



**THE BRISTOL PROLIFIC OFFENDER SCHEME**

**AN EVALUATION**

**A report prepared for Avon and Somerset Constabulary**

**by**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the Bristol component of the Avon and Somerset Prolific Offender Scheme (ASPOS). Avon and Somerset Constabulary commissioned the evaluation. The Bristol Prolific Offender Unit (POU) was set up in April 2002 under the auspices of the Bristol Crime and Disorder Partnership. It is a joint police, prison and probation initiative which targets the most prolific offenders in the Bristol area. The scheme as implemented and delivered in Bristol was extended throughout Avon and Somerset during 2003-2004.

ASPOS has attracted considerable attention both locally and nationally. The new national *Prolific and Other Priority Offender Strategy* (PPO) draws heavily on the Avon and Somerset model. Although our evaluation focuses upon the implementation and delivery of the scheme in the three original force districts in Bristol between October 2002 and September 2004, the views and experiences of Bristol POU staff and participants have important lessons for ASPOS as a whole. The findings also raise wider issues of relevance to the national strategy.

This introductory chapter looks briefly at developments that have provided the impetus for the current focus of attention upon prolific offenders, and at the main findings of evaluative studies of other prolific offender schemes that have been piloted in the UK.

## **Background**

Research and statistics at both the national and the local level indicate that a high proportion of detected crime is committed by a minority of known offenders. Nationally it has been estimated that about 100,000 people (some 10 per cent of all active criminals), are responsible for half of all crime (Home Office, 2001). Although this offender group is not static, the most active 5,000 within this group are estimated to be responsible for one in ten offences. Typical offences are household burglary and car crime. This is the target group for the 'catch and convict' strand of the new Prolific and other Priority Offender Strategy. In Bristol, a spur to the creation of the

POU in April 2002 was the estimate by the police that some 20 per cent of known offenders were committing approximately 56 per cent of all detected crimes and two thirds of acquisitive crimes.

While the incapacitation of such offenders puts a stop to their criminal activity for the duration of their sentences, the majority are reconvicted. Of prisoners discharged in 1999 whose original offence was burglary, 76 per cent were reconvicted within two years (Prison Statistics, 2002). Those reconvicted are frequently sentenced to further terms of imprisonment.

The financial and social costs of prolific offending are high. In their recent report *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2002) estimated that the cost to the criminal justice system of dealing with the consequences of re-offending by ex-prisoners averages £65,000 per offender and may far exceed this figure in the case of ex-prisoners whose offending is prolific. A study of the economic and social costs of Class A drug use in England and Wales concluded that, for problem drug users (those who offend to support their drug habit), the total social and economic costs ranged between £10.1 billion and £17.4 billion in 2000 (Godfrey et al 2002). The authors calculated that drug related crime accounted for around 88 per cent of the economic and social costs of Class A drug use. Drawing on the National Treatment Outcomes Research Study (NTORS), Godfrey et al concluded that criminal justice costs were the largest component of 'reactive government expenditure', accounting for 67 per cent of the total, exceeding even Health Service costs. On the basis of the pattern of offending reported by NTORS respondents, it was calculated that the additional costs to victims of drug related crime ranged from £5,778 - £10,400 million per annum in respect of problem drug users not in treatment, to £630 - £1,135 million for those in treatment for a year or more. These figures lend support to the argument that concentrating resources on prolific offenders whose offending is drug related not only addresses the safety concerns of the communities in which they live, but may also reduce some of the costs to the criminal justice system, other public agencies and victims.

Prolific offender schemes have been much influenced by the implementation of the National Intelligence Model (NIM) of policing (Maguire 2000, John and Maguire

2004). Police forces operating according to this model are already pursuing force-wide initiatives against prolific offenders. John and Maguire identified examples of good practice within pilot areas - systems and practices that enabled police services to develop the full potential of the NIM - and found evidence of significant increase in force arrests for targeted offences.

The movement within the probation service towards evidence-based practice, with its associated emphasis upon risk/needs assessment and the matching of level of services to the offender's estimated risk of reconviction, has also been influential in the development of prolific offender schemes. As with intelligence-led policing, this approach sees benefit in classifying offenders according to the risk they pose to the local community, and of concentrating probation resources upon those who present the greatest risk. It is also consistent with the concept of a probation service that plays a part in protecting the public through strict enforcement of post release licences and court orders.

### **The National Prolific and Other Priority Offender Strategy**

It was against this background that in 2002 the government launched its *Narrowing the Justice Gap* strategy, the aim of which was to reduce the gap between the number of crimes recorded by the police and the number which resulted in the perpetrator being cautioned, convicted or having offences taken into consideration by the court (Narrowing the Justice Gap, 2002). As part of the strategy, the national Persistent Offender Scheme (POS) was launched, the aims of which were to “catch, convict, and provide effective rehabilitative support to the most prolific adult offenders, those who have been convicted of six or more recordable offences in the last year, and other offenders identified as persistent on the basis of local intelligence.” (Narrowing the Justice Gap: Framework, 2002: 13). The strategy also advocated a ‘Premium Service’ for persistent offenders following their arrest and during the conduct of hearings at court.

A recent thematic inspection of the POS (Home Office Communications Directorate 2004) reported that all criminal justice partners supported the concept of prioritising work with a small number of offenders who cause significant harm by virtue of the

amount of crime they commit. Even before the launch of the *Narrowing the Justice* strategy, some police forces had begun to develop schemes for targeting prolific offenders. A fundamental aspect of all of such schemes is that they entail close partnership between the police and probation services in order to achieve the twin aims of swift apprehension of targeted offenders and an intensive response to the problems that underpin their offending behaviour.

The POS and all existing prolific/persistent offender schemes, including ASPOS, have now been subsumed within the new national PPO strategy. The strategy comprises three complementary strands: 'Prevent and Deter'; 'Catch and Convict'; and 'Rehabilitate and Resettle'. The first of these strands is directed at children and young people who are at risk of becoming serious offenders. The second and third - Catch and Convict; and Rehabilitate and Resettle - involve a three way partnership between the police, probation and prison service. The goal is to combine effective targeting, investigation, charging and prosecution of PPOs, while also building on the 'Premium Service' (which was part of the POS) to ensure that these offenders are prioritised through the criminal justice system, with support and priority access to services for participants in custody and in the community. Schemes are also expected to develop their partnerships with other key services (Health, Employment and Training, and Housing), and to engage their local Drug Action Teams (DATs) and related Criminal Justice Integrated Teams (CJITs) in their work with prolific offenders. Clearly, such a strategy will have resource implications for these agencies. It also raises issues of principle concerning the prioritisation of PPOs over non-offenders for mainstream services.

Within the new PPO strategy, CDRPs and Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJBs) are expected to provide a framework for prolific offender schemes. Since they have already begun to develop inter-agency structures and systems for information exchange, the government expects that CDRPs will be able to absorb the new PPO strategy into their existing structures and mechanisms for identifying and meeting priorities. And whereas the national persistent offender scheme imposed a definition of a 'persistent offender' upon local areas, the new strategy allows greater flexibility in the local prioritisation of a more limited group of people who are identified as causing most harm through their offending.

## **Evaluations of other prolific offender schemes**

As part of the POS, the National Probation Service part-funded 15 pilot Intensive Supervision and Monitoring (ISM) Schemes (including the Bristol POU) and commissioned the Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate to conduct a process and an outcome evaluation of the pilot schemes. The findings of this evaluation are soon to be published. Although existing evaluations of early schemes implemented in this country have been based on very small numbers of participants and short timescales, they highlight areas of good practice as well as implementation problems and difficulties in achieving intended outcomes.

Two of the first schemes to work with prolific offenders in this way were in Burnley, Lancashire (which began in 1995) and in Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire. These projects were also the first to be independently evaluated. Modelled on the key elements of a scheme developed on the Dutch city of Dordrecht in 1992, the Burnley scheme was evaluated during its third year of operation (Chenery and Pease, 2000). The scheme was successful in selecting the most prolific offenders available, but the numbers of offenders included in the outcome evaluation were insufficient for reliable statistical analysis of the impact of the scheme on offending. However, Chenery and Pease reported that of 33 completed orders, 20 succeeded without a return to court for revocation and 14 had no recorded offences for the whole period of the scheme. However, there was some evidence of displacement offending (both in terms of type of offending and location), and comparison between the participants and a control group indicated no difference in their re-offending rates. The authors discussed the problem of measuring the success of such schemes solely in terms of reduction in re-offending and in local crime rates. Focusing on these measures overlooks the fact that swift recall in response to breach of orders can also be regarded as a measure of success. Moreover, as far as reconviction is concerned, those who participate in such schemes are subject to a higher level of surveillance than any comparison group and for this reason alone are at higher risk of reconviction. The authors concluded that, although the underlying principles of the Burnley scheme were sound, teamwork between the police and probation services needed to be improved and there needed to



be clearer agreements about shared access to information held on participants and on the circumstances in which breach action should be taken.

Established in 1998, the Newcastle-under-Lyme prolific offender project was evaluated by a research team from Keele University. As with the Burnley scheme, the researchers were concerned both with implementation and effectiveness. A comparison of the offending pattern of 29 participants with that of a matched group of offenders who had not been exposed to the project indicated that the offending rate of participants was, on average, 50 per cent lower than the control group over a period of 18 months (Worrall et al, 2002; Worrall 2001). Although the researchers found the results 'promising', the sample size was too small to allow firm conclusions regarding the impact of the scheme on re-offending. Worrall highlighted the significance in the Newcastle-under-Lyme project of individualised 'treatment packages', fast-track drugs assessment and treatment, and close working relationships achieved by the probation and police co-ordinators (Worrall, 2001). Like Chenery and Pease, Worrall and the probation team involved in the scheme raised the important question of whether it is appropriate to include as a measure of success the increase in detected crime that results from close monitoring and surveillance, as this would normally be an indicator of programme failure. As Walton puts it, 'success' for prolific offender projects can be double-edged (Walton, 2000). On balance, the scheme was viewed as an effective method of reducing the *scale* of offending by non-violent property offenders, whose activities can create misery and fear in the localities in which they operate (Worrall, 2001).

Some of the insights gained from the Newcastle-under-Lyme project influenced the development of other ISM schemes, such as that which operated in Stoke-on Trent between June 2000 and September 2002 under funding provided through round two of the Targeted Policing Initiative (Worrall et al, 2003). A research team based at Keele University also evaluated this scheme. Unlike the Newcastle-under-Lyme scheme, the Stoke project team was based in a police station and included a police officer and a crime analyst. The Stoke project was also better resourced, especially in relation to drug treatment. Examination of reconviction rates of 22 participants compared with a matched comparison group showed that participants had a lower rate of conviction while they were on the project, although this difference was not sustained after

participants left the project. Once again the authors highlighted the fact that if participants did re-offend they were targeted and arrested swiftly, action, which could be expected to result in a higher reconviction rate than that of the comparison group. Worrall et al concluded that the limitations of reconviction rates as a measure of success are such that it is important to include other measures of outcome in evaluative studies. These could include: the benefits of partnership working, both at managerial and operational level; the opportunities the project was able to make available to participants through a network of support agencies; and the improved flow of intelligence achieved through the inclusion on the project team of a police officer and a dedicated crime analyst (Worrall et al 2003).

Closer to home as far as the Bristol POU is concerned was Project ARC (ARC standing for Addressing Repeat Criminality), which was piloted in South Gloucestershire. Funded by the Home Office as a 'Beacon Scheme for the Police Service', this pilot scheme, which was independently evaluated (Tupman et al 2001), ran from September 1999 to September 2000. The researchers carried out a process evaluation and examined the impact of the scheme on 11 participants, eight of whom were interviewed by the research team. Estimates were made of costs of crime admitted by the participants and potential savings achieved in respect of the few whose offending appeared to have been reduced as a result of their participation. But as the researchers conceded, it was far too soon to say whether the four participants who abstained from drugs and led crime-free lives for a period of six months would sustain this behaviour. The research identified a number of important lessons for future work with prolific offenders, including the need for clarification of the roles and responsibilities of key agencies (police, probation, health, housing and education), and the need to bring health services on board if schemes were to meet the needs of drug using offenders. There was evidence of some effective inter-agency co-ordination and understanding, but also of conflicting pressures upon agencies (housing and health) that were unresolved.

There is evidence from these evaluations that early schemes designed to target prolific offenders have taken on board an important message from studies within the body of research into 'What Works', namely, that interventions work best when they address social and personal problems as well as thinking skills and attitudes that support anti-

social behaviour (e.g Ross and Fabiano, 1985; Vennard et al., 1997; Raynor et al., 2000). Although a number of commentators have argued that the dominance in recent years of cognitive-behavioural approaches has resulted in a one track approach which neglects the “social and cultural contexts” of criminal behaviour, (see, for example, Vanstone 2004), this is not apparent in the above schemes. The Newcastle-under-Lyme project in particular demonstrated a commitment among probation team members to building relations with other statutory and voluntary agencies in order to access a range of services, including housing, training and employment and life skills, and help in overcoming substance misuse.

Although conclusions drawn from the above evaluations are highly qualified, the broadly favourable findings with regard to both process and outcomes have been influential in the development of prolific offender schemes in other areas of the country. The evaluations also highlight areas of difficulty in relation to project management and working conditions. For example, they warn about the tensions that can arise in establishing the respective roles and responsibilities of police and probation team members. Also evident is the fact that schemes must establish and maintain relationships with agencies, which may have other objectives and priorities (Worrall et al 2003). We shall return to these and other organisational and delivery issues in Chapter 4 when we examine the views and experiences of police, probation, and prison managers, and of frontline staff involved in the operation of the Bristol scheme.

