

Partnership Working Towards More Effective Resettlement

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Summary: In May 2018, the Criminal Justice Inspector Brendan McGuigan published his inspection report on resettlement within the Prison Service in Northern Ireland. He opened the report by saying: 'The successful delivery of resettlement inside prison must be one of the primary goals of the penal system in Northern Ireland. The work to address the causes of offending behaviour and reduce a prisoner's risk on release must start from the day someone enters prison and continue until the day they return to the community.' The Chief Inspector went on to say that the Inspectorate supported the collaborative approach of the Prison Service and Probation Service in delivering resettlement services but made several recommendations to enhance the model of partnership and develop future resettlement work. This paper provides context to the Inspection report, outlines the recommendations made, and discusses how those recommendations were implemented by local probation and prison managers in Hydebank Wood Secure College.

Keywords: Probation, prisons, Hydebank Wood Secure College, partnership, resettlement, PDU, Prisoner Development Plan (PDP), Criminal Justice Inspection.

Introduction

Resettlement is a key element in reducing the risk of reoffending. In May 2018, the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland published an inspection report on *Resettlement: An Inspection of Resettlement in the Northern Ireland Prison Service*. That report found that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) had much to be proud of in the work that it undertakes to provide effective services to support the resettlement and rehabilitation of people in a custodial setting.

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It did, however, make a number of recommendations, including that PBNI should be more central in the delivery of the prisoner development model of sentence planning. It also recommended that PBNI and NIPS sentence coordinators should work more closely together in sentence management.

As the Area Manager (Probation Manager) and Prison Governor (Unit Manager) for the Personal Development Unit in Hydebank Wood College, the authors have been responsible for shaping and progressing a more collaborative approach to sentence management between Probation Officers and Prison Officers carrying out the sentence coordinator role.

This paper will explore the journey since the publication of the inspection report in 2018 from an operational perspective. It will provide an overview of how PBNI and NIPS worked together within Hydebank Wood College in order to implement the recommendations in the 2018 inspection report.

Hydebank Wood Secure College

Hydebank Wood, located three miles from Belfast city centre, is Northern Ireland's main facility for holding young adults aged between 18 and 24 years. The site is shared with women held in Ash House. Hydebank Wood was opened in 1979 as a centre for Category C young offenders. On 1 November 2012, the establishment stopped holding male juvenile offenders between the ages of 16 and 17, and from 28 May 2016, it was given 'secure college' status, holding sentenced and young men on remand.

A significant number of those within the college have disclosed that they have mental health or emotional wellbeing problems. Reflecting the wider NI society, substance misuse issues are prevalent amongst the prison population, with alcohol, illegal drugs and prescription medication all frequent risk factors. Limited educational attainment is an issue, with a high percentage of younger offenders having numeracy and literacy deficits. A high proportion of the female population are victims of domestic abuse; and overall, amongst both the male and female prisoners, there is evidence of adverse childhood experience (HMIP, CJINI 2016). The college retains a policy of prison staff being in civilian attire rather than uniform.

A range of agencies work within the prison, including Belfast Metropolitan College of Further Education, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, and PBNI.

Within the college is the Prisoner Development Unit (PDU). This unit is in place to ensure that prisoners are supported, challenged and motivated,

whilst also recognising the need for them to be managed and supervised throughout their time in custody. Their management and supervision are appropriate to the needs, strengths and risks they present for their return to the community. The authors manage this unit.

The CJINI report

The inspection looked specifically at the concept of resettlement as opposed to rehabilitation, and pointed out that although the two terms have areas of commonality, for the purposes of the inspection the Inspectorate drew a distinction between resettlement and rehabilitation. Resettlement, it said, involved providing support and assistance to prisoners in preparation for release. Rehabilitation was the wider aspect of longer-term reintegration into society/community, addressing health and social issues and work involving the reduction in the risk, desistance and the prevention of reoffending; much of this was beyond the remit of the Prison Service.

Much has been written about the correlation between rehabilitation and resettlement and the definitions of both. McNeill (2014) points out that the term resettlement may involve, or be connected with, rehabilitation, but it also extends beyond it — in a sense, implying its objective. If correctional rehabilitation is the journey, reintegration and resettlement are the destination.

