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GREATER MANCHESTER PROBATION AREA – PUBLICATION OF OFFENDER MANAGEMENT INSPECTION REPORT

A report published today by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation shows that Greater Manchester Probation Area has many strengths but there is a need for improvement in some aspects of its work.

Andrew Bridges, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

“Greater Manchester Probation Area is to be congratulated on handling the implementation of a significant change programme such as the Offender Management Model in a metropolitan area while maintaining a good level of performance. There is an encouraging commitment to good diversity practice and some strong management and leadership within the area. Whilst the assessment of the likelihood of reoffending is generally very good, assessment and management of risk of harm required some refinement. They have had serious problems with the IT infrastructure on which their electronic offender assessment system (e-OASys) runs, which is provided via a central contract with the National Probation Service. Although the contractor eventually responded positively, these difficulties prevented staff from gaining the benefits of an otherwise sound offender assessment. This has become an issue in many parts of the country.”

The report's main findings are:

- Reports were generally of a good quality and well received by the courts. Assessment of likelihood of offending was comprehensively and accurately assessed.
- Sentence planning and reviews were not central to the management of cases and required attention in terms of several aspects of quality, timeliness and the involvement of offenders and others in the process.
- Assessment of risk of harm could be improved in all cases, in particular drawing on other information and assessments from different sources and by addressing victim issues. When a review of risk of harm was completed ongoing planning generally protected the public, however a number of reviews were completed late.
- There were good working relationships under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, particularly with the police. However the area's own risk administration management arrangements had not been fully implemented.

- Licence conditions were commensurate with the risk of harm, likelihood of reoffending and protection of victims. Consistent attention was given to issues concerning victims in most cases.
- Offender managers motivated and prepared offenders for interventions and co-ordinated the work of others however not enough work had taken place with prisons and others to prepare offenders for release.
- Induction, frequency of appointments, monitoring attendance and enforcement were definite strengths in the area.
- Full and proper attention was paid to diversity issues in most cases and resources were dedicated to diversity which was prominent within the organisation.
- Nearly all of those offenders interviewed said they were less likely to offend as a result of their supervision although just under a fifth had by the stage the inspection took place. Most offenders had complied with the requirements of their sentence.
- Senior managers had been trying to resolve the problem with the IT infrastructure, which had been causing difficulties for staff when they were completing the electronic Offender Assessment System form.
- A useful workforce plan had been produced and the area had been addressing sickness absence however a lack of clarity concerning the role and duties of Probation Service Officers which was an issue for the National Probation Service, was impacting on the implementation of the offender management model.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Offender Management Inspection of Greater Manchester took place in June 2006.
2. The Offender Management Inspection programme started in May 2006. All probation areas comprising the National Probation Service for England and Wales are being inspected over a three-year cycle, with areas in the same region visited within the space of a few months to facilitate comparisons in performance. This enables the Inspectorate to identify and promote effective work with offenders and disseminate information about good practice.
3. Probation areas are assessed on how well they have met defined inspection criteria. These address the quality of the assessments and interventions carried out with offenders, and the initial outcomes of the interventions, both in relation to criminogenic factors such as employment, accommodation and substance misuse, and also whether there has been any reduction in the risk of harm to others and the likelihood of re-offending. Overall management of the area is also inspected to see how well it supports good offender management.
4. A key focus of the Greater Manchester inspection was the area's management of a representative sample of 149 cases from most categories of orders and licences which commenced approximately six months previously. This included high risk of harm offenders and Prolific & other Priority Offenders.