### **Structure of the report**

The following chapter outlines the way in which the scheme is intended to operate in prison and in the community. Chapter 3 describes the aims and methodology of this evaluation and our sources of information. Chapter 4 examines the operation of the scheme from the perspective of the three agencies responsible for its delivery. Chapter 5 considers the views and experiences of a sample of participants. Chapter 6 considers what can be said at this early stage about the effectiveness of the scheme in achieving its stated objectives. Chapter 7 identifies possible lessons from the evaluation for future work with prolific offenders within the framework of the National PPO Strategy.

## **2 THE BRISTOL SCHEME: ORGANISATION AND PROCESSES**

Drawing on the original manual developed for use by ASPOS staff, this chapter provides an outline of the procedures and working practices that members of the Bristol Prolific Offender Unit (POU) were expected to follow during the custodial and the community phase of an offender's participation. The chapter also summarises the main interventions it was hoped that participants would attend while they were in custody and in the community.

### **Objectives**

The stated aims of ASPOS are to reduce the offending behaviour of prolific offenders through a combination of intensive supervision and prompt detection and disruption of further offending. Targeted offenders who are on licence, or serving community sentences, are closely monitored by POU staff with a view to ensuring a swift response to any failure to comply. At the same time the scheme aims to offer all who participate speedy access to range of support services both in custody and in the community. Where there are waiting lists (for example, in the case of drug services), this may entail prioritisation over others who do not have a criminal record. Members of staff and those supplying the service are, therefore, expected to ensure that the participants are motivated to engage with the treatment or course on offer.

### **Management and staffing**

Staff from the Probation Service, the Prison Service and from Avon and Somerset Constabulary work in partnership with a view to providing an integrated service from the point of referral. At both managerial and operational levels the three agencies have equal status. All three are represented on a Steering Committee. Members of the Probation Service are located at each of the three police stations. During the course of the evaluation, the probation team at each of the three police stations which comprised the Bristol component of ASPOS – Bridewell, Broadbury Road and Southmead, (referred to throughout this report as A, B and C districts), consisted of a probation officer and a probation service officer. A senior probation officer provided

operational management for the whole of North Somerset (the three Bristol districts and Staple Hill), supported by a senior practitioner. A full time office manager and two assistants provided administrative support.

### **Targeting and referral**

All three districts concentrate their efforts on offenders who commit a large volume of acquisitive crime. In the majority of cases their offending is driven by the need to support a long-standing class A drug addiction. The most prevalent offence committed by participants at the time of the evaluation was household burglary. In May 2004 house burglars comprised some two thirds of the caseload. Other offences committed by the target group were commercial burglary, vehicle theft, robbery and deception. Offenders targeted will generally have a substantial history of offending and will have received a range of previous sentences, often including custody, which have failed to bring about the desired change in their offending behaviour.

Although any criminal justice agency can refer an offender to the scheme, in practice referrals tend to be made by the police. Local police intelligence and probation records are the starting point in determining whether or not someone who is referred is suitable. Key considerations are the estimated current weekly offending rate, potential profit from offending, and type of victim. Only those men and women whose offending is judged to have a major impact on their local community are considered. They are then placed within a targeting matrix designed to examine whether they fulfil other criteria for inclusion in the scheme.

Inclusion in the scheme is compulsory for those who fulfil the selection criteria. Those who do not wish to co-operate with the rehabilitative component of the scheme will in any event be subject to intensive supervision, surveillance and speedy action in the event of a breach of a community sentence or period of supervision under licence.

The target number of participants at each of the three Bristol districts by September 2004 was 40, giving a total of 120 across the three police stations.<sup>1</sup> By June 2004 A

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<sup>1</sup> The target for Avon and Somerset as a whole was 220 by the end of September 2004.

and C district had attained this target, while B district had a caseload of 31. The ratio of offenders to staff at C district – 13 offenders to 1 Probation Officer/Probation Service Officer – has been adopted as a benchmark for other districts throughout Avon and Somerset. At both A and C districts the majority of the participants were in custody throughout the evaluation. A snapshot at the end of May 2004 indicated that, of 104 participants across the three districts, 64 per cent (67) were in prison, either on remand or serving a custodial sentence.

### **The custodial component**

HMP Bristol has collaborated with the scheme from an early stage. If an offender is targeted while on remand, prison officers seconded to the POU are expected to offer advice on appropriate courses and treatment available to remand prisoners. Drug using offenders are referred to the Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare Team (CARATs), drug testing is arranged, and the prison team inform the police of any “pertinent intelligence” arising from visits or contact with associates in custody. Pre-sentence planning may also involve identifying suitable treatment centres in the community and preparation (with assistance from the CARATS team) for treatment. If an offender is given a custodial sentence the senior/ prison officer assumes responsibility for throughcare in conjunction with the P/SO case manager. He/she is expected to attend sentence planning meetings and encourage participants to identify their goals and actions they need to take to achieve them, including attendance at relevant courses/programmes. The senior/prison officer then seeks to influence the choice of training prison to which participants are transferred in order that they can make progress on their goals. The prison and probation teams jointly monitor the progress of participants through written and oral reports from liaison officers and relevant course leaders and visits. Initial guidance suggested that the P/SO should visit offenders approximately every 6 weeks, but as is discussed in chapter 3, the frequency of visits has been reduced.

While participants are in Bristol prison they may be referred to a range of services including: CARATs; Detoxification services; Alcoholics Anonymous (AA); and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). The scheme has been allocated two places on Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS), a four-week accredited cognitive skills programme. In

addition, participants who demonstrate sufficient motivation to address their drug addiction may be transferred to C Wing – a drug free wing which offers the ‘Penthouse Drug Programme’, a four week first stage treatment programme that includes elements of problem-solving, and which for many offenders provides a first experience of group work.

Where possible, participants are transferred from Bristol prison following sentence to training prisons in the South West at which they can access programmes and courses that target their particular needs. Some training prisons have allocated prison officers to liaise with the scheme. The role includes monitoring participants, reviewing their progress, and acting as a point of contact for members of the POU.

Enforcement protocols have been established for the use of intelligence-sharing between HMP Bristol, Avon and Somerset Constabulary, and Avon and Somerset Probation Service. The protocols encourage exchange of information regarding any prolific offender. They also encourage the creation of a ‘release package’ for all prolific offenders prior to release.

### **Supervision in the community**

In the case of participants who receive a DTTO or Community Rehabilitation Order (CRO), or who are on licence, supervision and monitoring by the P/SO is far more intensive than that required within the National Standards that apply in mainstream probation. For the first three months the offender must attend a minimum of four appointments per week with project staff and those agencies to which they have been referred. The level of contact is reviewed at three months. Depending on progress made with goals and assessed risk of re-offending; this may be reduced to two appointments per week for the next three months. Home visits are conducted at an early stage in order to make contact with the offender’s family and to offer support to parents or partners. Such visits are also thought to enable the case manager to assess strengths and risk factors within the home environment. Drug testing takes place twice a week in the first 4 weeks of supervision. All appointments with offenders or contacts with agencies on their behalf are documented on computerised ‘contact sheets’ by case managers.

The scheme has developed links with other agencies whose co-operation is needed in order to address the multiple personal and social problems of participants. Formal partnerships (with service level agreements) have so far been limited to drug rehabilitation providers. If they are serving a DTTO or a community sentence, offenders may spend part of their sentence at a drug rehabilitation centre. During this time the centre will take responsibility for the delivery of treatment on behalf of the POU, but is expected to work with POU case managers to ensure that they are kept informed of progress and problems.

### **Surveillance and enforcement**

Close supervision on the part of the probation team is intended to ensure that non-compliance with the terms of a community sentence or licence -whether through re-offending or through other unacceptable conduct such as failure to keep appointments or positive drug tests - results in a swift response. Probation staff are expected to notify the intelligence teams whenever they have reason to believe that a participant is committing further offences. The police will target the offender and may keep him under surveillance. The case manager prepares the paperwork, recommends the action to be taken, and tries to ensure that the breach process is expedited through the courts.



### 3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Aims of the Evaluation**

When commissioned in the Autumn of 2002 this evaluation was intended to inform decisions on any further development of the Bristol POU and the possible assimilation of the scheme into mainstream working throughout Avon and Somerset. We were asked to focus on: the operation of the scheme from the perspectives of the key agencies involved in its delivery (including inter-agency working arrangements); and its impact on the offending behaviour, drug abuse, and related problems of some 10-15 offenders who were targeted during the first year.

Events could be said to have overtaken the evaluation. The scheme has already been extended throughout Avon and Somerset and a national strategy for working with prolific offenders came into operation in September 2004. But despite this enthusiasm for the so-called 'Catch and Convict' strand of the national strategy, the original research questions we were asked to address remain relevant. As with any new form of intervention with offenders, an independent evaluation can be of value in looking beyond initial teething problems to more fundamental problems that, if not addressed, limit the scheme's capacity to achieve the desired outcomes. An independent assessment of process and impact can also ensure that the perspective of participants is not overlooked or outweighed by the practitioner enthusiasm that is liable to accompany new initiatives.

There were two main strands to the evaluation. The process evaluation examined the views and experiences of staff in the three partner agencies responsible for the scheme delivery: the probation service, the police service, and the prison service. Whereas the prolific offender schemes referred to in the previous chapter broke new ground in achieving close partnership working between the police and probation services, the Bristol POU was the first in the country to extend the scheme to include the Prison Service. In the specification for the scheme it was envisaged that POU staff would begin work with all targeted offenders on remand in HMP Bristol or serving custodial sentences. It was important, therefore, to include in the process evaluation an

assessment of working practices and systems at the three police sites and in Bristol prison. Our interviews also explored the effectiveness of the links established by the team working in Bristol prison with other prisons to which participants were regularly transferred. Interviews sought to identify good practice, barriers to successful delivery of services in custody and in the community, and areas for improvement.

The second strand of the evaluation comprised an in-depth examination of the involvement in the scheme by a group of offenders. We examined their personal backgrounds, the problems associated with their prolific offending, their progress during the period of the evaluation, and their views on whether or not they have benefited from participation. An important question was whether those delivering the scheme viewed its objectives and benefits in the same way as did the participants. Previous research indicates that there is often a mismatch of views between the offenders and their probation supervisors as to the purposes of supervision in the community (Maguire and Raynor 1997). Whereas managers and frontline probation officers increasingly tend to focus on accountability issues (public protection and securing compliance with orders) and on offending behaviour, offenders perceive the main aim of the order as being the provision of practical help. We were interested to compare what staff and offenders thought that the scheme *should* offer, and the extent to which expectations on the part of participants were fulfilled.

Within the limits of our resources and timetable we have also sought evidence of the effectiveness of the scheme in achieving positive change in participants' attitudes and behaviour. However, we were not funded to carry out a reconviction study or to attempt to quantify the impact of the scheme in other ways. This would have entailed duplication of the evaluation of ISM schemes (including the Bristol Unit) conducted by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate during the course of our own evaluation (Homes and Walmsley forthcoming).<sup>2</sup> As we discuss more fully in Chapter 5, our timescale was such that very few of the participants whose progress we charted through the scheme were in the community for long enough to permit an assessment of the impact of the scheme on their lifestyles and patterns of offending. There would be value in a follow up study in order to gauge

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<sup>2</sup> A final report of the Home Office RDS study is due to be published in 2005.

whether short-term reductions in drug use and criminal activity were sustained, and with hindsight, what benefits participants themselves thought that they had derived from the scheme.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative research methods were used for both the process evaluation and to explore the participants' experiences and views of the scheme. The two researchers carried out in-depth interviews with staff and participants. These were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. Although checklists of topics was used as a framework for the interviews, this did not preclude discussion of other issues raised by respondents. In evaluative studies of this kind, such methods allow researchers to explore variation in the way in which an intervention operates at different locations, such as in the types of offenders targeted, or in the partnership arrangements. Qualitative methods are also best suited to evaluations of initiatives which are still evolving, as the data are typically gathered over a sustained period of time, this allowing for their developing nature in a way that is not possible in a 'snapshot'. And whereas quantitative studies of outcome simply indicate whether those who participate in an initiative such as this do better or worse in terms of reconviction than a matched comparison group, qualitative methods can also help to explain *why* a particular intervention is more successful than another. This is because they can provide insight into the mechanisms that contribute towards effective intervention (see, for example, Pawson and Tilley 1997).

### ***The process evaluation***

Interviews with managers and front line staff involved in the POU were carried during March-April 2003, by which time the scheme was operating at all three police stations. These interviews were conducted with:

- police inspectors responsible for intelligence coordination across the three divisions;
- the first senior prison officer responsible for coordinating the prison component of the scheme (referred to throughout the report as SPO1); and
- probation managers and staff seconded to the POU

These initial interviews explored views on a wide range of issues, including: roles and responsibilities of each partner agency; staffing and training; workloads; systems and criteria for targeting prolific offenders; arrangements for case management; partnership working between the three agencies; and access to services and treatment for drug using offenders, both in custody and in the community.

A second round of interviews was conducted between June and August 2004, again with the police inspectors responsible for intelligence co-ordination, probation staff seconded to the Bristol POU, and the senior prison officer who assumed responsibility for the prison component of the scheme early in 2004 (referred to as SPO2). In these interviews we returned to the above topics to find out whether or not views had changed in the light of experience in running the scheme. In addition, the interviews explored: the effectiveness of the scheme in achieving its objectives; structural/operational difficulties encountered over the previous year; and problems in gaining the support of other agencies. Interviews were also carried out with senior managers in the police service and probation service who were responsible for the implementation of the Bristol POU and the subsequent extension of the scheme throughout Avon and Somerset.