The CJINI report made two strategic recommendations, which were:

1. The Prison Service and Probation Board should strategically review the Prisoner Development Model (PDM) to increase the effectiveness of joint delivery. CJINI considers this an urgent need. To inform the work, a joint scoping study should be completed within six months of the publication of the report, to assess the impact of the changed working practice for prison-based Probation staff on the operation of the PDM and resettlement outcomes for prisoners.
2. The Department of Justice NI, as part of its wider desistance remit, NIPS and PBNI should, within one year of the publication of the report, develop meaningful performance measures to assess the longer-term effectiveness of resettlement provision, interventions and outcomes for prisoners.

It also made seven operational recommendations. Six of those recommendations were specifically for the Prison Service, and one related to the Reducing Reoffending Strategic Outcomes Group (RRSOG).¹

Implementation of recommendations

In order to implement the recommendations, a working group was established which brought together senior managers, governors, managers and psychologists from both NIPS and PBNI, to discuss and review the recommendations and identify opportunities for joint working to improve outcomes for prisoners.

The working group agreed that PBNI staff should contribute more to the resettlement process by being involved from the outset of the custodial sentence. Staff and, indeed, service users post release had indicated through a range of service-users surveys that it would be beneficial for PBNI to be involved at an earlier point in their sentence, rather than waiting until 12 months pre-release pre-Parole Eligibility Date (PED).

The working group pointed out that there are key points during the sentence — for example, induction post sentence, devising the Prisoner Development Plan (PDP), PDP reviews — where PBNI should take the lead, working closely with prison staff.

It was also agreed that there should be regular reviews and agreement on roles to enhance partnership working and address needs and strengths. This commitment to collaborative working from the outset would promote better communication and partnership-working with all service-providers within the prison.

¹ Within six months of the publication of the report, the Reducing Reoffending Strategic Outcomes Group (RRSOG) should complete any outstanding work to align psychological services and interventions across the NIPS, the PBNI and the YJA. The NIPS review of the Prisoner Needs Profile (PNP) should examine the veracity of the information collected in the PNP and whether this was sufficient for effective sentence planning and resource allocation. Within six months of the publication of the report, the NIPS should introduce effective casework supervision for PDP coordinators, to ensure that appropriate work was done to address properly prisoners' risk of harm, likelihood of reoffending and preparation for return to the community. The NIPS should take the necessary steps to implement the corporate vision to have the offender as the centre of its focus, to reduce the risk of prisoners reoffending on release. Work should start immediately to embed resettlement as a core role of residential officers linked to the PDM, underpinned by the internal appraisal process. The NIPS should fundamentally examine the provision of psychology services and Offending Behaviour Programmes (OBP). Using the learning from RESET, ECO, POST and operational recommendation 5, the NIPS should review how it deals with short-term prisoners who are at high risk of reoffending, to target resources to reduce the reoffending rates for short-sentenced prisoners. Within nine months of the publication of the report, the NIPS should implement a policy for prisoner transfers to ensure that, other than in exceptional circumstances, all prisoner transfers are planned and made on the basis of resettlement need.

This proposal would require additional staffing to allow PBNI staff to engage with all sentenced prisoners, subject to post-custody licence at the point of sentence, to assess and agree pathways and interventions with prison colleagues, utilising information from PBNI pre-sentence reports and other assessments. This would, in turn, ensure that all relevant information is gathered and used to inform and agree the PDP and review points.

The working group also set out that: 'Responsibility for taking forward these recommendations will rest with Senior Managers in both organisations; at an operational level, NIPS Governors, Managers, and Psychologists, as well as PBNI Area Managers and other partners will be key to the successful implementation.'

As the managers of the two key agencies within the Personal Development Unit, our main area of responsibility was in changing the working practices of the unit to ensure that it was more effective, and in developing a partnership approach. It should be noted that we made a joint decision to change the name of the PDU from Prisoner Development Unit to Personal Development Unit, to emphasise the individual focus of our work.

This paper will discuss the actions taken to deliver on this work.

