

Response to the Inspection of the Community Service Scheme

Introduction

The Jersey Probation Service is delighted to receive the positive Inspection Report prepared by Mrs Ingram and Ms Clark from the Isle of Man and Guernsey Probation Services respectively. The Service is grateful to the authors for their thorough report and would also like to thank Jurat Nicolle for his important contribution in interviewing a range of stakeholders.

Overall, the report highlights an efficient and effective service that is held in high esteem throughout the Island and this is a testament to the commitment and professionalism of Andy Le Marrec and Nicky Allix (Assistant Community Service Managers), Gillian Gosselin (Case Management Assistant), John Lennane (Team Leader) and all the supervisors.

Recent developments

Before discussing the details of the report it is useful to consider how the Community Service scheme has been reorganised since 2009. During that year the senior management team concluded that efficiency savings could be made without compromising the effectiveness of the scheme. As a result the post of Community Service Manager became redundant and the Assistant Chief Probation Officer became more closely involved in the oversight of the scheme. Other changes at the time included:

- Introducing weekday work parties with clients completing 7.5 hours per day instead of the weekend shift of 5 hours per day. Currently, the scheme is operating six days a week;
- A vehicle sharing initiative with the Transport and Technical Services department which has been highlighted as an example of best resource utilisation within the States;
- Cancelling the lease on the Community Service store and moving tools to the new premises in Lempriere Street thereby saving rental expenses.
- Agreeing with H M Attorney –General that community service clients could continue with their Order pending sentence in cases where they have pleaded guilty to new offences. Previously, this type of scenario would have resulted in the client being suspended from the scheme and unable to complete the hours ordered by the courts until sentence was determined on the new offences.

- A number of internal processes have been changed to make practice more efficient. For instance, wherever possible, appointments are given to clients in court when a Community Service Order is made. This reduces delays in the client starting the Order and reduces administration and postage costs.

It is ironic that 2009 saw the scheme faced with the challenge of having to manage twice the number of hours ordered by the Courts in previous years. This trend has continued. For the past three years an average of 20,000 hours has been worked every year - a rise of approximately 6,000 hours on years prior to 2009.

The main findings of the report.

The report's conclusions are "overwhelmingly positive" and are welcomed by the Jersey Service. Although it is not intended to replicate the findings in detail in this paper, it is heartening that the Community Service scheme retains the confidence of sentencers and beneficiaries alike. Although the number of clients interviewed was very small, the positive feedback about the usefulness of the work and how clients were treated resonated with a larger sample of 100 clients throughout 2012. In this survey 90% of clients felt that they were doing something useful for the community and 97% felt that they were treated fairly.

The Management and Community Service teams were particularly pleased to read that the inspectors recognised that assessments were thorough and took the needs of the offender into account. Clients began their hours quickly although the inspectors found that discretion was used appropriately and enforcement action was described as fair on every occasion where it had been necessary. During the inspection a number of work parties were visited and the inspectors noted they saw groups working hard and saw evidence of a good rapport with the supervisors working alongside them.

The Service is committed to implementing the following recommendations although, because of the positive nature of the report, it does not intend inviting the Inspectors to conduct a further review on the scheme in the foreseeable future.

Recommendations

There are three main areas for improvement

- 1. To ensure that there is evidence to indicate whether parents or guardians have been invited by the Service to attend key meetings with clients who are under 18. It is obviously good practice to involve parents and guardians in order that they can support their child and be aware of progress.**

Action Taken

The Community Service team has reviewed the three files where there was no evidence to suggest that a parent or guardian was invited to attend an initial or subsequent interview with their child.

In one case an error was made by assuming that the client was already 18. In the second case the young person had had his eighteenth birthday by the time he commenced Community Service although it could have been possible to ask for his consent to talk to his parents in the event of problems.

The third case involved a boy who had been given his initial appointment in Court using a counterfoil book. This practice commenced some years ago to ensure that delays and expense were minimised by giving appointments at the time of sentence rather than by writing formally to the defendant. Following this inspection it will be necessary for the Court Duty Officer to ensure that invitations to parents and guardians are formally recorded – not just the request to the client. In the case above the Inspector recorded that the boy's mother had been invited to subsequent meetings which leads the Service to believe that this was a recording issue rather than ignoring involving a parent.