### *Participants' views and experience of the scheme*

The original plan was to draw a sample of some 15 new offenders as they entered the scheme during its first year of operation, ideally including roughly equal numbers of participants from each of the three areas. From January 2003 staff at each of the three police stations were asked to supply the names of all new participants who were willing to be included in our evaluation. We aimed to interview each offender three times. The first of these interviews would be conducted as soon as possible after placement on the scheme, focusing upon the offenders' understanding and expectations of the project and their perceptions of the social and personal problems underlying their criminal activity. A second interview was to be carried out towards the end of the period in which the offender was in contact with the scheme to explore views on: the helpfulness of the project in tackling offending-related problems; the impact of the project on drug/alcohol misuse and offending behaviour; and any

perceived shortcomings of the project or ways in which it might be improved. A final interview with each offender was to be attempted some months after he or she had 'left the scheme' for whatever reason (such as successful completion of the agreed period of support and supervision, or a move to another probation area). These interviews were to investigate any change in the offenders' main offending-related problems (employment circumstances, living arrangements, income, drug use etc) and their views on the impact of the project upon their lifestyle and offending behaviour.

In the event, we carried out a total of 17 initial interviews. As summarised in Table 2.1, 12 of these interviews were conducted in prison and five in rehabilitation centres. One year later, second interviews were carried out with 12 offenders, seven of these in prison and five in the community. Four of the five other original participants on the research had, by the time of the second interview stage, left the project for various reasons. The fifth, having come to the end of her licence, had moved to an address unknown. We conducted only three third interviews. Two of these were in the community, and the third in prison following a recall. In addition to our face-to-face interviews with offenders, we kept track on their progress by a series of reviews based on information obtained from prison and probation officers. The final review was carried out during the first week of August 2004, which marked the end of our fieldwork period.

It soon became apparent that our planned interview schedule would require modification. Two of the three police stations (Bridewell and Broadbury Road) started to work with targeted offenders later than we had anticipated, and because probation staff did not always remember to inform us of new cases. Although the fieldwork commenced at the beginning of January 2003, we did not receive any cases from Broadbury Road until late April. This has resulted in our sample being drawn disproportionately from Southmead. Of the total of 17 offenders participating in the research, nine are from the Southmead office, six from Bridewell and only two from Broadbury Road.

It had been our intention to conduct first interviews soon after offenders were sentenced, at which point they could have been expected to have a clear idea as to

what lay ahead of them in the medium term. We in fact conducted most first interviews while participants were on remand in custody as we were concerned that if we waited until the offender was sentenced this would leave insufficient time remaining of the fieldwork period to allow us to follow through cases to a final interview after offenders had left the scheme.

**Table 2.1 Interviews with Participants: Locations and Timing**

Case No.	First Interview		Second Interview		Third Interview	
	Where	Stage	Where	Stage	Where	Stage
1	Prison	pre-sentence	Community	After 6 months (Feb '04)	-	
2	Prison	pre-sentence	Prison	Just before release (Feb '04)	-	
3	Prison	pre-sentence	Prison	Just before release	Community	2 mths after release (July '04)
4	Prison	pre-sentence	Transferred out of scheme			
5	Rehab		Transferred out of scheme			
6	Prison	post-sentence	-	-	-	-
7	Rehab	[voluntary]	Ceased contact with scheme			
8	Prison	pre-sentence	Prison	Just before release	Prison	Just after recall (July '04)
9	Prison	pre-sentence	Prison	2 months before release (May '04)	-	-
10	Prison	pre-sentence	Community	After 2 months, just before recall	Community	1 mth after release (June '04)
11	Prison	pre-sentence	Prison	4 months before release (March '04)	-	-
12	Prison	pre-sentence	Prison	Just before release (March '04)	-	-
13	Prison	post-sentence	Prison	5 months after recall (May '04)	-	-
14	Prison	post-sentence	Community	One month after release (Jan. '04)	-	-
15	Rehab		Community	Five months after release (May '04)	-	-
16	Rehab		Rehab	End of licence (May '04)	-	-
17	Rehab	[voluntary]	-	-	-	-

Of the 12 initial interviews carried out in prison, eight were with offenders on remand. As we anticipated, their uncertainty as to their sentence tended to make it difficult for them to formulate clear expectations of their participation in the scheme.

A more serious constraint was the fact that a large proportion of the offenders included in our sample received custodial sentences, many of which were longer than expected, taking their time on the scheme very close to or beyond the end of our fieldwork period. Thus, whereas we had aimed to carry out second interviews some three months following offenders' release from prison, in practice seven of these interviews took place prior to release. In six cases the offenders were still serving their original sentences, and the other had been recalled to prison following a breach of his Drug Treatment and Training Order (DTTO). Of the five second interviews carried out in the community, one took place in a rehabilitation centre. Of the remaining four, two offenders had been released some five months earlier, and the other two only eight and six weeks previously respectively.

Ideally, we would have carried out more third interviews, albeit very few of these would have been at stage we originally envisaged – that is, some time after having left the scheme. However, we found that even among those few in the community, two or three were undergoing crises as we approached the end of our fieldwork period, during which time it was considered by their probation officers inappropriate for us to interview them. These crises culminated in offenders relocating to unknown addresses, or being recalled to prisons well away from Bristol, and therefore not being interviewed at all.

It can be appreciated from the above that when the fieldwork period came to an end the cohort of 17 offenders was far less advanced through the scheme than had originally been anticipated. Of the 17, nine were only part way through their involvement and their situations were far from settled.

### *Measures of outcome*

It was not possible within the agreed timescale and budget for the evaluation team to draw a larger sample of participants for the purpose of examining the impact of the scheme on reconviction. Even without these constraints, it would have been difficult to construct a suitable comparison group for the Bristol POU participants. A



comparison group comprising offenders who were offered a place on the scheme but declined would have been poorly matched in terms of motivation to address the factors associated with offending behaviour. As Worrall, Dunkerton and Leacock (2002) point out, without random allocation there is always the possibility of selection bias, although in practice, and perhaps also ethically, it is not possible to allocate prolific offenders randomly to the project and a control group. There is the added difficulty that offenders identified as suitable for the scheme, but who choose not to participate, would still be subject to intensive surveillance.

It must also be recognised that, unless the number of offenders in each group is sufficient for robust statistical analysis of differences in behaviour and in reconviction rates, such an exercise would be of little value. Where the expected reconviction rate is high – as in the case of prolific offenders whose offending is drug related – it is not realistic to expect a large reduction in re-offending within two years of the start of a community intervention. For example, in order to demonstrate a reduction of 10 per cent one would require a minimum sample size of over 300 offenders in both programme and comparison groups.

In the longer term it will be important to carry out a reconviction study of offenders who have participated in the scheme, distinguishing between rates of offending while under supervision and for a period of time after having left the scheme. However, in the absence of reconviction data there is still value in examining other factors that can give an early indication of likely reductions in re-offending. Widely accepted indicators of successful intervention (Chapman and Hough, 1998; Colledge et al 1999) include improvement in scores for risk assessment tools (notably OASys), reductions in use of Class A drugs, and positive change in attitudes towards offending. Simply completing a course of treatment or keeping appointments can be regarded as a measure of success in the case of many offenders. There is evidence that even prolific offenders with entrenched drug problems show substantial reductions in conviction rates if they remain on drug programmes and complete their Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (Hough et al., 2003). Moreover, as Raynor et al. have argued: ‘Drug misuse...is usually enmeshed in complex physical, emotional and social problems and underpinned by a dependent lifestyle which can only be reshaped through small incremental changes.’ (1994: 82). Obtaining settled housing can thus contribute significantly to reductions in re-offending, while lack of suitable accommodation heightens the risk that the offender will relapse into drug abuse and

criminal behaviour. Unemployment is another important factor associated with risk of re-offending. Although offenders targeted by the scheme are unlikely to obtain employment in the early stages of their involvement, improvement in their employment prospects, through education and training, would be an indicator of effective intervention.

Although the POU team had completed initial OASys assessments on most of the 17 offenders included in our sample, the evaluation ended too soon for us to be able to compare these assessments and risk scores with the reviews to be carried out on completion of a post-release licence or a community sentence. Moreover, whereas it had been agreed with the first manager of the Bristol POU that Crime-Pics 11 self-assessments would be carried out with offenders who participated in the scheme during the evaluation period (immediately on joining the scheme and after a period of post-release supervision), such assessments were not carried out.<sup>3</sup>

We were thus reliant for information on key indicators of change emerging in the course of our own interviews with participants and with their supervising probation officers. In these interviews we sought to ascertain whether:

- drug treatment programmes had been completed;
- drug use had been reduced/participants were abstaining from drug use; and
- there had been resolution of, or improvement in, personal and social problems.

It was beyond our remit to attempt to estimate any savings to the community resulting from reductions in offending while the 17 offenders were involved in the scheme. However, we sought information from crime databases compiled by Avon and Somerset Constabulary on offences committed by these offenders in the 12 months before they were targeted by the scheme and during their participation. In a few cases we were able to examine re-offending rates for a short period after the offenders had left the scheme.

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<sup>3</sup> Crime-Pics 11 provides a psychometrically validated measurement of change in offenders' attitudes towards crime and victims and in a range of social and personal problems. We understand that initial Crime Pics 11 assessments were carried out on some offenders, but these were sent to the Home Office for use in their monitoring exercise and copies were not taken.

#### **4 THE OPERATION OF THE SCHEME: PERSPECTIVES OF THE THREE PARTNER AGENCIES**

The focus of this chapter is on the manner in which the scheme was delivered in custody and in the community, drawing on the practical experience of the police and probation service managers, front line probation staff, police officers based at the three police stations, and prison officers at HMP Bristol prison who were seconded to the scheme. As noted in Chapter 2, interviews were conducted at an early stage and again towards the end of the evaluation period. The chapter highlights aspects of the scheme that are working well, but also areas of difficulty in the internal organisation or where the scheme relies upon other agencies for the provision of services.

##### **Views on the Scheme's objectives**

Across all three services, staff involved in operating the scheme supported the concept of combining rehabilitative work with rigorous enforcement and a swift return to court in the event of further offending. Indeed, the combination of strict enforcement of community orders with intensive support and prioritisation of limited resources (particularly for residential drug treatment) was highlighted by many police and probation service respondents as the cornerstone of successful work with prolific offenders. Characterised by some as a 'win win' approach, swift enforcement meant that drug using offenders who relapsed could be recalled and stabilised quickly in custody, thus avoiding a further spree of offending. The ability to expedite recall if participants breach the conditions of licences and court orders (with the co-operation of the court) was viewed as benefiting both the community and the offender, since the latter may thus avoid a further prison sentence and be able to pick up where he left off in terms of drug treatment and other targeted interventions.

None of the respondents were optimistic that the scheme would divert the majority of participants away from drug use and offending in the short term. Even a two year follow-up period, the normal period for reconviction studies, was thought to be insufficient to achieve major change in the offending behaviour of the target group given their entrenched patterns of drug misuse and highly criminogenic lifestyles. But whatever the impact of the scheme on re-offending, staff valued the opportunity to offer far more intensive supervision and support than was possible in mainstream probation supervision, and to continue such work even if participants were recalled to

prison. The fact that the probation team performed all the functions of mainstream probation – report writing, supervision, throughcare and aftercare –but far more intensively, was seen as a major strength of the scheme.

### **Targeting and selection**

All of the POU staff and police officers whom we interviewed were supportive of the methods and criteria for selecting participants. Police inspectors responsible for co-ordinating intelligence believed that the matrix developed for use at the referral stage encouraged a standard approach across the three police districts and ensured that only the most prolific offenders were targeted. The police inspectors also stressed that the approach was consistent with the intelligence-led policing promoted by the National Intelligence Model. During our initial interviews, carried out soon after the scheme was extended from the first Bristol district to other areas of Bristol (and subsequently throughout Avon and Somerset) several members of the POU questioned whether it was appropriate to adapt the selection criteria to the different priorities of the areas which they serve. Whereas at C district the police had concentrated on dwelling house burglars, in A and B districts police priorities reflected different patterns of offending. At A district the offences of principal concern to the police (robbery associated with drug misuse, drug dealing, sex industry offences) were not those typically targeted by prolific offender schemes. Some probation staff had misgivings about extending the scheme to target offenders for whom it was not originally intended.

A year later, the extension of the scheme throughout Avon and Somerset had demonstrated that a measure of flexibility would be needed to meet the target numbers in the timetable set by the national PPO strategy and to reflect differences between districts in the profile of PPOs. In CDRP areas with relatively small numbers of prolific burglars, altering the profile of the target group (and the selection criteria) seemed unavoidable to most respondents if numbers were to be met. Police inspectors stressed that the scheme should continue to target only those offenders who are assessed as high risk in terms of re-offending and whose behaviour has a major impact on the community. As one inspector explained:

If we start getting intelligence that they are active we look back to their offending before they went into custody – if they fit other criteria we'll target. A lot of balancing goes on. There's no point in diluted attention so we need to

cream off the ones that are prolific. Balance is also needed between the ones who are most easily caught and the most active. We are applying the NIM in that we have a problem with commercial burglaries on Bristol East and an active commercial burglar in the area who's hurting us, so we raise him as a target.

Some respondents were concerned that a widening of the selection criteria could have resource and training implications. They thought that inclusion of other types of offence - drug dealing and domestic violence had been mentioned as possible target offences - would require specialist training and experience, which the present probation teams lacked.

Following the extension of the scheme throughout Avon and Somerset, staff identified a need for coordination between police stations in the selection of prolific offenders for inclusion. One probation officer had asked the police at Weston (now participating in ASPOS) to consider targeting the brother of a participant at C district since the two men had very similar offending patterns and the team had found it difficult to address the behaviour of one offender (O1) in isolation from the other. However, the police at Weston had apparently taken the view that O1's brother was "not sufficiently prolific", albeit that his offending pattern was similar to that of O1.

