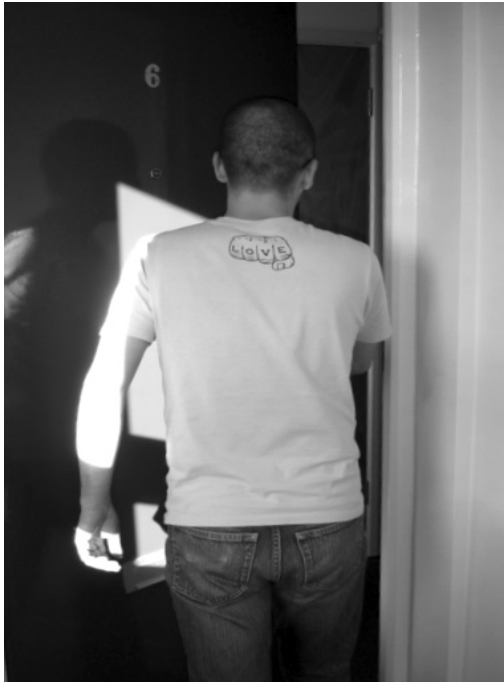


An Essential Element of Effective Practice



This bulletin describes the key findings from our Thematic Inspection: “An Essential Element of Effective Practice” An Inspection of National Probation Service Work on Offender Accommodation. The aim of this inspection was to determine how well the National Probation Service (NPS) identifies and addresses the accommodation needs of offenders. We also sought to highlight the impact of the work on offender risk of harm (RoH), likelihood of reoffending (LoR) and successful community reintegration.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- The inspection found that many offenders with an accommodation need also had linked drugs, alcohol and thinking skills problems. We noted the higher reconviction rates of those offenders compared with the overall probation caseload. The reoffending rates recorded in this inspection, for offenders with accommodation needs, suggest that offender accommodation issues should have a high level of priority within the NPS.
- We found that the leadership arrangements for offender accommodation, both nationally and at the local level, needed to be strengthened. The Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan gave a welcome and clear steer on future developments planned for this area of work.
- Good practice examples were noted in many of the areas we visited. In particular, we saw several examples of Approved Premises being used to good effect to address public protection and crime reduction concerns.
- However, a number of key mainstream service delivery issues were not of sufficient quality. These included accommodation and risk of harm assessments, supervision plans and the focus on race and wider diversity. Access to mainstream accommodation resources, via Supporting People arrangements, varied across the areas and this was a limiting factor in the work.

CONTEXT

The NPS seeks to manage offenders in ways that reduce reoffending and protect the public. We believe this is underpinned by offenders' having access to and sustaining satisfactory accommodation. Appropriate accommodation is not just a basic need for offenders, it is also an essential element in achieving the desired outcomes from their supervision – to make them less likely to reoffend, and to protect the public.

Many offenders experience particular challenges in obtaining and sustaining their accommodation. These difficulties, when compounded with linked criminogenic factors, can create a situation in which the risk of reoffending is increased and public protection concerns are heightened. Many of the developments in probation practice in recent years have been specifically geared towards assisting areas to reduce both RoH and LoR. Stable accommodation for offenders forms a necessary platform for other constructive interventions to have the desired outcomes. Arguably, the management of RoH is enhanced by the ability to access suitable accommodation that contributes to risk management plans. Therefore, it is important that probation areas, under the leadership of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the National Probation Directorate (NPD), have effective strategies for addressing offender accommodation matters.

The data from the inspection found significant differences between the reported reconviction rates for offenders identified as having an accommodation need, compared to those who did not have such a need. The level of reconviction during the period of supervision for those in the accommodation sample was 48 from a total of 162 cases, giving a reconviction rate of 29.6%. This was compared with the results from the core 649 cases in the Effective Supervision Inspection (ESI) sample. From these 127 offenders had been reconvicted, a rate of 19.6%. There was a striking difference in the reconviction rates

for offenders in Approved Premises, compared to those accessing mainstream services via the Supporting People programmes. For those in Approved Premises the reconviction rate was 3.1% (1 of 32 cases). From the group of offenders accessing Supporting People services, the reconviction rate was 36.6%.

The reconviction outcomes noted in this inspection lends credence to the view that the ability to tackle offender accommodation issues lies at the heart of the strategic purpose of the NPS, i.e. reducing crime and protecting the public. Therefore, offender accommodation issues could reasonably be viewed as a priority in the effective supervision of offenders. Progress on accommodation issues helps many offenders to make the changes that will reduce the risk of further reoffending.

