who specialises in helping people who have been in prison into employment.

The Committee welcomes moves to "ban the box", removing the initial criminal record disclosure section on job applications, for the majority of civil service roles. It says this should be extended to all public bodies, with exclusions only for roles where it would not be appropriate. Ban the Box does not oblige employers to hire ex-offenders but it increases the chance that they will consider them. The Government should also consider a statutory "ban the box" for all employers.

According to the Rt. Hon Frank Field MP, Chair of the Committee, Government has announced it will publish a new strategy in early 2017 for getting more ex-offenders into employment and this marks welcome progress.

To read more about the Work and Pensions Committee's report:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2015/support-for-ex-offenders-report-published-16-17/>

Charlie Taylor's Review of Youth Justice and the Government's Response

The youth justice sector have been waiting for the publication of Charlie Taylor's review of the system since early Summer and then two significant reports were published in one day. Monday 12th December saw the publication of Taylor's review and the associated response from government. Since then, the sector has been comparing the ex-headteacher's recommendations with the government's take on what will actually change.

Taylor's report is clear in its view that almost all causes of childhood offending lie beyond the youth justice system. The government claims it is "implementing [Taylor's] key recommendations by putting education at the heart of youth custody and improving the provision of health care to tackle the factors that increase the risk of offending."

In terms of custody, Taylor recommends fundamental change to the current youth custody system with education, health and welfare services integrated and at its core. He wants to see high quality education and improved mental health services embedded in custodial institutions, with therapeutic environments with psychologically informed approaches across youth custody. He recommends a radical overhaul of the youth custodial estate with the creation of a network of Secure Schools to replace YOIs and STCs. These smaller custodial establishments of up to 60-70 places should be located in the area they serve with considerably improved education, health and behavioural management services provided.

The Government has committed to piloting two secure schools initially, although there is little detail about what secure school will look like and no time frame is given. Organisations such as the National Association for Youth Justice (NAYJ) have stated that the government would have been better off investing in the least harmful part of existing secure estate, Secure Children's Homes.

The Government's planned reforms to the existing custodial estate aim to tackle violence and improve outcomes by:

- Putting education and health at the heart of youth custody by developing a new pre-apprenticeship training pathway starting in custody.
- Empowering governors "so that they can better help to reform young people".
- Increasing the number of staff on the operational frontline in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) by 20%.
- Developing additional specialist support units with a higher staff to young person ratio'.
- Introducing a new Youth Justice Officer role.
- Each young person will have a dedicated officer who is responsible for "challenging them supporting them to reform".

It is unclear from the Government's response how many youth justice officers will be appointed with the £20million set aside for these reforms.

Recommendations by Taylor on diverting children pleading guilty from the youth court to a Scottish-style panel system would require primary legislation and will not be prioritized by the government in this Parliament. The Government would though like to make the Youth Court more "problem solving" and will see if they can develop a new review mechanism within the Youth Rehabilitation Order before the next Parliament.

The Government does not appear to be convinced about changing the funding arrangements or the statutory framework around Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). They are going to look at how they can remove "barriers to innovation" without changing funding structure or statutory framework.

The Government will look at accountability across the youth justice system and work with the Youth Justice Board to review its governance.

In response to Charlie Taylor's recommendations on reporting restrictions and criminal records reform, the Government say current court cases prevent them from responding fully at this time.

To read Charlie Taylor's review of youth justice in full:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577103/youth-justice-review-final-report.pdf

To read the government response to the Taylor review in full:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/576553/youth-justice-review-government-response.pdf

To read the NAYJ response to the proposal for Secure Schools: <http://thenayj.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NAYJ-Press-Release-Secure-Schools.pdf>

Outsourcing children's social care

An independent report on the potential for developing the capacity and diversity of children's social care services in England has been produced for the Department for Education by Laing Buisson. It focuses on how to promote the marketisation and potential commercialisation of statutory children's social services. As such it has potential far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for some of the most vulnerable people in our society that readers will want to be aware of.

To read the report by LaingBuisson in full:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573035/LaingBuisson_report_December_2016.pdf

To read concerns about the plans for outsourcing children's services:

<https://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2016/dec/12/laingbuisson-report-privatising-childrens-social-services>

The organisation Article 39, which campaigns for children's rights in institutional settings, has updated its briefing for Members of Parliament. More on their work can be found here: <http://www.article39.org.uk/news/>.

Sentencing Council consultation on knife crime

The Sentencing Council for England and Wales in October published a consultation document on Bladed Articles and Offensive Weapons. The consultation ends on 6th January 2017.

The consultation seeks views on three guidelines:

1. Possession of a bladed article/offensive weapon;
2. Threatening with a bladed article/offensive weapon, and;
3. A youth guideline which covers all offences involving bladed articles and offensive weapons.

The document states there has been growing concern over recent years about the number of people carrying knives and other weapons on the streets and cites legislation introduced since 2008 that highlights Parliament's concerns about these types of offences.

The consultation sets out a range of proposed aggravating factors that would lead to extra prison time for people caught with bladed weapons, including carrying a knife while in a group, attempts to hide identity, targeting someone because they are vulnerable, and evidence of wider community impact.

For the youth guideline, the council said judges and magistrates should take into account aggravating factors such as attempts to deliberately humiliate a victim by posting videos or sharing details on social media of the crime.

To read the Sentencing Council's consultation in full:

<https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Bladed-articles-and-offensive-weapons-guideline-consultation-web.pdf>

Home Secretary's College of Policing speech on vulnerability

In her first speech to the College of Policing as Home Secretary, Amber Rudd focused on the issue of vulnerability. She announced government's intention to introduce a licence to practise for professionals working in high harm areas of policing.

She highlighted the creation of new offences since 2012, such as those for stalking and forced marriage. Coercive control has also been recognized as an offence, recognising the harm caused by patterns of sustained emotional abuse.

Rudd announced the provision of £1.9 million over two years for the College of Policing to change the police approach to vulnerability. This is designed to allow the college to develop a training package for new leaders in vulnerability who "will coach, brief and debrief front line officers so they are better able to identify signs of vulnerability and provide the much-needed support to victims."

The Home Secretary announced that the Home Office and the College of Policing have been working together to develop a licence to practice: "It is important that only those who are absolutely qualified to perform critical roles dealing with the vulnerable are deployed to those situations."

To read Amber Rudd's speech in full: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretarys-college-of-policing-speech-on-vulnerability>

Policing Education Qualifications Framework

The CEO of the College of Policing, Alex Marshall, has announced a new educational framework to police officers and staff. He explains that the new Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) is designed to give officers more professional recognition and better reflect the nature of the jobs performed by officers around the country.

By 2020, following promotion officers will be supported in gaining a qualification which reflects the nature of their role, such as all newly promoted sergeants will undergo a 12-month higher-level apprenticeship in leadership and management. Officers seeking the rank of assistant chief constable or above will require a master's degree before applying.

Entry to the police service will also change and it is this that made more headlines. Beyond 2020, there will be three available options for entry into the police:

1. A police constable degree apprenticeship paid for by the force, allowing individuals to obtain a policing degree and earn while they learn.
2. Specific policing degree as seen in other professions.
3. For graduates, a graduate programme which will also be paid for by the police force.

To read further information about the PEQF: <http://www.college.policing.uk/What-we-do/Learning/Policing-Education-Qualifications-Framework/Pages/Policing-Education-Qualifications-Framework.aspx>