### **Training and experience in working with drug misusing offenders**

During the first round of interviews with probation staff we did not elicit any concerns about the adequacy of training and experience within the teams based at the three police stations. The probation officers were experienced in managing generic caseloads of offenders and also in working with substance abusers. Two of the PSOs had worked with substance abusing offenders in probation hostels and in this role they had received training in motivational skills and relapse prevention. They thought that this, together with training they had received since joining the POU, equipped them to fulfil all aspects of their new posts. Moreover, while the scheme was in its infancy and caseloads were small, probation officers were able to give time to mentor any PSOs who had no experience of working with offenders. One such PSO shadowed her line manager for four weeks and she said that this gave her "real on the job training, which was excellent". PSO staff who had not previously worked with offenders also received formal training in motivational interviewing, OASys assessment and relapse prevention.

With the expansion in the number of offenders targeted and the roll out into other areas of Avon and Somerset, a number of new PSOs were appointed, some of whom lack experience in mainstream probation. In our second round of interviews it was apparent that for some experienced members of the team this lack of experience was an issue of major concern. In the words of one respondent:

It's not the same as having worked in a hostel. We are talking about 100% drug users who are the most chaotic people to work with and are unpredictable in terms of risk assessment. A PSO said to me that she was amazed that she had two weeks training and then was told that she had to do the job. It causes me in my role huge concerns about lack of experience and lack of knowledge of working with people like this.

Although training is provided for new staff, in the view of some members of the team this did not overcome the problem of lack of experience:

They do get into training schemes but it's about understanding the relevance of that training and in what contexts you apply it. It is about experience. Junior staff say they have been trained in this or that technique and are going to employ it with so and so – it just doesn't work like that. Much of our work is crisis intervention and requires a holistic approach, generic working rather than concentrating on one of many tools you need to work with in this area of work. It's more dangerous to try new techniques in the community. Offenders see through it.

This respondent was not alone in pointing out that offenders can be highly manipulative and that it takes experience and training to recognise and deal appropriately with this behaviour. Where training and/or experience were minimal there were risks to PSO staff since they are the main point of contact with many of the offenders.

There was also anxiety that the shortage of experienced staff at some police stations prevented the probation teams from providing the high quality supervision required in working with the targeted offenders. A failure to address offending behaviour was of particular concern to two respondents. Inexperienced PSOs tended to focus on practical issues “because they feel safe with those, such as the drug testing, looking for rehabs, all the practical things. But then what?” When asked by a PSO “What offence focused work should I do with this person?” one respondent told us that she struggled to know where to begin. She did not have the time to provide the PSO with the level of mentoring that she evidently needed in order to apply the training she had

recently received. Shortcomings in training were identified by another member of the probation team as limiting the ability to understand the way in which family factors contributed to a participant's drug abuse and offending.

One other respondent (an experienced probation officer) illustrated the problem created by the intake of staff who had not worked in mainstream probation with reference to their ignorance of breach procedures and the associated paper trail that demonstrate adherence to national standards. This probation officer was also critical of the fact that some members of the team lacked experience in case management and throughcare. Moreover, although the POU had recently assumed responsibility for managing Drug Treatment and Training Orders (DTTOs), at the time of our final interviews staff had not received training on this aspect of supervision. One probation officer observed: "no-one knows how to do it properly....because they haven't been trained".<sup>4</sup>

The two senior prison officers whom we interviewed considered that the training they had received during their career in the prison service, coupled with their many years experience, equipped them to fulfil their role within the scheme. Although there were many aspects to their work requiring new skills, for example in developing effective partnership working with the police, they thought that these could best be learnt "on the job". Prison staff undertook motivational interviewing with participants even though they had no special training. This was not thought by one of the senior prison officers to be problematic: "Years of working with offenders teaches you how to motivate people". However, the officer saw a role for probation staff in areas where he lacked the expertise, such as when offenders asked to see probation staff separately "on counselling issues".

### **The police and probation service partnership**

As has been reported in other evaluations of joint police and probation schemes that target prolific offenders (see Chenery and Pease, 2000 & Worrall et al., 2003), the close partnership between the police and probation services, both at strategic and operational level, was viewed as a major strength of the scheme. The partnership was widely regarded as essential if prolific offender initiatives are to fulfil both the

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<sup>4</sup> This gap in training was addressed after completion of the final interviews.

rehabilitative and enforcement strands of the strategy. The fact that the two services had achieved close and effective working relations in a relatively short space of time was attributed in large part to the location of the probation teams at the three police stations. A minority of probation staff mentioned that they had experienced initial difficulties in working in a very different environment from that to which they were accustomed. Again, this is consistent with evaluations of other schemes, notably Stoke-on-Trent, where it was reported that at the outset probation staff had to overcome initial discomfort in a “vaguely hostile setting” and had experienced feelings of isolation from their probation colleagues (Worrall et al., 2003 p 19). Moreover, probation staff were aware that many of their colleagues who worked in mainstream probation were highly critical of the close collaboration with the police service and saw them as “colluding with the police, setting up offenders to fail”. One respondent did admit to us that she occasionally felt that she was “crossing the boundary”.

As Worrall et al. (2003) note, concerns about “blurring of agency boundaries” have arisen in other contexts, such as in Nash’s (1999) analysis of the partnership between the two services in working with sex offenders. Citing Nash, Worrall et al. (2003) comment: “his analysis of the ‘blurring of traditional agency roles’ (1999: 366) in the name of risk reduction and public protection raises pertinent questions for intensive supervision and monitoring projects”. But as Worrall et al. found in relation to the Stoke-on-Trent project, in the Bristol POU the majority of our respondents saw themselves as having adopted complementary roles. Even the probation officer who experienced occasional discomfort was persuaded that the benefits of teamwork outweighed any costs as far as relations with mainstream probation service was concerned.

By the time we conducted our second round of interviews, probation staff at all three locations considered that they had established effective working arrangements with the police. The physical proximity (at two police stations the team has desks within the intelligence departments) ensured that there was much informal contact, which encouraged a constant flow of information. At the referral stage this was regarded as valuable to the probation team in gaining information about lifestyles and police concerns. At later stages police intelligence helped them monitor participants’ movements and behaviour. None of the probation staff whom we interviewed



expressed any concerns about this degree of information sharing. As one probation officer observed:

It's the immediacy of it that's good. We can go straight to intelligence and look at their daily briefings and find out exactly what's going on with your cases if they're being targeted.

In addition to informal exchanges, probation staff believe they benefit from attendance at fortnightly intelligence meetings, where the police identify “hotspot crime areas”, offenders being targeted, and tactics employed. The ready access to up-to-date documents and computerised information about the offenders targeted was also seen as beneficial. The police inspectors confirmed that their intelligence staff passed on to the POU team everything they knew about targeted offenders. As one put it: “There's a lot of trust involved on both sides. We won't let this information go any further”.

Probation staff identified a wider benefit they derived from close collaboration with the police service. As the police become increasingly familiar with the work carried out by the probation teams, it seemed to one probation officer that they had established credibility, won the respect of their police colleagues, and overcome scepticism about their willingness to rigorously enforce orders and “pull someone back to prison within 24 hours if things fall apart”. In the words of one PSO: “We're changing attitudes. Some myths have been dispelled.”

All three police inspectors to whom we spoke were similarly enthusiastic about the partnership with the probation service and the location of prolific offender teams within police stations. They described the arrangement as having improved understanding between the two services and having enabled the police to modify their image of probation officers as social workers uninterested in managing risk and improving public safety through strict enforcement of licences and court orders. In the words of one inspector, the working practices they had established with the probation teams had “removed some suspicions and barriers that have habitually existed.” Providing POU staff with office space within the police intelligence department was seen by one inspector as essential, since it encouraged regular contact on an informal basis: “When you sit and talk to them and work with them you see that we're not really that far apart in what we're trying to achieve.” From a police perspective it was also clear that the presence of probation teams within police

stations ensured that the intelligence units benefited from information held by probation staff. As one inspector explained:

“This a joint enterprise – when they think someone might be out offending again they’ll tell the local intelligence officer and he’ll feed that back via the bulletins to the sectors. They’ll go and have a look at this individual .... We may adopt someone as a target on the sector if they’re not engaging with the POU. We will check a person out, observe that he’s in the area when burglaries are happening, try to do operations on him to catch him”.

Interaction between the POU team and the police volume car crime team was also viewed by this inspector as valuable. He believed this would be far less effective if the POU team worked in a separate office. This inspector observed, however, that although the CID staff were familiar with the scheme and saw it as valuable to the police, this was not always the case as far as uniformed police officers were concerned. Early efforts to cascade information to uniformed police officers had not been entirely successful. At the time of interview this inspector was making efforts to ensure that every inspector met the POU team and learnt about the scheme, so that this information could be passed down to lower ranks. But he conceded that:

Trying to educate everybody (below inspector level) is difficult. I try to do it through intelligence officers who do go to the briefings. There are some who won’t be convinced by the scheme.

Several respondents (including probation and police managers and operational staff) were enthusiastic about the inclusion of a police officer on the POU team in Bath and were keen to adopt this approach in Bristol. This police officer had become closely involved in the rehabilitation strand of the scheme, visiting participants in their homes and in prison, and had gained first hand experience of the probation officer’s role. Such visits also provide an opportunity to challenge behaviour that gives grounds for concern. At one other location (Staple Hill) the probation team involve the police in joint interviews with offenders who are doing well. Respondents strongly endorsed this involvement as it demonstrates to offenders the reality of “joined up working” and helps them to view the police as “more than simply enforcement officers”.

Similarly, the prison based team saw mutual value in a police presence at interviews with participants in custody. One senior prison officer described the benefits as follows:

It’s about continuity and overcoming distrust. We need the police to come in here and say ‘you’ve done really well this time, we’re going to cut you a bit of

slack and give you a chance to make a new life for yourself'. It's all about breaking down entrenched attitudes that they have about the police.

### **The prison component**

A Criminal Justice Chief Inspectors Group thematic inspection of local prolific offender schemes conducted in 2003 observed that, although the prison service was the theoretical partner to the Persistent Offender Initiative, it had not produced mandatory instructions to prison Governors, nor had it set performance targets in relation to persistent offenders (*Joint Inspection Report into Prolific and Persistent Offenders*, 2004). The inspection team found little evidence of engagement with the initiative on the part of the prison service. Bristol was then one of only two prisons in England and Wales actively involved in such schemes, and the only prison to work with the entire group of targeted offenders through a network of liaison officers in other prisons. Unsurprisingly, respondents from all three agencies considered that securing the commitment of HMP Bristol to the scheme was a major achievement.

Probation staff involved in delivering the scheme thought that the main benefit they derived from the links forged with Bristol prison was the fact that a senior prison officer was seconded to work full time with the scheme. As one probation officer explained: "Sometimes we need to ask SPO1 actively to chase things or push for us, but usually we just mention his name and they are willing to help." This probation officer also observed that:

It's quite a closed environment and I don't think we could do the things we do without SPO1. If I needed to get someone drug tested for a court report by next Monday without SPO1 it would be pretty difficult. I can ring SPO1 and he'll ensure that it's done.

This senior prison officer and his successor (SPO2) similarly argued that prolific offender schemes gain a great deal from having one or more experienced prison officers dedicated to the work. One advantage mentioned was the fact that they had personal knowledge of most offenders who were targeted. SPO1 said that he already knew some 95 of the 110 prolific offenders identified when the project first came into being. He observed: "Prison involvement is vital – we know these people better than anybody."

The link with Bristol prison, facilitated by the dedicated prison team, has meant that work begins with targeted offenders even before sentence if they are remanded in custody. All the probation staff we interviewed appreciated this link as it enabled them to build confidence and trust among offenders from an early stage. If the participant is on remand an assessment is carried out without delay by the seconded prison officers. Subject to the participant's co-operation, arrangements can then be made to refer him to appropriate courses, detoxification, or drug maintenance. The CARATs team fast track participants so that they may begin one-to-one work with a drug counsellor within a week. The prison team sometimes provides an addendum to a Pre Sentence Report (PSR), informing the court of work undertaken by the offender while on remand. This can demonstrate motivation to address offending and drug use. According to SPO1, such information is not usually incorporated into PSRs and is well received by probation staff "who say it's wonderful to have this insight and factual information". The court also benefits: "It has also given the judges some sort of substance to the recommendation, so they are tending to accept more PSR recommendations than otherwise".

SPO2 observed that, since assuming responsibility for the prison component of the scheme, he had witnessed a major improvement in the participants' attitudes and motivation: "While in custody they are often at their most stable - either drug free or being maintained - and most motivated". Like his predecessor, he knew most of the offenders and had seen them come back to prison "time and time again", rarely undertaking any interventions focused on their offending behaviour. SPO2 finds that he and his colleagues are now having more success: "We are able to motivate them and point them in the right direction. They are accessing the programmes". Although in the early stages of the scheme SPO1 saw advantage in holding all of the participants on one wing - it was easier to provide intensive support, deal with queries, or pass on information to them from the probation service - in practice this arrangement proved to be unworkable. The majority now spend time undergoing detoxification on A wing, after which many progress to the drug free wing (C wing), where they complete the Penthouse programme. Others move to G wing where they can access educational courses.

A theme running through our interviews with staff of the three services was that the ability to engage and motivate participants while they are in custody depended in large measure on whether they had reached a point in their lives when they genuinely

wanted to change their lifestyles. If this were the case, participants were much more likely to be able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the scheme. Hence the importance attached to high levels of contact while offenders were on remand in custody and conveniently located at Bristol prison.

