

Bexley POPO Scheme

Background

The Bexley programme was established under the narrowing the Criminal Justice Gap initiative and was officially launched in November 2003. The launch was preceded by detailed discussion and planning both to ensure the active support of the CDRP and to establish and agree the procedures and arrangements through which this multi-agency initiative would operate in practise. The proposal was developed in accordance with best practice in existing schemes in Sheffield, York and the Southeast.

The ongoing commitment to the programme by the CDRP and other partners was confirmed at the launch which was actively led by the Leader of the Council, Borough Commander, Assistant Director for Community Safety, and the Borough Assistant Chief Probation Officer.

Funding was obtained from BCU monies and from the Bexley Public Service Agreement which includes local targets for reducing burglary and increasing the number of offenders entering drug treatment.

The programme as developed and delivered in practice is compliant with the guidance provided under the Rehabilitate and Resettle strand of PPO work. The multi-agency component has ensured the delivery of the resettlement pathways under the National Reducing Re-offending Action Plan.

Expected Benefits

The initial Focus on offences of burglary has recently been broadened to include street crime, motor vehicle crime and persistent theft. The shift in intervention with these offenders to one firmly based on multi-agency, risk assessment and management is a key benefit emulating the success of the MAPPA arrangements for high risk of harm offenders.

Establishing and agreeing the information sharing protocol has increased the effectiveness of the interventions of all agencies and provided intelligence that is relevant and timely.

The joint supervision and enforcement of prolific offenders subject to statutory supervision by the Police and Probation effectively brings together both the Catch and Convict and Reform and Rehabilitate aims of the programme. These twin aims are reinforced to the offender during joint prison and home visits where agreement to the programme and the conditions that apply is gained from participating offenders.

Priority and Prolific Offenders can expect fast track referral into drug treatment, Probation programmes designed to challenge and change offending behaviour and a range of other interventions designed to meet their identified criminogenic needs. This process involves intensive supervision and support on an almost daily basis. It is also made clear to the offender

that a failure to comply and or any concerns about their behaviour are likely to lead to breach and an immediate return to court or recall to prison for those under licence supervision.

Programme Team

The 0.5 Senior Probation Officer has been critical to the development, management and delivery of the programme. The Probation Manager chairs the multi-agency panel, negotiates with Police and other partners in relation to individual offenders, undertakes some direct work with offenders and supervises the case manager (currently PSO grade).

The Police role in the programme has been essential and the officers have been excellent advocates for the work undertaken representing both the Catch and Convict and the Rehabilitate and Rehabilitate strands of the POPO approach. The Police and Probation staff form a highly effective team and have established close working relationships.

The programme developed slowly from its launch in November 2003 allowing expertise and confidence in the joint work undertaken to develop. This was deliberate and has proved very effective in establishing processes and practices that are now seen to deliver reductions in re-offending. Thus the number of offenders on the programme to date has not exceeded 17 including those in custody. This has resulted in intensive work with offenders in the community.

Programme Offender Panel (POP)

This was established along similar lines to the MAPPA multi-agency arrangements and considerable time and effort was spent in ensuring commitment to the work of the panel from statutory and voluntary partners.

The role of the panel is to share information, undertake assessment of the risks posed and needs presented by the offender and to agree an individual action plan. SMART objectives are agreed and their achievement monitored on a monthly basis. Overall progress is reported back to a quarterly meeting of a Chief Officers group comprising police, probation and local authority representatives at Director Level. The task of this group is to monitor the effectiveness of the work undertaken and to seek resources that are identified as being essential to achieving effective intervention with offenders.

Expected outcomes

All the expected outcomes have been met and there have been significant falls in the target offences of burglary. The numbers of offenders re-offending has been small and the programme has been effective in engaging and motivating offenders and reducing crime.

Critical success factors

Without the resources provided by the CDRP it would not have been possible for the Probation Service to provide the additional case manager and management time required for work with POPO's to be effective.

Leadership and the active support of the programme by the Borough Commander, Assistance Director for Community Safety, leader of the Council and Borough Assistant Chief Probation Officer were also essential in the establishment of a multi-agency approach to prolific offenders in the Borough. Ownership and support from statutory and voluntary partners then followed.

An early decision was made not to distinguish between the Catch and Convict and Reform and Rehabilitate strands of the programme. In practice the degree of offender motivation and engagement with their supervision will determine the overall emphasis at any one time.

Finally the programme developed slowly, initially targeting offenders who are motivated to change. This has enabled us to build in success from an early stage and to develop confidence in the overall approach.

Next Steps

Work with non-statutory offenders and their early identification by Criminal Justice Agencies needs to be developed. The aim following a reconviction is to encourage the courts to place them on the programme as a direct alternative to a short prison sentence. The prompt execution of warrants for breach of court orders also needs to be ensured.

This "Premium Service" for PPOs also needs to include the Prison Service and the routine exchange of information and prompt access to Offending Behaviour programmes while the offender is in custody.

The information sharing protocol needs to be reviewed against that recently provided as a model by GOL and the range of prolific offenders needs to be extended. A performance management agreement will be provided by GOL and will require active implementation.

The Bexley approach provides a template for other London Boroughs against which they can measure the implementation of their POPO Scheme and the London model. All Boroughs will also need to decide which agencies should be included in the "core" PPO team and whether they should co-located along MAPPA lines. Clearly the alternative is a virtual team working within a clearly defined structure.

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Bromely/Bexley
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