Enhancing collaboration within PDU

Leadership and culture

In the *Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service* (Prisons Review Team, 2011), it was highlighted that 'one of the key partnerships is between prisons and probation services'. That partnership is at the heart of the PDU model, and leadership was identified as being highly influential in shaping and embedding a collaborative culture. Whilst staff within the PDU came from two different organisations with different values and cultures, it was important that there was a shared vision of what collaboration should look like.

In the first instance, therefore, work was carried out internally to build mutual respect and understanding of each organisation's professional role. Both managers agreed to have an 'open door' approach and to be available for all staff to provide advice and guidance. A deliberate decision was taken to reach out to all the staff within the PDU, but especially the coordinator group, irrespective of whether or not they were a Prison Officer or a Probation Officer. Basic courtesy, respect and acknowledging the skill and experience of all the staff were cornerstones to the management approach.

We were acutely mindful to ensure as best we could that there would be no 'us and them' culture, but rather a culture that was open and transparent, with two agencies working in partnership at all grades within the PDU.

According to Bitna and Matz (2018), 'To maximise the benefits of partnership, some researchers recommend police and probation/parole agencies formalise their informal working relationships. Formal partnerships can provide clear guidance on the nature and extent of partnerships, including the specification for measurable purposes, geographic areas covered, information shared, and activities to be undertaken.'

Mindful of the research into professional partnership in criminal justice, to embed this culture of partnership and collaboration, the authors worked together to provide defensible, sensitive, unambiguous and clear communication. A Collaborative Best Practice Guidance was produced in 2020 for sentence coordinators of both agencies, to provide a step-by-step guide from committal to discharge. This document complements both the PDU standards and the PBNI standards regarding sentence management and preparation for release, but details what a collaborative approach should look like for NIPS and PBNI coordinators. Whilst we have stressed that this is a guide, and different prisoners will require a nuanced bespoke approach, we wanted the coordinators to have a practice guide as a reference and as a direction for broadly how they should work in partnership in sentence management. Moreover, we were able to reference the guidance when continuing to push the message of collaboration.

Over a two-year period, as part of enhancing the collaborative identity of the PDU, a programme was developed of external PBNI visits to Hydebank, and a job-shadowing opportunity for NIPS with PBNI in the community. This has given staff from both organisations further knowledge and insight into the life in the prison, the specific work within the PDU and the challenges for PBNI in the community. Community representatives have also been invited into the PDU to build awareness of our role and to enhance engagement with communities.

The structure of PDU

'Collaboration was also conceived as partnership — working and attending inter-agency and cross-sectional forums where key stakeholders meet together to finesse their practice and to calibrate their long-term visions and goals...' (Graham, 2016). This description captures the vision both managers had for the PDU working in collaboration. Together, both managers

developed the internal working structure of the PDU. That included agreeing the frequency of coordinator team meetings, how these should be chaired, the operation of case conferences, the joint management of discharge and release, the oversight of reports to the Parole Commissioner for Northern Ireland (PCNI) and Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI). Joint presentations to external and internal audiences also took place in order to set the tone and provide a single voice. At all times, in any formal or informal context, both managers were mindful of consistently referring to the collaborative/partnership that is NIPS/PBNI within a PDU setting.

Joint training initiatives — in particular, for the coordinators — have also been developed and facilitated. Examples include child protection training and training in relation to report writing for PPANI. We have also facilitated numerous internal meetings to look at particular areas of operation within Hydebank, including links with the Educational Department. The goal has been to expand the understanding of PDU, but more specifically the collaborative emphasis of the work.

Another key element in the joint approach was establishing the monthly Sentence Coordinators Team Meeting. This forum is an opportunity to bring all coordinators together formally, to consider best practice and peer support, and to enhance their knowledge base through outside speakers coming to the meeting. In regard to the collaborative aspect, the key to the success of this forum was the joint ownership by both managers who share the chairing of the meeting, agree to the agenda and provide a forum for all coordinators to contribute.

