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Independent inspection of probation and youth offending work



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OFFENDER MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN CUSTODIAL INSTITUTIONS IN LONDON - PUBLICATION OF OFFENDER MANAGEMENT INSPECTION REPORT

Andrew Bridges, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, and Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, said:

“We have seen in London an encouraging strategic direction from prisons and probation together to implement offender management and there were signs that this joined-up approach would aid consistent and thorough implementation of this important shared work over time.

At operational level there were some issues which needed further work before the full benefits of offender management would be realised. There needed to be greater clarity about the respective roles of particular staff. Offender supervisors and case administrators needed to have protection against being deployed to other duties not core to their offender management roles.

Offender management, and especially the role of sentence planning within it, needed to be the central driving force for offenders under the scope of offender management who would be making the transition between custody and community. Offender managers in the community had to have a more active involvement in managing these offenders, most particularly through formal sentence planning meetings for which they were responsible. Furthermore, the Offender Assessment System (OASys) had to be recognised as the primary planning and assessment tool.”

The report's main findings are:

- There was a need for more regular and frequent contact between offender supervisors and offenders. Not all offenders had offender managers allocated to them and not all offender managers were adequately involved in the sentence planning process.
- There was evidence of good communication between prison and probation. In particular issues of self harm and suicide were taken seriously. However, greater use could have been made of video link and telephone conferencing facilities between prisons and probation areas.

- Sentence planning was not always seen as the central component of effective offender management.
- All prisons had arrangements for induction of offenders at the point of reception into custody.
- There were sometimes delays in offenders accessing accredited programmes and a number of gaps in provision.
- We found that a number of offenders arrived in prison without an assessment using the Offender Assessment System (OASys) or that its arrival was delayed. This meant that OASys was not central to the initial induction and planning of work with offenders.
- There was limited attention paid to the assessment of offender engagement. When such assessment had been considered it tended to be focussed around education work and not on general sentence planning.
- There was attention to diversity issues at an operational level, with some good examples of staff sensitivity to the individual needs of offenders. However, at a strategic level, the focus was narrower and attention was paid almost exclusively to race equality issues rather than to wider diversity needs.
- All prisons gave public protection issues a clear priority; staff were conscientious in their efforts to ascertain the Risk of Harm an offender presented and this was a consistent thread in the work of prison and probation staff.
- We found examples of staff working to protect victims and there was evidence that telephone calls were monitored to assist in protecting victims. However, this monitoring work needed to be better integrated with the sentence planning processes. Some victim awareness work had been undertaken and there were some indications that offenders had found this useful. Overall, however, victim awareness was an under developed aspect of sentence planning whilst in custody.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Prison Offender Management Inspection in London took place between October 2007 and June 2008. In addition to this report, HMI Probation has published a separate Offender Management Inspection Report relating to the London criminal justice area and HMI Prisons publishes a separate report on each prison inspected.
2. The Offender Management Inspection programme, led by HMI Probation, started in May 2006 in relation to offenders in the community, and offender management in prisons has been inspected in earnest from mid-2007. All probation areas comprising the National Probation Service for England and Wales are being inspected over a three year cycle on the main OMI Programme, with areas in the same region visited within the space of a few months. Whilst a probation region is being inspected HMI Probation and HMI Prisons together inspect offender management arrangements in a sample of approximately six custodial establishments in the corresponding prison area. The inspectorates hope to work closely together to identify and promote effective work with offenders and disseminate information about good practice.
3. Prisons are assessed on how well their offender management arrangements meet defined inspection criteria, including how well they are carrying out shared tasks with their probation counterparts. Overall management and organisation within the prisons' Offender Management Units is also inspected to see how well it supports good offender management.
4. Evidence is gathered by interviewing groups of staff and managers and by reviewing policy documents and examples of practice, e.g. OASys Sentence Plans. Questionnaires are also sent to offenders in the prisons inspected who fall within the scope of the NOMS Offender Management Model