### ***Workload***

At the initial interview with SPO1 (in April 2003) he was concerned that certain aspects of his work were not being managed as well as they should be as a result of his heavy workload. He had oversight of some 50 offenders on remand or serving sentences. He saw his role first and foremost as maintaining contact with the offenders, and knew from experience that if they were not seen regularly and kept well motivated “they’ll go off the rails.” There was also increasing pressure to spend more time developing action plans with offenders and liaising with link officers at other prisons in respect of participants transferred. Soon after this interview a prison officer was seconded full time to assist SPO1, and more recently, two half time PSOs have joined the prison team. Although the number of participants in custody was approximately 120 in July 2004, the expansion of the prison team ensured that, up to that point, the team was able to cope with the increasing workload. When at full strength throughout Avon and Somerset SPO2 anticipated that the team will be expected to handle some 150 prisoners. He has continued to develop new contacts at other prisons throughout the South West in anticipation of increasing numbers of transfers, and emphasised the importance of ensuring that at each prison the liaison officers are fully briefed on their role. However, since link staff at other prisons are not resourced to provide a similar service (see below), he envisaged that a large amount of his time would continue to be taken up with keeping himself and other members of the POU informed of the progress of scheme participants.

### ***Commitment to the scheme in HMP Bristol***

In the early days the scheme received a mixed reception in HMP Bristol. Whereas some prison officers and members of senior management were suspicious or sceptical, others were supportive from the start. Negative attitudes were largely attributed by the prison team to the fact that the scheme was new and not well understood within the prison. A year later, SPO2 said that he had developed effective communications

with link officers on every wing in Bristol prison. He now found them “receptive to the scheme”. Early difficulties had been largely overcome:

The longer the scheme’s gone on the better it’s been received. We are getting our working practices tighter and better. And officers are noticing the change in our offenders. We’ve got lads on G wing who are no. 1 cleaners and doing the ETS programme. And again, these are lads staff have known for years. They are saying this is amazing. So yes, it is being received really well.

The agreement to prioritise scheme participants for work on their drug misuse appeared to have been accepted by prison managers and course leaders:

We get priority CARATs and when the Penthouse programme is run they save us two spaces. We’ve got to fill them with appropriate people - they’ve got to meet the criteria. But if we recommend them they snap them up. The course manager told me: ‘your prolific offenders have been the stars of the group.’ From my point of view that’s great.

Although the prison team can influence decisions regarding the timing and location of transfers, difficulties have arisen as a result of overcrowding at Bristol prison. As SPO1 explained, at one point during the evaluation period the governor had introduced “a blanket instruction that no prisoners will be held in the prison when there is a need to transfer prisoners to reduce overcrowding.” SPO1 understood the need for this decision, but regarded it as “a big problem.” To alleviate the problem an understanding was reached with the Sentence Planning Unit (SPU) and the offender Classification Unit (OCU) to retain prisoners targeted by the scheme for as long as possible. This informal agreement between SPO1 and OCU had become critical to the ability of the prison-based team to influence when and where participants were transferred:

Staff there are excellent. They’re helping me a lot and understand the importance of this initiative. When places do come up (e.g. at Erlestoke) they phone me first. They say there are spaces at Erlestoke or Guys Marsh, is anyone suitable? So we do damage limitation to try to get people to the right establishment. I take my hat off to them.

Despite this high level of co-operation with the POU, pressure to move participants on as soon as they are sentenced is a continuing problem. SPO2 has sought to ensure that every offender is held at least until the OASys assessment has been completed, although the need to avoid overcrowding in Bristol prison is such that this request is often overridden, with the result that “they go without a properly structured sentence plan”. This practice reduces the ability of the scheme to ensure that goals identified in a sentence plan are achieved through attendance at relevant courses and programmes.

Several members of the probation team highlighted the issue of overcrowding and untimely transfers as one that needs to be addressed nationally within the context of the national PPO strategy. The problem is longstanding and not, of course, confined to prolific offenders. As the prison population continues to rise, it remains to be seen whether the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) can achieve its objective of providing the end-to-end management of offenders - in custody and following their release - that lies at the heart of the strategy.

Prison and probation staff saw a strong argument for returning participants to Bristol prison for the last few weeks of their sentence in order to undertake intensive resettlement work. Again, population pressure at HMP Bristol works against attainment of this objective, although SPO2 estimated that, out of 120 participants who are at any one point in custody, no more than two a month would need to be returned to Bristol prison to engage in resettlement work: “So we’re only looking at a couple of beds and once these are established those beds will always be clearing themselves”. At the completion of our fieldwork (in July 2004) the scheme was investigating the scope for local discharge of offenders, which would entail returning participants to Bristol approximately six weeks prior to release. The dedicated Resettlement Unit at Bristol prison would then be able to prioritise them for a range of services, including education and training, accommodation, and drug treatment or maintenance. As an example of the Resettlement Unit’s drug-related work through the prison gate, it was explained that if an offender is identified as suitable for a particular type of ‘blocker’ when released, the prison ensures that “all the networks are in place and a prescription is ready for them to pick up on the day of their release”. This does not always happen when offenders are released from other prisons.

### ***Influencing the transfer of participants to suitable training prisons***

Where the prison team is able to influence the transfer decision, the Bristol POU has been able to take advantage of drug treatment provision, educational courses, and offending behaviour programmes at training prisons (including Erlestoke, Guys Marsh, and the women’s prison Eastwood Park). Probation staff valued the opportunity to “jump the queue” at certain prisons, such as when they request prioritisation of an offender for the ‘12 step’ drug treatment programme, which aims at total abstinence, and which research has shown can be effective in reducing drug

use and re-offending if it is followed up with high quality aftercare such as that provided by the scheme (Ramsay, 2002).

However, we were told that only a minority of participants attend programmes designed to address their offending behaviour (such as ETS) whilst in custody as there is seldom time for them to complete such a programme in addition to a course of drug treatment. Staff also conceded that some participants were insufficiently motivated to engage in a programme, which seeks to modify impulsive and egocentric ways of thinking and behaving. One member of the probation team saw this as a major gap, since many of the participants had begun offending some time before they became drug addicts. Those who had completed the ETS programme were better able to progress to similar programmes delivered by the probation service in the community. This probation officer had found that participants often failed to respond well to efforts to address their offending in custody and following their release “because you’re working with denial”.

Notwithstanding the limitations of what can realistically be achieved through rehabilitative interventions in custody, some participants who completed programmes or courses at training prisons progressed to Category D establishments with open conditions. While this was not always appreciated by the participants (as discussed in Chapter 5), SPO2 was enthusiastic about the scope for progression, which some offenders were able to exploit:

A lot of these lads year in year out spend their time in Cat B or at best Cat C training establishment. Now they are actually progressing through their sentence. You can’t make anyone change, but if someone is ready we can actually give them the tools to make that transition.

Although the community based team retain responsibility for the case management of participants throughout their sentences, they valued the fact that the Bristol prison team are involved in reviewing individual sentence plans and working towards the achievement of individual goals.

### ***The liaison officer function***



POU staff regard the liaison officers at the training prisons as having a key role in supporting participants through their sentence, monitoring their conduct and attitudes, and where necessary playing a part in re-motivating them. This was compared favourably with mainstream probation work, where several respondents pointed out that they had no channel of communication with prison staff. Probation staff placed high value on the information relayed to them about offenders' drug use while in custody. For example, if random or voluntary drug testing indicated that the participant was still using class A drugs, this information was fed back to the team. In the absence of liaison officers, one probation officer observed: "you feel you haven't got any idea what the offender is doing."

The benefits seen to flow from the links with training prisons were such that respondents wished to strengthen the liaison officer arrangement. The fact that these officers are not dedicated to the scheme was generally viewed as a major limitation. SPO2 acknowledged that the link officers are unable to have as much contact with participants as some may need, although he believed that participants may not be aware of the amount of work done on their behalf, for example, in trying to secure a safe address to which they can be released on HDC. Several respondents advocated ring fenced staff in each establishment in the South West. The arrangement at Bristol was seen as best practice as it ensured joint working in prison between a dedicated prison officer and members of the probation team.

Liaison staff, even if dedicated to prolific offender schemes, can of course only be part of the answer to problems associated with population pressure in the training prisons to which participants are transferred. Even before the national implementation of the PPO strategy, the increasing number of prisoners dispersed to selected training prisons in order to benefit from their programmes gave rise to complaint on the part of one governor who considered that he was having to accommodate the needs of too many scheme participants. As SPO2 explained: "He said that he's not happy that he's got 20 prolific offenders there". SPO2 intended to take a robust approach in a forthcoming meeting with the governor:

I will say that with national roll out he will have 80 odd such offenders. We haven't created these new offenders. These are guys that are coming through the system time and time again. And out of the 20 perhaps 18 are motivated and doing well. So they really haven't got anything to complain about!

Difficulties had also arisen at one prison in relation to the decision whether or not to release participants on Home Detention Curfew (HDC). Some offenders were concerned that they were not being released on HDC because they carried the label 'prolific offender' and as a consequence were viewed by prison managers as too high risk. SPO2 was confident that he had dealt with this by requesting that link officers attend the HDC board, convey to the Board the team's recommendations (they do not always recommend HDC), and address any misgiving:

They explain that they have four appointments a week, they are regularly drug tested, and it actually makes them safer. It's just getting that message across.

Maintaining contact with female participants and ensuring that they access relevant programmes was particularly problematic as they tended to be transferred to training prisons at a considerable distance from Bristol, such as Buckley Hall in Rochdale, some of which had no liaison officers. As one PO observed:

We don't get to see the women as often as the men yet we are being asked to recruit more women onto the scheme. They won't benefit at all. Liaison officers try to help but they can't fulfil our role. Also, because the number of women is low we aren't able to build the same amount of contact with the prison as with male prisons.

This PO was one of several who had also found that he did not always hear of sentence planning meetings in time to attend and had therefore had to chase the prisons to be kept informed of changes of dates, a time consuming exercise that was not always successful. Another respondent conceded: "Historically, prisons don't expect probation officers to turn up for sentence planning meetings, therefore they don't normally give us much information before we get there". Unless a prison became accustomed to receiving scheme participants, this respondent feared that prison staff would not adopt a system of routinely informing the probation team of forthcoming meetings and providing information in advance. As the scheme expanded it was thought unreasonable to rely on the prison team at HMP Bristol to keep the probation staff informed.

Respondents considered that effective communication with prison governors, coupled with the system of liaison officers, may not be sufficient to ensure that, as prolific offender schemes expand, the prison authorities continue to respond to the needs of targeted offenders. Indeed, at our second round of interviews it was evident that probation staff were not persuaded that the probation/prison partnership was working

well. The experience of one probation officer in working with the scheme since its inception confirmed his impression that “even the prison service is not well meshed”. This was highly disadvantageous to the scheme:

Different prisons have different approaches, offer different courses and programmes, and have different visiting arrangements. They are little autonomous units with their own business plans. Structures aren’t there to ensure continuity of the work we’ve established with liaison officers when they move on.

If future PPO schemes are to be in a position to influence the custodial element of the sentence, our evaluation suggests that there needs to be greater clarity concerning the responsibilities of the Prison Service in relation to targeted offenders. The issue of how best to ensure that sentence plans are implemented and participants prioritised clearly cannot be resolved on an ad hoc basis at a local level. As one senior member of the team put it: “We need more of a steer from the centre in the Prison Service”. He went on to comment: “From their point of view we don’t exist... We’re not a KPI for the Prison Service.” Again, the national implementation of PPO schemes is likely to bring this issue more clearly into focus for prison governors.

### *Prison visits from case managers*

In keeping with the intensive nature of the scheme and in order to maintain contact with participants during their prison sentences, in the early days of the Bristol scheme probation staff aimed to visit participants in prison on a regular basis, typically every four to six weeks. Where possible their visits were tied in with sentence planning meeting and reviews of progress. With the expansion of their caseloads, and as participants were transferred to prisons at greater distances from Bristol, it became impossible to maintain such an arrangement. By the time of our second round of interviews probation managers had decided that visits should no longer be made to prisons unless for a specific purpose. As one manager explained:

We have made the decision that officers need to draw up an interview plan and say specifically what work we are going to do. Before any prison visit they must come and talk to [a senior member of staff] to tell them why they need to go. Over a long sentence sometimes a letter would suffice – ‘how’s it going, hear you’re doing well.

Probation staff and the prison-based team were broadly supportive of this decision, not least because some offenders had come to expect regular visits and were disappointed when these did not take place (see chapter 5). Some staff felt that they

could achieve very little in the course of a prison sentence, though they stressed that link staff needed to keep in touch with participants and inform case managers of progress and any difficulties. Contact by correspondence was one way of conveying that the probation team had not lost interest in participants and were kept informed of their progress. Staff also stressed the importance of clear communication with participants from the outset concerning the pattern of visits they could expect. This was seen as one way of avoiding the disappointment and disillusionment, expressed by a few of the participants whom we interviewed. As one staff member put it: “We need to be clear that contact will tail off and build later on”.

All were keen to maintain regular first hand contact while participants were on remand (for the reasons noted above it was seen as necessary to make the link with an offender at this stage), and in the last four to six weeks of the sentence. In the early stages of this new arrangement one member of the team commented that the process of having to seek permission in writing to visit remand prisoners in Bristol prison was “long-winded” and time consuming.

### ***Intelligence sharing between prisons and police***

It was clear from our interviews that the exchange of information between the police and the seconded prison officers at Bristol prison was perceived to be mutually beneficial. From a police perspective, information on drug use and association with certain other prisoners could be sufficient to make a case for mounting surveillance on an offender following his release. Police inspectors responsible for intelligence across the three districts considered that there was much to be gained from access to the “wealth of intelligence” held in prison, although acknowledging that they were unclear as to whether such intelligence was accurate and up to date.

