

Looking forward to 2011

London Probation's Three Year Strategic Plan for 2008 – 2011 has now been published, following extensive consultation with stakeholders across the criminal justice field, including the CPS.

The plan focuses on eight strategic priorities:

- Dynamic and responsive risk assessment and management
- High quality reports delivered on time to the Courts and Parole Board
- Robust enforcement of all orders and licenses
- Achieving excellence across all services
- Active contribution to crime reduction partnerships across London's diverse communities
- Improved data quality to inform our practice
- Reputation as a good employer
- Strength in business innovation, corporate and social responsibility

Relationships with, and service to courts feature high on the agenda of the strategy.

In relation to court reports, the strategy pledges to "seek more feedback from sentencers...to improve the quality, speed and range of our reports". This commitment has already been put into action with the Judges' Forum which was held on 17 March with a number of Crown Court Judges in attendance, and will continue with a range of events planned for magistrates in the coming months.

In addition, recent funding given to London Probation by NOMS has offered us the opportunity to focus on innovative ways of reducing the prison population by offering alternative community penalties. Please read the report below on IMPACT to find out how this is progressing.

Electronic copies of the Three Year Strategy can be found on the London Probation website:
www.london-probation.org.uk

Project IMPACT – Short prison sentences: Is there a different way?

The steady rise in the prison population over recent years has been well documented, and of course, as sentencers you will all be aware of the pressures and challenges this poses to the criminal justice system.

During this financial year an additional £40m has been allocated to the National Probation Service to devise non-custodial methods of working with persistent offenders to focus on 'bucking this trend', whilst still achieving our aim of encouraging those who break the law to lead more useful and law abiding lives.

The National Plan provides the overall aims for the project as:

- To ensure that Probation areas are able to deliver community orders effectively in all circumstances

where sentencers are considering using them, rather than short prison sentences, given their positive impact on rehabilitation and cost-effectiveness.

- To ensure that Probation areas secure greater levels of offenders' compliance with their community order rather than needing to breach or recall them to custody.

Various facts and figures endorse this approach:

- An individual spending less than a year in prison has a 73% likelihood of being reconvicted upon release.
- An offender on a community sentence has a 50.5% chance of reconviction.
- There are literally thousands of offenders for whom short prison

sentences have become a way of life (known as the revolving door).

- A high number of prisoners have drug addiction problems.

London Probation will receive approximately £6.8m of the £40m – serious money with serious aims and expectations placed on it.

In response, we have initiated PROJECT IMPACT – **Short prison sentences: Is there a different way?**

The overall aim of the project is to build on current provision, improving its range and quality, innovating and implementing new alternatives to provide courts with more effective sentencing alternatives to short term custody.

This will in turn improve public protection through reduced re-offending and reduce the volume of short term prison sentences and the associated costs.

In London during 2007, over 5,500 individuals received less than one year in prison and London Probation breached over 1,000 licence cases which were subsequently recalled to prison, so we have to keep asking the question "Is there a different way?"

The significance of this project cannot be overstated. London Probation will endeavour to target offenders who are considered low or medium risk of harm. We absolutely accept that cases of serious harm must go to prison in order for the community to be protected.

Analysing figures in 2007 there were approximately 3,400 individuals going through the London courts who received between one to four months. These kinds of cases will be the target group for Project IMPACT. The project will work with criminal justice agencies across London and with a whole range of stakeholders.

London Probation has already engaged with a wide range of these stakeholders through workshops, interviews and newsletters, to identify the key themes and gather ideas for the project. This dialogue will be continued throughout the life of the project. Proposals which emerge from this process will be reviewed by

the IMPACT Project Board, and once accepted into the project, they will be developed, implemented and their performance continuously evaluated against agreed targets.

We are looking for new solutions to solve very entrenched and difficult issues. London Probation is confident that with this additional funding we will make a difference to you as sentencers, to the offenders and, importantly, to communities in London.

Geraldine Gavin, Chief Operations Officer for London Probation, is leading on this project, and welcomes your views, your ideas and your expertise to help us make a difference with this project – so please contact us at: sentencer_enquiry@london.probation.gsi.gov.uk.

Court Reports - consultation with Judges

On 17 March, a small group of Judges met with Mary McFeely, Director of London South and Courts, and Sara Robinson, ACO Courts and OASys, to review the purpose and process for the delivery of Court Reports at Crown Courts.

It was a useful exercise in re-examining current practice, which has assisted London Probation in determining business priorities for the coming year.

The key areas under review were efficiency of report delivery, quality and purpose of report content, and resource savings.

Many thanks to those Judges who participated in the event.

London Probation in the spotlight – the Offender Management Inspection

In March 2008 London Probation's Offender Management work was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Probation. A full report into the findings was published in June 2008.

The report shows that our work with the courts, particularly the delivery of reports, has been noted as a strength on which we should build. A key recommendation is that we continue to work closely with the courts in London to improve communication and the engagement of sentencers. This will help Probation deliver a service which is within our capacity and help to reduce the prison population.

Your Views

London Probation now has a dedicated contact email address for Sentencers. Email Sentencer_enquiry@london.probation.gsi.gov.uk with any questions, comments or ideas on Probation issues that affect you. In particular we are interested in hearing your ideas for Project Impact:

- What do Sentencers need from the Probation Service to assist in the reduction of short term prison sentences?
- Are you interested in being involved in the Impact project? (eg in a consultative role)?