Summary of future action

- To review ages of all clients at weekly meetings to ensure that children are easily identified and their cases treated accordingly in terms of contact with parents/guardians and the type of placement they are given. It is envisaged that this will be straightforward in relation to children sentenced by the Youth Court and that greater vigilance will be necessary when reviewing clients sentenced by the Magistrates and Royal Courts.
- An instruction to Court Duty Officers to record whether a parent has been invited to the initial interview with their child. If this has not been possible in court then a formal letter will be sent to the parent by the Community Service Department.

2. To increase the number of Individual Placements (IPs)

Action Taken

The Community Service team has recognised that in 2012, 29% of Orders were placed on an IP rather than the service target of 33%. Unfortunately the Assistant Manager with main responsibility for IPs was unable to be interviewed in depth by the Inspectors due to her court commitments.

The Community Service team assesses every client at interview to see if their skills can be matched with an individual beneficiary who might include a charity café, sports club, charity shop or church amongst others.

Clients who are given individual placements are those who do not pose a known risk to others and who it is felt can be more easily managed by someone outside of the Service. Even where it is possible to find such a client the availability of a suitable beneficiary and a mutually convenient time can limit opportunity. It is the opinion of the team that placements have proved more difficult over the years and a number of clients have been moved back to the work parties from IPs after unsatisfactory compliance or performance. There are some clients who are rated as “possibly suitable for an IP but the team is conscious about ensuring that work parties strike a balance between the less motivated clients and those who are felt will take the work more seriously. Without this balance it is feared that work parties will not be able to maintain the current level of work that has earned the respect of beneficiaries.

The Team reviews all cases in the team meeting every Tuesday to ensure that clients are placed in the most appropriate setting. The value of IPs is recognised and it is felt that improvements can be made in recording the reason why a particular placement is preferred.

Summary of future action

- To continue to assess all clients at initial interview to see if they are suitable for an individual placement. The reasons for the placement choice should be recorded.
- The percentage of clients on individual placements will be reviewed by the Community Service team and senior managers on a quarterly basis.
- Community Service managers will continue to approach potential beneficiaries and promote the Scheme for both individual placements and work parties.

3. Improving feedback between Probation Officers and Community Service staff

Action taken

The Assistant Community Service Managers appreciate the proximity of Probation Officer colleagues within the office and have used some helpful meetings with the Probation Officer and client to resolve difficulties. This has been particularly useful at Social Enquiry Report stage where the Scheme is explained to a client who is either anxious or ambivalent about the scheme. Meetings with the client, Probation Officer and Assistant Community Service Manager are also undertaken where compliance problems have emerged and where it is considered important to provide a consistent approach to the client.

In recent years the Induction Programmes for new Probation Officers has included a weekend visit and Community Service team meetings which have been well received by all colleagues. It is felt that this type of arrangements might also benefit more established staff and allow a better understanding of how the Community Service operates. Since the Inspection, this has featured in staff appraisal and training plans where appropriate.

The Inspection also noted some of the training needs of the supervisors. Later this year a pro-social modelling training event has been arranged for all staff which will entail the entire Community Service team working with Probation Officer colleagues. It is also intended to arrange drug awareness training that will be led by Mark Saralis.

Summary of future action

- Ensuring that key non Community Service staff increase awareness of the Scheme by spending time with Community Service colleagues in the course of their work.
- Confirm training dates for pro social modelling (whole team training) and drug awareness.
- Liaise with the States Human Resources Department to consider whether community Service staff are eligible for a weekly First Aider grant
- To examine the possibility of certification for Community Service supervisors in order to recognise the quality of work undertaken.

Other issues

Although not discussed by the Inspectors, the Service is aware that many Community Service clients are unemployed. The Service intends to examine ways in which clients can receive some form of accreditation for the hours they complete on community service. The intention would be for clients to improve their opportunities at finding work if they can demonstrate competence in various employment related areas.

Initial discussions with Highlands College have indicated that this accreditation process entails a significant amount of preparatory work which would cause difficulties for the Community Service team at present given the existing workload on staff. However, it is intended to discuss the potential project with the Skills Board in order to ascertain whether any resources can be obtained from that source in order to pilot an accreditation project.

Mike Cutland
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