Both the prison team and police officers saw considerable value in developing more formal systems for intelligence-sharing, going beyond the existing protocols that specify in broad terms the kinds of information that can be exchanged. Such a system was in the process of being developed at the time of our final interviews with staff and we understand that it has subsequently been implemented. The initial ‘intake document’ provides prison staff with information on patterns of offending, drug use, family relationships and peer group in the community. Building on this document, prison staff are required to enter information on such factors as programmes

completed, drug use, visitors, those with whom offenders associate in prison, discharge addresses. The document must be returned to the relevant district police station before an offender's release to inform police decisions regarding the need for surveillance:

If the prison team is able to show that an offender has done well in terms of drug abstinence, re-establishing relationships with family, coming out on some kind of drug blocker, the police won't need to concentrate their resources on him. They will give a bit of breathing space, allow the probation service to monitor him. They will know if things are beginning to break down and it's time to bring their heads up again.

It is anticipated that such information sharing will take place in respect of all scheme participants. Where offenders are transferred there will be an expectation that liaison officer in other prisons will keep it up-to-date. If completed accurately and used in the way intended, such a document has the potential to make an important contribution to the throughcare of participants and to police decisions regarding the need for surveillance. In accordance with the guidance to the 'Catch and Convict Framework' of the National PPO Strategy, this intelligence sharing arrangement between the two agencies complies with national standards pertaining to confidentiality and data protection.

## **Delivering intensive supervision in the community**

### ***Responding to individual needs***

A defining characteristic of intensive supervision and monitoring schemes is the requirement that participants attend many more appointments per week than is the case in mainstream probation supervision. Caseloads must be correspondingly smaller to allow probation staff to provide a high degree of support, to arrange suitable referrals, and to intervene swiftly if difficulties arise. Several members of the probation team mentioned that their relatively small caseloads did indeed enable them to offer a service tailored to the offender's needs. This compared favourably with their previous experience of mainstream probation, which one team member described as "too broad... it tries to accommodate everyone within the one system". In contrast, the POU "is about being able to offer something different." Small caseloads were viewed as essential in order to work effectively on a one to one basis on the full range of problems identified in the supervision plans of participants. All agreed that a

caseload of 25-30 offenders, shared between two officers, should be the maximum. Any significant increase in this ratio would threaten the ability of the POU to provide meaningful supervision and to monitor prolific offenders effectively, particularly if a caseload is weighted towards participants serving the first three months of a community sentence, when appointments are frequent and input high. As one team member argued, there is a need for flexibility and a readiness to respond to shifts in the balance of their caseload between offenders in custody and the community:

The situation is quite fluid – you can have four people out in the community on licence who all need four appointments a week, preferably two with us and two with other agencies. That’s still quite a demand on our time. You might have that for a month, then suddenly it breaks down with two back in custody.

There were concerns that, as the national strategy comes into effect, pressure to increase the number of prolific offenders targeted by ASPOS will dilute the intensity of the one to one work teams are able to achieve with small caseloads. Although some offenders could be referred to other agencies for at least one of the four weekly appointments during their first three months in the community, at an early stage of supervision it was not uncommon for probation staff to see them personally at least four times a week. It was said that this enabled staff to build motivation and rapport, develop ‘targets for change’, and carry out regular reviews of progress in relation to these targets. This high quality work could not be achieved unless caseloads remained in the region of 13 participants to one member of staff.

When we carried out initial interviews with probation staff, some team members observed that the requirement of four appointments per week created a high risk of failure among offenders whose lifestyles tended to be chaotic. A year later, despite high breach rates, most probation staff were supportive of the high level of contact, as they had begun to see the benefits of this approach. They were able to make an impact on offenders’ problems - where appropriate building relationships with their families - and respond quickly to drug relapse and suspected re-offending. Close supervision and support was also thought to have helped participants to abstain from drug use for considerably longer periods than in previous attempts to overcome their addiction:

This scheme is their security. For some the drug testing is vital. Visits to NA/AA are also important to them. Although many hate the 4 weekly appointments they comply, perhaps because they see that somebody does care and however rude they are to you, you’re there.

Even where participants were returned to custody, so long as probation staff saw them soon after their recall it was argued that many appreciated “that you’re there for them.... that we’re straightforward with them, we tell them what we think, where we think they’ve gone wrong.”

In order to build confidence and rapport, some respondents considered continuity of contact with one member of staff the ideal, although in practice it was common for participants to have contact with two members of a team. Staff did not regard this as necessarily a problem providing each member of staff kept up to date, and was fully aware of the offender’s circumstances and needs. Moreover, one probation officer thought that, if offenders see only one person all the time it could become “an exclusive relationship”. This officer believed that offenders need to be able to form good relationships with a range of people. The model adopted by each of the three teams, in which a PO shares a caseload with one or two PSOs but has overall responsibility for all stages of supervision and enforcement, is one which found favour in a recent review of case management models for community sentences (Partridge, 2004).

Although probation staff endorsed a multi-agency approach as the most effective way to address the full range of personal and social problems presented by the target group, in practice in almost all cases the most urgent needs were in relation to drug dependency. A similar emphasis on drug problems has been reported in evaluations of other such schemes (see, for example, Worrall et al., 2003; Tupman et al., 2001). Tupman et al. concluded, “In all cases except one, drug dependency was the single most overwhelming issue that had to be tackled before anything else could be approached.” (p: 21) As we discuss in the following chapter, the offenders whom we interviewed shared this perception of their problems and priority needs.

### ***Residential drug treatment***

From the outset the Bristol POU placed strong emphasis on the need to address drug addiction through residential rehabilitation. For most of the evaluation period the scheme paid for this form of intervention out of its own budget. This enabled the scheme to offer residential treatment to a number of offenders who would not otherwise have been assessed as suitable (if, for example, they were not fully committed to drug abstinence), or who would have had to join lengthy waiting lists.

Being able to access treatment without delay (the team was able to pay to hold bed spaces a week or two in advance) was seen by staff from all three partner agencies as a major benefit of the scheme. The high rates of drug misuse and homelessness among offenders targeted by the scheme were such that all of those whom we interviewed stressed the importance of continued funding for residential treatment. According to one team member:

If this tapers off we won't be nearly as effective. The people we're dealing with need intensive residential treatment. They're not capable of surviving with day treatment.

Consequently, the loss of funding early in 2004 was a major cause of concern. Under the new arrangement probation staff must apply to the local CJIT for funding on an individual basis. Scheme participants thus compete for funds with other priority applicants. Even if an application were successful, some respondents feared that they would no longer be able to influence the point at which offenders enter treatment, anticipating that the new arrangements will be slow and that the scheme will "get bogged down by bureaucracy". One senior police officer stressed: "the window of opportunity can be very narrow as offenders have to be at right place mentally and physically to benefit".

There was agreement that the new system of assessment and prioritisation for residential drug treatment should make some allowance for the fact that, at the outset, targeted offenders are often reluctant to engage with the objectives of the scheme and have relatively poor motivation to abstain from further drug use. However, a minority of respondents saw advantage in withholding treatment until participants demonstrate their commitment, as in their experience it is counter-productive to send offenders to residential hostels when they have not demonstrated sufficient motivation to complete the treatment programme. According to this school of thought, when offenders are not "ready" for intensive residential drug treatment and consequently fail to complete the course, this is, as one put it: "bad for the offender who sees himself as having failed and been let down by the scheme because he is recalled." The alternative view was that high rates of non-completion were to be expected given the longstanding drug habits of most participants and should not be seen as an indicator of failure or a waste of resources. Respondents who took this view felt that, even if only a minority of prolific offenders take advantage of the treatment and counselling provided in drug rehabilitation centres, they stand a good chance of progressing further than they have



done in the past in overcoming their drug dependency. Others, it was claimed, may achieve partial success if they manage to stay in treatment for a few weeks. All respondents agreed that there needed to be sufficient mainstream funding to enable the scheme to continue to secure priority residential drug treatment for the target group.

Although in the early stages of the project some participants were referred to drug rehabilitation centres in Bristol, the POU has made increasing use of treatment centres at some distance from Bristol in order to reduce the temptation to leave and to renew contact with other drug users and offenders. It was said that this policy has benefited many participants, although a downside is that staff are unable to maintain high levels of face-to-face contact with offenders while they are undergoing first stage treatment or during the critical period after they leave the structured and supportive environment of the centre.

### ***Non-residential drug treatment and support***

In the case of participants who have undertaken drug treatment programmes in custody and who need follow-up medication or counselling, or who are serving community sentences without residential treatment, the Bristol Specialist Drug Service (BSDS), a prescribing drug service, is the main treatment provider. The POU also access the Bristol Drugs Project (BDP). Since we carried out initial interviews with staff a day care service has also become available. Towards the end of the evaluation period we were told that there were waiting lists for a first appointment with BSDS and for day care services, as many places were being allocated to DTTOs supervised by the mainstream probation service. The community team was therefore relying on local GPs to prescribe medication while waiting for appointments with BSDS. Most respondents found this arrangement unsatisfactory and identified a need for a formal, funded service from general practitioners. One suggested solution to this perceived gap is a GP who is funded by the scheme and 'on call', as in the Stoke-on-Trent project, where the a GP became a full time team member who saw offenders in times of crisis and provided immediate medication where needed, for example, to stabilise a participant's drug use in the event of a relapse. In the words of one probation officer:

In an ideal world the scheme needs to be able to see someone one day and have an appointment for them with a provider or medication or detox the next day. We can support their applications for detox services - there are good services available – but they have to join the waiting list.

Others favoured a more flexible approach, as in their experience GPs tended not to be interested in working with drug users “day in day out”, whereas they had succeeded in engaging the services of a few local GPs as and when a need arose. For example, one probation officer found GPs in the locality were willing to prescribe methadone and agree treatment plans, which they themselves monitored. Although it took time to meet these GPs and develop treatment plans, in areas “renowned for high drug use and crime GPs do see the need to engage with the probation service.”

If such a model were to be more widely promoted, Primary Care Trusts would need to recognise the priority needs of drug using participants and ensure that some GP practices have access to funds to cover their treatment. Indeed, it was argued that the Health Services needed to become key players in future multi-agency work with prolific offenders in order to provide for the medical needs of participants throughout Avon and Somerset as the scheme expands. One senior police officer hoped that the national PPO strategy “will be the stick to prompt them into action, because they are just not interested”. Strong leadership on the part of CDRPs would be essential to secure the necessary funds from Health Services. However, it was thought that there might be offsetting savings if some participants who are currently assessed as needing residential treatment could access high quality non-residential medication and counselling.

### ***Shortage of suitable housing***

Without exception, members of probation and prison teams identified an urgent requirement for suitable housing following release from prison or on completion of a residential drug treatment programme. All respondents considered that the existing provision of drug free supported housing in Bristol for offenders with a history of substance abuse was inadequate. A major part of the problem is that many hostels in the Bristol area are known to accommodate drug users. For participants who wish to remain drug free such an environment could contribute to a relapse. One PSO gave a recent example of a participant who had been housed at a hostel “which is notorious for drug use and drug dealing”, but who had refused the alternative of poor quality

bed and breakfast accommodation. One member of the team saw this shortage of suitable housing as an indicator of a wider failure of Local Authorities and other statutory services to recognise the need for improved aftercare services for ex-prisoners.

Other studies have similarly observed that a dearth of suitable accommodation is one of the main resettlement problems that offenders experience on leaving prison (see for example Burrows et al., 2001; Lewis et al., 2002). Bristol was compared unfavourably with other areas of the country to which participants were being sent in order to take advantage of their drug rehabilitation centres. For example, Bournemouth apparently offered drug free housing following successful completion of residential treatment and “a safety net service” for those who relapse and lose their place in residential hostels. Although certain housing projects in Bristol do offer accommodation to ex-prisoners if they are drug free, we were told that these are not popular with participants:

They feel that they have already done their time. They're not prepared to put up with rules. But if they are not 100% committed they won't be accepted. We've had a number of people who have fallen into this hole. We struggle with this because we don't have the resources. We then have to look at B & B and breath a sigh of relief if a fair number will have them.

In short, with the increasing numbers of participants completing custodial sentences and residential treatment, POU staff have experienced a pressing need for a range of suitable accommodation, including stable independent housing. An experienced member of staff pointed out that the only real pressure on Local Authorities was to provide accommodation for offenders who are “extremely dangerous”. And whereas other providers may have available housing, they are unwilling to accept offenders who have a history of drug misuse.

### *Access to mainstream probation programmes*

For offenders deemed capable of benefiting from group work (as noted above, this was not the case with many participants), the scheme may take advantage of programmes offered by the mainstream probation service, in particular, cognitive behavioural programmes (such as ‘Think First’ and anger management) and the probation service education, training, and employment (ETE) package. According to

one probation officer, however, mainstream probation “have a real problem with our clients because they think they will contaminate the group”. At all three locations staff told us they had to put pressure on the probation service to secure more places on probation programmes.

### **Court processes and decision-making**

A positive aspect of the scheme mentioned by some team members is the fact that they have greater scope to influence court decisions relating to bail and sentence than is the case with mainstream probation. This was most evident at the Crown Court as there would always be a probation report for the court to consider in cases committed for sentence. Where bail decisions are concerned one team member observed: “In this job we go and address the judge, we object to unrestricted bail ...it raises the profile of how the probation service should be working.” However, several members of the team thought that it was necessary to put further effort into raising awareness of the aims and provisions of the scheme and to communicating more effectively with magistrates. Magistrates, we were told, sometimes remand participants on bail without any special conditions (such as remaining in regular contact with the POU), even though they have breached the reporting requirements of the scheme. This occurs typically when offenders are taken into police custody overnight or at the weekend and the POU is not notified before the case comes to court.