METHODOLOGY

The inspection was carried out alongside ESI inspections in eight areas: Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dyfed-Powys, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, North Wales and Lincolnshire. We evaluated the quality of management, assessment, interventions and initial outcomes in relation to offender accommodation work. The sample for the thematic was centred on offenders who had been identified as having an accommodation need. The total sample size was 162 across all the areas. Evidence in advance was provided by the areas. We also undertook a range of interviews with senior and middle managers who had responsibility for offender accommodation matters. We interviewed specialist accommodation staff, accommodation providers and Board members. Finally, we interviewed members of the NPD who had responsibility for offender accommodation policy and strategy.

OVERALL FINDINGS FOR QUALITY OF OFFENDER ACCOMMODATION MANAGEMENT

Strengths

- All areas recognised the importance of accommodation issues in the effective supervision of offenders.
- Most areas had in place policies and strategies on offender accommodation matters.
- The majority of areas had access to specialist staff working in this field.
- Partnership arrangements were generally well developed.

Areas for improvement

- Leadership and prioritisation of offender accommodation issues, both locally and nationally, needed to be improved.
- Information systems (and reporting arrangements) for offender accommodation work were inadequate.
- Implementation arrangements for local offender accommodation strategies were weak.
- Insufficient time was allocated to senior managers to enable them to effectively engage with the Supporting People agenda.

ASSESSMENT

Strengths

- RoH classifications were generally appropriate.
- The majority of cases with an identified accommodation need had been referred to a specialist worker.
- Most cases had clear LoR scores, and supervision plans adequately addressed these issues.

Areas for improvement

- More than half of the cases did not have an adequate assessment of accommodation or RoH issues.

- Few supervision plans met national standards or contained SMART objectives.
- Assessments of race and wider diversity issues did not feature in the majority of the case records.

INTERVENTIONS

Strengths

- Work was directed at community integration in the majority of cases.
- In high/very high RoH cases public protection issues were acted on promptly and additional requirements were implemented.
- Reviews of initial supervision plans (ISP) at Approved Premises were being carried out in line with national standards.

Areas for improvement

- Reviews of ISPs were not carried out routinely.
- SMART objectives were not set and some staff had limited knowledge of this concept.
- In high/very high RoH cases MAPPP/risk management plans were not properly integrated with the overall supervision of the offender.

OUTCOMES

Strengths

- Most offenders had not been reconvicted; this was particularly significant for those in Approved Premises where only 3.1% had been reconvicted during the period of supervision.
- The accommodation status for offenders had improved.
- RoH had been managed and reduced.

Areas for improvement

- Limited housing stock and access to move on accommodation was a concern for all areas.

- Arrangements for collecting and using outcome data and information on race and wider diversity issues were weak.
- There was limited evidence that offenders were being challenged on their offending related attitudes, beliefs and behaviour and on the harm caused to victims.

Recommendations

The NPD should ensure that:

- The level of priority for work on offender accommodation issues is made clear, and implementation of the offender accommodation strategy is monitored.
- Areas have guidance on the establishment and use of information systems to enable the accurate collection of data relevant to offender accommodation issues. This to include use of information in eOASys and the needs of black and minority ethnic offenders and others with specific diversity needs.
- Assistance and advice is given to enable areas to obtain maximum benefit from Supporting People arrangements.
- Information from the outcome target for offender accommodation interventions, introduced in performance measure PM4 (April 2005), is utilised to promote best practice across the NPS.

Boards should ensure that:

- Staff understanding of local offender accommodation strategies is improved.
- All relevant managers, support staff and practitioners involved in this aspect of service delivery have access to relevant training and developmental opportunities.
- An adequate assessment of accommodation needs is undertaken in all cases and these encompass a specific assessment of any race equality or wider diversity needs.
- All RoH assessments are completed on time, to an adequate standard and contain an assessment of accommodation issues.
- Risk management arrangements, including accommodation issues, are reviewed in all cases where the RoH increases during the course of supervision.
- Areas produce initial and review supervision plans that contain SMART objectives and, where necessary, fully integrate risk management plans and accommodation interventions.
- Senior management teams routinely report to them on the profile of accommodation needs in their areas and on outcomes from interventions in this work.

The full report of the inspection is published in ***An Essential Element of Effective Practice. An Inspection of National Probation Service Work on Offender Accommodation***, available on HMI Probation's website (see below).

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