

Question and Answers Session at Criminal Justice Forum 28.10.14
Martyn Underhill – Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset (MU)
Tina Ridge – Head of Dorset NPS (TR)

We understand that the NPS will be doing the initial assessment of all 18 year olds who are transferring from Youth Offending Teams into Probation. What does the NPS do to make this transition as smooth as possible and provide a service to those young adults that is appropriate for their level of maturity? – asked by Des Persse, BCHA

TR – There is a small number of young adults transitioning into Probation and the Youth Offending Team does a good job of preparing them in advance. Additional support is available where required. Going forward in light of the changes to the National Probation Service (NPS) and the creation of the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) there may be a meeting with representatives from both to ensure the same level of support continues.

What about the issues surrounding the dynamics of young people with legal highs and the associated health risks? – asked by Des Persse, BCHA

TR – Legal highs are creating issues in many areas including inside prisons. I know the drug and alcohol teams are working hard but the composition of the drugs changes daily so they are hard to combat and the way forward may be psycho-social interventions.

What are the PCC's plans for ensuring the voluntary sector is involved in Integrated Offender Management? – asked by Kirsten Thomson, Big Issue

MU – I touched on this briefly in my presentation and the contract for the CRC will be awarded soon. Through the Gate is an important element here and we will have to see how it goes once the contract has been granted and the CRC is in place. I have got money set aside to provide assistance for any gaps in service but we need to wait and see what those gaps are. All Dorset prisoners will be in Devon prisons which will complicate things as services may need to be based in that locality however since the prison in Dorset will be catering to other areas, services based here may need to cater to them.

What is the strategy for working with people with learning disabilities and how do you work with other agencies to meet their needs? – asked by Julie Moverley, Dorset Advocacy

MU – I had a meeting with Bournemouth People First yesterday to discuss this as Paul Thomas at BPF helps victims and witnesses with learning disabilities. In 5 years they have had 111 referrals with a very high 85% conviction rate. The Pan-Dorset board for learning disabilities is meeting in January to discuss a solution. At the moment Paul at BPF is funded by Bournemouth and Poole local authorities but Dorset County Council uses Dorset Advocacy. I would like a joined up Pan-Dorset solution with one umbrella of funding. The Force is in the process of writing a strategy for learning disabilities and it will include people on the autistic spectrum. The Community Safety Partnerships are also currently working towards a Pan-Dorset partnership.

TR – There is a sub-forum from the Dorset Criminal Justice board that deals with Mental health and learning disabilities in the criminal justice system and Julie Moverley from Dorset Advocacy sits on it.

Is the PCC aware of the growth in the percentage of older (55+) prisoners in recent years and how ill equipped prisons are to cope with age related (including dementia) illnesses? – asked by Mark Horsford, Michaels Limited on behalf of James McKinnon, Restore Support Network who was not able to attend the Forum

MU – I am aware that this percentage has grown massively and 5% of the prison population is people over the age of 70. This could be down to people living longer and having better overall health. I have asked for work to be done nationally on dementia in prisons. I don't think healthcare is acceptable generally in prisons and I do have an issue with this.

TR – Under the Social Care Act work is being done to see what care packages should be in place and this is being undertaken by Public Health and Local Authorities.

It's not a question as such but I just wanted to raise that the Governor of HMP The Verne approached the Kings Fund and was able to get money to build a day room specifically for older people – Anna Webb, Dorset Mental Health Forum

TR – The Verne is now a deportation centre but it is important to know that mental health work still goes on.

From April 2015 the Local Authorities where prisons are based will be responsible for social care of the prisoners. There is a growing risk that care for older people in prison will be so good that when they are released there will actually be a deficit. How do you propose to deal with this? – asked by Robert Fenwith, National Offender Management (NOMS)

MU – If the new system with the NPS and CRC work there will be less people with mental health issues in prison. We will have to wait and see until maybe this time next year what the outcome of the new system will be. I would reiterate that I feel that the healthcare in prisons is not good enough.

Des Persse, BCHA – Just to make the room aware, we have a service called RECOOP which provides support to older people in prison. We promote health and wellbeing as well as providing information and advice.

Bernadette MacDonald-Raggett, Restore Support Network – We provide support to older ex-offenders to help them reintegrate into the community through mentoring and befriending once they are released from prison. We will now be working with RECOOP so they can provide support inside the prisons and then refer to us once the person is released. We have funding but we need more. There must be more focus on this so that people don't end up on the streets.

Can the panel envisage a future where Integrated Offender Management becomes the case management vehicle of choice for all offenders leaving prison with heightened risks of both re-offending and serious harm? – asked by Robert Fenwith, NOMS

TR – I would personally welcome this especially for high risk offenders with partnerships working together to benefit the same individual (an extension of MAPPA arrangements) however I would have some concerns on how to meet local needs if case management became too centralised. How would the same service be delivered in Lyme Regis as in Christchurch for example?

MU – I have provided funding to allow for 3 new officers to be assigned to IOM and would welcome a future where IOM becomes the vehicle of choice for high risk and prolific offenders. There needs to be more partnership working but there are funding and resource implications. .

How does the NPS involve the voluntary sector in MAPPAs (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements – partnerships that deal with high risk offenders)? – asked by Jo Wells, The Footprints Project

TU – This will be managed from strategic boards made up of police, prisons and probation alongside local authorities, housing etc. with community links via lay advisers. There will be meetings for partnership work to manage risk and the voluntary sector could be included if working with the individual. A disclosure can be granted if help from the voluntary sector is needed and they don't already work with the particular individual. They will meet every month for the highest level of risk (up to 5 at any one time but currently only 1 person) and for the level 2 managed high risk offenders they will meet every 3 months. Emergency meetings can be arranged if needed.