A second area of difficulty was in relation to the amount of time it took some magistrates to deal with requests to expedite warrants of arrest. Staff regarded the systems for prioritising warrant execution and expediting enforcement action at court as critical to the credibility of the coercive strand of the scheme. When working effectively, this action conveyed a clear message to offenders that further offending would result in a swift response and immediate penalties for non-compliance.

At the national level, the Catch and Convict strand of the PPO strategy requires every Local Criminal Justice Board to develop a ‘premium service’ for targeted offenders. All PPO cases are now flagged by the police and the CPS with a view to their prioritisation from the point of charge through all stages of the court process, including the provision of bail information, listing for trial, and warrant enforcement. If effective, this premium service may overcome the difficulties noted above.

## **Surveillance and enforcement**

Staff from all three agencies thought that in most cases the scheme was achieving the objective of early detection and disruption of further offending through the system of expedited recall. Experience in combining intensive supervision with swift enforcement action was seen as beneficial, both to society and to the participant. One senior prison officer expressed this as follows:

Offenders are fast-tracked back in before they've done too much damage to themselves and the community. If someone relapsed and stays out for some time it can take 6-12 months to bring them back – they can be as bad if not worse than at first contact. With this scheme quite often they are a couple of steps on from where they started. So there is something to build on.

For this reason staff seldom regarded the high breach rate (we were told that some two thirds of participants are breached at some stage) as necessarily indicating failure on the part of the scheme. A prompt response to drug relapse and/or re-offending enabled staff to stabilise participants' drug use and prevent a further spree of offending, with the associated risk of a lengthy prison sentence. It was argued that many of the offenders who had been breached eventually appreciated that this action was in their interests. Their attitudes towards the scheme remained positive and they were willing to work with the prison-based team again. A few offenders had even "handed themselves in" and asked to be returned to prison in recognition that they were not coping in the community.

The 'carrot and stick' inherent in the scheme was valued as it enabled the probation team to negotiate with offenders, for example, offering the reward of reporting to the probation office rather than to the police station if they kept their appointments. As far as the police were concerned the scheme had created an additional demand for surveillance, but this was apparently being met within their existing resources. One inspector explained that intelligence units would mount surveillance only if there was good reason to believe that participants were re-offending. For example, they might be informed that an offender had failed a drug test, or receive intelligence from other offenders that a participant in the scheme was "active again". Even then they might ask uniform controls to check on the offender rather than employ higher-level surveillance. If advised by the POU that participants were complying they might "back off".

It was clear, however, that from a police perspective surveillance was an important component of the enforcement strand of the scheme and as such needed to be adequately resourced. According to one police inspector this was an aspect of their work that needed to be strengthened if the police were to be fully effective in apprehending those who re-offend and deterring others:

We do need more staff to deal with the targeting. The proactive capability of the district is limited. We've got a sergeant and 6 [constables] dedicated to this type of work but there are other priorities: car crime, street parking etc – they get called on to a range of jobs. There are 35 offenders on the list, probably 10 that are out and about. By targeting [named offender] we're also likely to catch two others as they work as a team.

Linked to the perceived shortage of dedicated proactive staff, this inspector also identified a case for additional cars and specialist training in mounting surveillance on targeted offenders. Others did not identify such a shortfall albeit observing that, where targeted offenders were not deemed high priority in the district, surveillance was necessarily limited. All of the police respondents stressed that surveillance would only be employed if it could be justified on the basis of high quality and timely intelligence.

### **An exit strategy**

Probation staff advocated a flexible approach to the decision whether or not to terminate contact with an offender once the licence or community order came to an end. At the time of our evaluation there was no clear cut-off point: offenders could remain in contact beyond the termination of their licences or community sentences for as long as they wished. But as was pointed out by several respondents, the length of time participants remain on the scheme has important implications for the caseloads probation staff can manage effectively. Until offenders leave, or reduce contact to occasional voluntary visits, the scheme is unable to take on new offenders. However, most probation staff were reluctant to end their contact with a offender unless they were confident that the risk of drug relapse and a return to offending was low. Many participants were not expected to reach this point for a number of years. But this raised the question of what kind of service the scheme should offer to participants who were assessed as presenting a lower risk of further offending when others, identified as suitable for the scheme, could not be targeted while caseloads were at capacity. Some team members considered that it was inappropriate to allow

participants to remain in regular contact beyond their statutory licences/sentences as this could encourage over-dependency. One probation officer thought that there were some offenders who should have been moved on to mainstream probation or been discharged “but we tend to hold on to them because we know so much about them. We don’t let go”. A phased exit from the scheme, advocated by several respondents, would appear essential. In this way appointments may be gradually reduced, as participants are encouraged to take responsibility for an increasing range of tasks, such as making their own arrangements to visit other agencies.

To summarise, it can be said that the broad tenor of our interviews with managers and frontline staff involved in the Bristol POU was highly positive. Probation staff, seconded prison officers and police officers responsible for intelligence coordination at all three police stations were supportive of what the Bristol component of ASPOS is attempting to achieve. They also endorsed the structure of the scheme and the processes of supervision and monitoring. Working relationships within the police/probation/prison partnership were described as strong and mutually beneficial. But although the liaison arrangement established in some prisons were seen by POU staff as working well, the evaluation indicates that there were tensions within the probation/prison partnership, which stemmed from their different priorities and pressures. If ASPOS is to make best use of rehabilitative opportunities available while participants are in custody, there will need to be a clearer commitment from the prison service to the scheme and a closer involvement of case managers in decisions affecting targeted offenders. It is also evident that, following release from custody, participants need rapid access to drug services and stable housing if they are to reintegrate successfully and establish new support structures away from their criminal and drug using associates.

There is a widely held assumption that schemes that are effective in targeting prolific offenders and diverting them from further offending will be able to justify their costs, including those incurred in purchasing services from public and private sector agencies in the community. The evaluation of the pilot project ARC suggests that, if assumptions made about crimes ‘prevented’ prove in the longer term to be accurate, schemes could be cost effective in terms of savings attributable to reductions in offending and drug use (Tupman et al., 2001). Future evaluative studies of PPO

schemes will need to demonstrate that this resource intensive approach does provide value for money.



## **5 THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE SCHEME**

This chapter begins with a brief profile of the 17 participants with whom we carried out initial interviews, including an account of their expectations of the scheme. It continues with an examination of the views and experiences (of both custodial and community components) of the 13 who continued to participate in the scheme into the second year of our evaluation. The methodological constraints on this aspect of the evaluation should be borne in mind. When the evaluation ended the majority of participants were only part-way through their involvement in the scheme and could expect to receive further input for some time to come. Our account of their progress and perceptions of benefits they derived from the scheme must therefore be regarded as provisional.

### **Personal backgrounds**

Fourteen of the 17 original interviewees were men, three were women. The average age of the offenders interviewed was 29, ranging from 24 to 35 years. We did not delve deeply into the participants' personal histories, but several told us of childhoods blighted by parental separation and new parental relationships in which new partners were rejecting. A few mentioned the impact upon them of alcohol or drug abusing fathers or step-fathers.

Ten participants considered themselves to be in a current relationship, ranging from stable long-term cohabitation in three cases, to very much shakier relationships for others. Those whose partners were drug users were concerned that this situation would adversely affect their own chances of remaining drug free in the longer term. Twelve of the sample had children – some several. In most cases these children were now living with ex-partners, although some had a continuing relationship with these children which they considered important.

In all but two cases the living arrangements of the offenders were unsettled. Twelve described a lifestyle in which they drifted from one place or another, living on the streets or with friends, but with no secure home of their own. Respondent (01) was typical. A 27 year old who had not worked since he was 18, he had started to use hard drugs and to offend while still at school. His lifestyle when he was targeted by the

scheme (while remanded in custody) involved: "... going from one place to another, taking over people's flats (squats) with a friend or whatever". Similarly, (05) did not have any accommodation of his own at the time of his arrest for the current offence and had been "out day and night ....my drug habit got bigger and bigger. I was basically out there constantly for weeks." The majority described unsatisfactory accommodation or homelessness when they were arrested for the most recent offence(s). Eight reported that they had no home and simply drifted between friends and family, or lived on the streets.

Through their drug taking and offending some had alienated their parents and were not welcome in their homes unless they changed their lifestyles. Three lived with their parents, but were wary of returning to their parents' homes as they were in the areas where they could not avoid contact with others who offend to support a drug addiction. Six lived with their partners and children and enjoyed greater stability of accommodation, at least for the duration of the relationship. However, since these relationships were often fragile, the accommodation could not be described as fixed or certain when they were released from prison. Exceptionally, one respondent told us that he owned his property (jointly with a partner), and another said that in the past he had held down a mortgage.

Twelve of the sample had never, or hardly ever, held any form of employment. For example, (01), had worked for only two years after he left school at 16. Respondent (02), aged 28, had been expelled from school aged 15 for fighting and truanting - he "did not really get on with authority" - and he had "never really worked". Likewise, (05), told us "I've never worked in my life". The majority had no formal qualifications, although some had started but not completed NVQs. Exceptionally, one participant (12) had worked for six years (as a pensions advisor), while one another (08) claimed to have co-run a business as a steel erector, with contracts at home and overseas, and said that he was usually in employment and enjoyed his work.

Despite the few exceptions mentioned, the background of these individuals was such that few of them could look forward to much in the way of support from family or friends on their release from prison. Indeed, for most, a return to their previous environment would, they foresaw, be disastrous. Many said that they would not want

to return to their previous locality or anywhere near central Bristol, but would prefer a new start away from all temptation. However, they realised that in taking this step they would be entirely without support networks. This is illustrated in the comments of (15), whom we interviewed in a residential rehabilitation centre at some distance from Bristol. He was concerned about moving on to the third stage of treatment in a town in which he knew no-one. Having “come off the streets” he did not want to find himself without suitable accommodation and knew that he would need to stay off drugs and alcohol when he left the centre if he were to stand any chance of avoiding further offending. Determined not to return to Bristol, he told us that he was making efforts to “set up my own safety networks for when I leave”.

### **Offending behaviour and drug use**

All but two of the 17 offenders whom we interviewed were selected for the prolific offender scheme as a consequence of burglary offences. One of the three women in our sample (06) had been convicted of GBH – which she claimed to be untypical as her regular pattern of offending involved prostitution and shoplifting. Another had a conviction for ABH in addition to burglary. Consistent with the targeting criteria adopted by the Bristol POU, all these offenders had histories of acquisitive crime and had been targeted in response to high rates of offending in the locality served by the three police stations. With two exceptions, they acknowledged that the term ‘prolific’ was an accurate description of their behaviour. One participant told us that when he is in prison, the crime rate in Bristol falls perceptibly.

Almost all of those interviewed had spent a large proportion of their adult lives in prison and were well aware that their criminal history, coupled with their drug use, accounted for their inclusion in the scheme. As (05) observed of the scheme: “It’s to help people like me who have got a drug habit and like me have been in and out of gaol all their lives.”

Thirteen of the group reported a history of becoming involved initially in drug use, starting with solvent and alcohol abuse, and turning to offending to fund their drug habit, because this is what their friends, and in several cases their siblings, were doing:

It was just the kind of people I mixed with, they seemed exciting to me, I looked up to them. (01)

At 14 or 15 the kids ahead of us were driving round in stolen cars. That was the role model for us. We moved on to stealing cars, doing ram raids, getting through more money, getting on different things – just progressing. (04)

In the above cases drug use and offending seem to have begun at the same early age and these respondents could not say which came first. Their drug abuse escalated into hard drug addiction, with a similar escalation in offending. Four participants, including two of the three women, started to use Class A drugs and began offending at a later age (in their 20s). In these four cases drug use seems to have preceded offending, with recreational use turning to addiction, at which point these individuals had turned to crime. This group had relatively recent memories of their former, happier lives.

Two respondents volunteered the fact that they hated the crime of house burglary. One, 08, a 24 year old with 57 convictions for burglary, told us that he had a grandmother who had been the victim of a burglary and he had seen the effect on her. But this was the life he had known since the age of 13 and the only way he knew to obtain the money he needed to fund his drug habit. Another (14), described the spiral whereby he would commit burglary to fund his drugs, then, hating himself for this, would use drugs to escape those feelings.

### **Offenders' perceptions of their problems**

All of those whom we interviewed were addicted to Class A drugs at the time they were targeted by the POU. Without exception, their prime objective in participating in the scheme was to obtain help in tackling their addiction. Linked to this underlying problem was the fact that the majority had no stable home to return to on release from custody or drug rehabilitation. As noted above, even those who did have somewhere to live were wary of returning to their former haunts, or of sharing accommodation with other drug users – whether this be a partner, other hostel inmates or even a parent. Several had clear ideas about where they would like to live – all well away from central Bristol.

Other problems mentioned by these offenders included finances, family relationships, parenting skills and, in the case of two of the women, reliance for their income on prostitution, and a 'compulsion' to shoplift. Such problems were generally seen as being related to their drug use, but at the point at which we interviewed the offenders none of these difficulties loomed anywhere near as large as their drug addiction and lack of stable accommodation. The offenders' perceptions of their interlinked problems and priority needs corresponded closely with the assessments of POU staff, particularly with regard to their drug addiction and housing difficulties.