The authors also developed a collaborative model of supervision of staff. Within PBNI, as with other social-work based professions, there is a tried-and-tested model of staff supervision that is broadly based on support, accountability and development of staff. As part of the development of the PDU model, the Prison Service developed a supervision model for the Prison Officer coordinators. However, it was clear that there was a need to develop an additional tier of supervision of staff that captured the collaborative element and the partnership working required of them. The model of collaborative supervision requires managers to meet jointly with both Probation Officer and Prison Officer, with a focus on how they are meeting the best-practice guidance and the threats and opportunities the co-working presents. This model also provides line management with evidence of how the collaborative model is evolving, and the impact on staff and on prisoners. In addition, this further tier of supervision provides support for the staff.

Within the PDU, each agency has its own monitoring arrangements of cases in line with its own agency policy and procedures. PBNI, through the Probation Manager, provides to the PBNI Assistant Director Prisons a monthly report of the monitoring of a number of cases subject to sentence management by the PBNI Coordinator, reports to PCNI or PPANI on release plans and additional scrutiny of those prisoners assessed as Significant Risk of Serious Harm. The monitoring provides checks and balances on how PBNI is meeting both internally laid-down standards and prison-based business objectives (these focus on six key areas of sentence management from committal to release planning, with defined timescales and qualitative standards). To undertake this monitoring, access to information systems is critical. In the PDU, this requires access to PRISM (Prisoner Records and Information System Management) and, in addition, for PBNI it requires access to the PBNI information system ECMS (Electronic Case Management System).

To embed a collaborative approach fully within the PDU required an additional mechanism of monitoring and auditing that allowed managers to quality assure the work being jointly undertaken by both NIPS and PBNI coordinators and to track the impact of that work on prisoners' journey through their sentence.

The authors developed a new audit system to be undertaken by the senior officer in the PDU, which would form the basis of the monitoring of selected cases that were being collaboratively managed by both NIPS and PBNI. Cases were randomly selected and the findings examined to enable any deficits to be addressed, but also to track the impact of the work of the PDU on a prisoner whilst in custody, and to ensure relevant interventions to match the objectives of sentence planning and future release planning. Alongside this, PBNI coordinators use the ACE system (Assessment, Case management and Evaluation system – an evidence-based measurement of the risk of reoffending). The assessment is reviewed in custody at critical points. In subsequent sentence planning, the monitoring exercise takes account of the link between the evidence-based assessment and the prisoners' progress.

An important component in our collaborative monitoring is the work done around those prisoners recalled to custody having breached their licence. A post-recall case conference is now held and information is gathered to inform any links between the prisoners' sentence management prior to release and the behaviours or activity that led to their subsequent recall to prison.

New partnerships

Both Probation and the Prison Service have sought within Hydebank Wood College to develop partnerships with the voluntary and community sector and other statutory bodies, to assist in resettlement of those in custody. For example, in response to the high level of young men with low parenting skills, we embarked on a partnership between Barnardos, the Prison Service and the Probation Service, to deliver a parenting programme to male prisoners. A Probation Officer, a Prison Officer and a Barnardos team member worked together to facilitate this programme. This was an arrangement we deliberately implemented to reinforce the partnership approach.

We have also developed partnerships with sporting organisations including the Irish Football Association (IFA), where Probation staff, Prison staff and IFA coaches come together to provide training and interventions to those in custody.

Conclusion

In the Foreword to the 2018 Resettlement Inspection Report, the Chief Inspector said: 'prison staff need more help and support if we are to lift resettlement to the next level and make a real impact on reoffending. That will require the fulsome involvement of trained, experienced Probation staff working alongside Prison Officers, not just with the most serious offenders.... It would be the view of CJI that NIPS could not deliver the PDM effectively without the support, expertise, social work and community-based experience of PBNI.'

As a result of the work undertaken since August 2018, staff at all levels in both organisations have been encouraged to consider opportunities for enhancing joint working, streamlining services, reducing duplication and any other initiative that will lead to better outcomes for prisoners. To date in Hydebank Wood College, we have undertaken a number of initiatives to build a culture of partnership, and in doing so improve the outcomes for those in custody. We believe in the principle of continuous improvement and acknowledge that there is more work to be done but we believe we have a firm basis for that work to continue into the future.

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