MU – The Dorset Criminal Justice Board will be setting up a Victim sub-group that I will chair and the voluntary sector will be invited to contribute.

Having already worked closely with and supported the BME community so well in the first two years of your post, does the PCC plan on continuing at this level for the next two years? – asked by Bernadette MacDonald-Raggett, Restore Support Network

MU – I was recently at the Black Mental Health Summit in London with the Home Secretary. Dorset is not as diverse as London but the same issues appear here as they do in the capital with stop and search statistics being higher and prescribing in excess to black people as opposed to white people. In the West Midlands they have recently set up the 300 Voices scheme where representatives from the black community advise police on issues such as stop and search, mental health etc. I would like to set up a similar scheme here.

How will the NPS maintain or develop strategic relationships with the voluntary sector so that the voluntary sector's expertise can inform their strategies to reduce re-offending? – asked by Anna Braczek, Dorset Race Equality Council

TR – The landscape is a bit different now with the CRC soon to be in operation but there will need to be a good joined up strategic group. I am especially keen to continue working with the voluntary sector and I recognise the value of the sector as a whole.

Will the NPS offer any grants or contract out any services that voluntary sector organisations might deliver? – asked by Joanna Syrett, Safe Partnership Ltd

TR – This would be a national decision so the answer is that it would be a possibility but there aren't any grants available at the moment. Bidding is still happening for the CRC contract and whoever is successful will have plans to work with the voluntary sector as this is one of the 5 aims they have been told to concentrate on so the commitment is there.

How is the PCC's office implementing the Social Value Act and how are commissioning and procurement processes tailored towards the inclusion of the voluntary sector? – asked by Chris Beale, Poole Council for Voluntary Service

MU – Value for money is about balancing the best price with the needs of the community. I am trying to get better at this but the Social Value Act is a new concept having only been implemented in 2012. I recently joined the commissioning academy with my team so we can get better at this. We have set up the Safer Dorset Fund this year and the deadline for applications recently closed. In terms of procurement, all commissioning is available to tender by the voluntary, statutory and public sectors. Some services are not provided by the voluntary sector so they have to be provided by statutory or public bodies. As many people here will know I am especially committed to the voluntary sector and am involved with several charities. My choice would always be to use the voluntary sector over anyone else as I believe it delivers better value for money but I am a public servant and I have to follow commissioning rules.

With Dorset offenders being put in Devon prisons it will be harder for them to have strong family links. Barnardo's already do family days at HMP Guys Marsh and I wanted to know if there were plans to do work with kids whose parents are in prison. – asked by Carole Banton, Barnardo's

MU – As the CRC bidding process is still on-going we won't know until probably February next year whether this will be one of the gaps in service provision. I am upset that Dorset prisoners are being sent to Devon as it means families cannot support them and statistics show that family support helps prevent re-offending.

Richard Fenwith, NOMS – Just to add, prisons will be responsible for keeping families in touch although this will obviously be difficult since the prisons are a 5 hour train ride away.

Jenny Sherwood, World Wide Volunteers – I think there are things in place that if families are on benefits then the train fare can be paid and if travel is over a certain period of time then accommodation can also be provided.

MU – The journey time and financial impact will still be detrimental to low income families not in receipt of benefits as there will be no support for them and this may be something we need to look at in February.

How are offenders split into high or low risk and who has responsibility for this? – asked by Simone Walls-MacDonald, Acts Fast

TR – The original assessment is done by the NPS and there are various criteria in place to decide whether a person stays with the NPS or goes to the CRC. This whole process usually takes only 24 hours but can take 48 hours. If the CRC are not happy with a particular assessment and feel that a person should be rated as high risk and remain under the NPS then a discussion between both the CRC and NPS will take place. If it is escalated from there it will go directly to NPS and a decision will be made straight away however these kinds of escalations will be rare.

There is a £108,000 budget for restorative justice. How is this spent and what proportion goes into the community? – asked by Louise Edwards, Dorset Probation Service

MU – The money is spent on a mix of a 1 year post to draw together Restorative Justice which started 3 months ago, the setting up of Pan-Dorset neighbourhood panels, the justice fund and victims meeting offenders eg funding for travel. In terms of spending in the community the neighbourhood panels are community based as is restorative justice. I am hoping for more funding for this in the next year.

Dorset Advocacy provides an appropriate adult scheme in Dorset for people with mental health and learning disability support needs. The turnaround for an interview takes us 1 hour 20 minutes. We were asked to provide this service because when it was under the Local Authority it would take them 8-10 hours to do the same thing. Would this service ever go back to the Local Authority? – asked by Julie Moverley, Dorset Advocacy

MU – I don't think that the Local Authorities should take back the service but I do think they should govern the contracts. The service should be centrally funded and owned by the Local Authority.

Are there any risks of the new CRC provider not being aware of local issues and going against work that is already being done by other bodies eg the Regeneration effort in Boscombe? – asked by Des Persse, BCHA

TR – I haven't personally been involved in any discussions with the potential new CRC providers but the CEO of the CRC Rob Menarey has spoken with Bournemouth Borough Council to get a handle on local issues such as Boscombe Regeneration. The new CRC owners will need to work with partners to reduce reoffending.

MU – I do think this a bit of an elephant in the room and I am personally not happy at the prospect of anything like this happening. We will need to watch with interest.