### **Initial understanding and expectations of the scheme**

At the time of our first interviews, which were conducted while participants were on remand in custody or at the beginning of residential rehabilitation placements, most had a relatively hazy understanding of the scheme's overall purpose. The majority expressed their understanding very much in terms of what it could do for them. This notion was reinforced for many offenders, such as (16), by their having been offered the prospect of placement in drug rehabilitation centres. A few did recognise that a wider purpose of the scheme was to attempt to cut crime rates. This was well captured by (03), a man of 35 who had been offending from the age of 12 and using drugs since he was 18:

They reckon we go through about £10,000 worth of property every week ... it's a lot cheaper for them if they just spend £400 giving us treatment, getting us off it – that's the way I think it's being looked at – as well as helping us.

Initial responses to being recruited on to the scheme varied from caution and suspicion to outright scepticism. For those who were still awaiting sentence at the time of our first interview, it was difficult to focus on the various possible scenarios. Some were expecting prison sentences, but others were hopeful of DTTOs. The aspect of the scheme which appeared to them most significant and likely to be beneficial was the promise of intensive support from the probation team on release. This was something most felt they had never previously been offered and was expressed in the following terms:

I've never had any help – I've been in prison all my life – all my life in and out – but no one's actually sat down and talked to me. I've had people in prison saying they want me to do this scheme and that, advanced thinking skills – you do that because you're bored in prison – it's something to do. You go along, answer their questions – sometimes you might even enjoy it –

but it does nothing for you whatsoever once you leave the prison. But this is actually outside and they're going to stick with you. They're not going to give up on you – like everyone else has.” (03)

The main thing I really want is support when I'm out. If I have someone there to say 'if you do this you'll be straight back inside'. (2)

I know when I finish stage 2 outside, there will be overwhelming support for me. They'll do home visits – see if everything's going well - if I need anything. (12)

From past experience, some respondents appreciated that they would need the help of the scheme in bringing structure into their lives and helping them to resist the temptation to fall back into previous patterns of drug use and offending:

...not being left to my own devices ... when I'm with my friends I slip back and get into trouble. It just seems a bit more structured, there's a bit more help. (01)

Others were sceptical – or fearful - that the scheme might not deliver what was promised in this regard. For example, on previous occasions (09) felt he had received no help on release from prison:

It's after, when it's all finished – are they still going to be there for me, basically? That's what's worrying me.

A second major expectation was that, if they received a community sentence, they would be 'fast-tracked' for drug rehabilitation. Most appeared well aware of the high cost of treatment and the fact that rehabilitation centres have long waiting lists. They were impressed by the way the scheme appeared to be in a position to provide immediate funding for placements, and by the speed with which it could arrange admission. There was appreciation of attempts to secure places in drug rehabilitation centres away from Bristol. As (04) put it: “There are ones in Bristol, but I wouldn't be giving myself a fair chance. I need to get out of Bristol.” Those in custody were similarly impressed by the ability of the scheme to arrange for their transfer to prisons with rehabilitation programmes, almost of their own choosing as they saw it.

For those expecting, or already serving, prison sentences of eighteen months to over three years, the question of accommodation on their release seemed some way off and not of immediate concern, although most were adamant that they would not want to return to their previous living arrangements. They felt a need to be well away from

old haunts and temptations. Some had some vague idea that the POU could influence council housing departments:

They will have to do something – get me a house – somewhere to live. What’s the point of being [on the scheme] if I’m going to be going back to where I came from? (06)

They were also adamant that they did not wish to be accommodated in hostels, which were “full of smack-heads ... the worst place you could be.” Even ‘dry’ houses were considered unsuitable, and not as ‘dry’ as the scheme’s staff imagined them to be. Those hoping to be placed in residential rehabilitation centres also envisaged that the centres would provide, or at least assist, with accommodation at the end of the programme.

Perhaps understandably at the point at which we interviewed them, most offenders were hazier and a little less enthusiastic about what the scheme would expect of them. While in custody they seemed focussed on courses and programmes in which they were currently engaged or about to undertake. Those on drug rehabilitation programmes in prison saw the requirements of the programme as overriding anything else. Those seen at an earlier stage, while on remand or awaiting allocation to rehabilitation programmes, understood generally that they were expected to remain drug free and to give regular samples. Their understanding of what would be expected of them *on release* was vague. While some had picked up an idea of post release expectations from the initial description of the scheme they were given, others told us that they had heard only from others already on the scheme.

Police surveillance had been described to participants by POU staff as the ‘stick’ element of the scheme. They were given to understand that, on release, they would be targeted intensively and recalled to prison immediately should they re-offend. For several offenders, this seemed not to be a problem. Their attitude was that since it was their clear intention not to offend, the issue was irrelevant:

It’s been made perfectly clear to me what will happen. If you’re serious about doing it – that shouldn’t bother you should it? I’m taking this seriously – so it’s a good thing. (08)

Others felt they could ‘beat the system’:

If you know someone's following you, you wise up, you know how to play little games, wind them up so that whoever's following you gets frustrated. (15)

But at our initial interviews the majority regarded police surveillance as an imposition and an unwarranted intrusion into their lives:

The surveillance part – that's going to piss me off. If you're not doing anything it won't matter – but if you are.... it invades your privacy. I know of friends who've seen photos of themselves going in and out of their own houses – and girls they're with. It might be alright for me – but might not be for the people that are with me. Anyone who speaks to me – I'm going to have to tell them. They can stop you in the street – take your trainers from you ..... I can see it's something they've got to do – appreciate the need for it – but I won't like it. (03)

### **Personal motivation**

As noted in Chapter 3, the Bristol POU recruits offenders who fulfil the targeting criteria irrespective of their degree of motivation to change their lifestyles. All are offered help, but if this is refused they are still subject to the enforcement and surveillance component of the scheme. None of the offenders in our sample had, in fact, refused the 'carrot' aspect. Of course, it may be that none who fell into this category were brought to our attention, since it is unlikely that they would have been willing to play a part in the evaluation. At the other end of the spectrum, two voluntary participants were included in our sample. They had accepted the help offered, but were not subject to statutory supervision.

During our initial interviews it soon became evident that for the majority of the offenders the risk of a further prison sentence was not a motivating factor in their decision to co-operate with the scheme. Prison was not regarded as a deterrent. On the contrary, several actually found their time in custody quite congenial. Their lives were simpler and more structured, and once they had undergone detoxification they felt far healthier and less depressed. This was expressed by two participants in the following words:

I'm not particularly worried about prison. It's not a deterrent to me – my life is worse out there than in here. I've got nothing out there, my life's a mess out there. (02)



It's always the same – I come to prison, stay off drugs – it's easy in prison. I get healthy, go to the gym, feel confident. (08)

The reasons why most of the offenders in our sample claimed that they were willing to participate in ASPOS was that, with their latest conviction, they had reached a point at which they felt motivated to make fundamental changes to their lives. From their point of view it appeared that the POU had been introduced to them at an opportune time. They could see that it might provide the support and reinforcement of motivation they needed. This was described in terms of having 'had enough' of a drug dependent and criminal lifestyle. The following respondents were all too aware of what they were missing and spoke of their desire to lead a normal life.

Funny you should ask that .... The other day it came up in conversation, someone said 'You've had enough haven't you?' I really believe I've had enough. That was a bit of a turning point. Up to then I hadn't really thought about it. It's just that I've been a drug addict for 9 years and I'm not getting nowhere. It's just \*\*\* basically. I don't own anything. I may as well be homeless. Friends of my age have homes, cars – I don't own anything. Whatever happens I'm pretty sure I'm going to stay clean so Prolific Offenders are going to get a result from me. My mind is set, I've got to do this. It's as simple as that. (02)

If I don't stop now I'm never going to stop. I want to lead what I call a normal life Mon-Fri playing football, having a laugh with different kinds of friends instead of using drug-related people as friends. I haven't had a serious laugh for a long time; I've forgotten what it's like to have a good laugh. When you're on drugs you haven't got time – all you think about is where the next fix is going to come from, what it's going to cost. You haven't got time for laughter and crying to come into your life. (05)

I'd had enough – I want my life back. I've always run my life, even when smoking – I had a flat, paid bills, drove a car. (12)

Another key motivating factor for participants who had children with whom they were in contact was a realisation that their behaviour was damaging their children. These participants were increasingly aware of their shortcomings through the eyes of their children, and of the adverse effects of their lifestyle on them. As the following extracts illustrate, the discomfort they felt as a result of this realisation was coupled with a desire to spend more time with their children:

As soon as I take drugs again I'll be back in here. I'll be doing it for the rest of my life. I've got a 3 year old son and I want to spend some time with him. I'm messing up his life now. (02)

A lot of people are keen to do it just to get out of prison – but if that was the case – I’d say scrap it now - I ain’t really interested. I really want to do it – I’ve got a daughter to think about. She’s 7 now and she’s noticing things, asking questions. I don’t want her going to school and other kids saying her Dad’s a druggie – that’s not fair. (09)

My oldest boy is now 17. My two youngest ones don’t miss school – they’re doing really well. The 17 year old is getting like me – it’s doing my head in a bit. He’s going to end up here – I couldn’t handle that.... I’ve been a part-time father – that’s got to change. (03)

A related motivating factor was the desire to maintain improved family relationships and re-establish those that had been damaged. For example, (09) mentioned a rapprochement with his sister and parents:

I really don’t want to screw that up – it took a long time to get it back – it’d be stupid to mess it up.

One other respondent (15) wanted to regain the trust of his parents whom he seldom saw as a result of the damage he had done to his relationship with them through his offending and drug addiction.

When we examine what actually happened to these offenders while they were involved in the scheme it is apparent that, despite these seemingly strong incentives, following their release from prison few sustained the motivation to abstain from drug use.

### **Overview of progress during the evaluation period**

The progress of the participants from the time we first interviewed them (during the first half of 2003) to the completion of our fieldwork (in early August 2004), is far from straightforward. Of the 17 offenders originally involved in the research, 10 received custodial sentences ranging from 18 months to three and a half years. Five others received Drug Treatment and Training Orders (DTTOs), to be served in community rehabilitation centres. A final two were voluntary participants on the scheme - that is, not under any statutory supervision; both were placed in rehabilitation centres. Two of those on DTTOs (04 and 05) had transferred to other areas by the end of 2003 and thus could not be followed up in our evaluation. Both the voluntary participants (07 and 17) had also ended their involvement in the scheme, having made no contact since late 2003, although it would be open to them to initiate

contact again. Table 4.1 provides a summary of what happened to the 17 participants following release from custody or commencement of a residential drug placement.

Of the 13 offenders who remained on the scheme into the second year of the research, 10 had breached the terms of their licences and had been recalled to prison by the time the fieldwork ended. Six were in prison at this point, having been recalled after periods varying from three and a half months to three weeks at liberty. One of these participants in fact 'recalled himself', turning up at his probation office with bags packed asking to be returned to prison rather than have to continue under the terms of his HDC. Four others who were at liberty at the end of our fieldwork had had their licences revoked and been recalled. Two of the four had twice been subject to breach proceedings and recall (10 and 11).

Only two participants had succeeded in reaching the end of their licences without revocation (01 and 15). One of the two, (01), had been out of prison for a year, living independently and drug free. He remained in touch with the scheme for two or three months beyond the end of his licence on a voluntary basis, but following a series of personal crises had been out of touch for the last three months. There was no evidence of re-offending by the end of the fieldwork period. The second, (15), progressed through all stages of a drug rehabilitation programme and at the end of the evaluation period had been living in independent accommodation away from Bristol for some months and attending a full time course at an FE College. He was free of drugs and had not been charged with further offences.

**Table 4.1 Summary of Events following Release from Prison/Start of Drug Rehab. Placement up to August 2004**

<b>Case No.</b>	<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Released prison / Left Rehab.</b>	<b>Recalled To prison</b>	<b>Charged with new offences</b>	<b>Where Aug 2004</b>
1	2 yrs	August '03	-	No	At liberty Address unknown
2	2 ½ yrs	February '04	June '04	No	Prison
3	3 ½ yrs	May '04	July '04	No	Prison
4	DTTO	Absconded rehab Spring '03	July '03	Yes – after transfer	Transferred out of area Autumn '03
5	DTTO	Absconded rehab Feb & Aug '03	Aug '03	No	Transferred out of area Autumn '03
6	1 ½ yrs	1. July '03 2. Nov '03 3. April '04	July '03 Dec '03	Yes	At liberty Address unknown
7	Voluntary	Left rehab June '03	N/A	No	At liberty Address unknown
8	3 ½ yrs	May '04	June '04	No	Prison
9	3 ¼ yrs	July '04	-	No	At liberty
10	1 ½ yrs	1. July '03 2. Dec '03 3. May '04	Sept '03 Feb '04 -	No	At liberty
11	DTTO 2 ½ yrs	1. Absconded rehab July '03 2. July '04	Aug '03 -	No	At liberty
12	3 yrs	March '04	April '04	No	Prison
13	3 yrs	1. August '03 2. Absconded rehab Sept '03	Dec '03	No	Prison
14	3 yrs	December '03	Spring '04	No	Prison
15	DTTO	January '04	-	No	At liberty
16	DTTO	1. Absconded rehab May '03 2. Nov '03 to rehab May '04	June '03	Yes	At liberty Address unknown
17	Voluntary	September '03	N/A	Yes	At liberty Address unknown

Although on the face of it this looks a bleak picture, as shown in Table 4.1, in most cases where licences were revoked this was not because participants had been charged with further offences. Only one was known by the POU to have reverted to his previous pattern of offending. Two others had been charged with property offences (one had just come to the end of her licence), another had been charged with driving while under the influence of alcohol after he had been transferred to another probation area, and two others were suspected of further offending at the point at which they were recalled. But in none of these cases was it thought that the participants were committing offences on the same scale as when they were first targeted by the scheme. It was more often the case that participants were recalled because they failed to adhere to licence conditions (four breached DTTO orders), and relapsed into using hard drugs. Moreover, as we discuss below, these brief facts do not tell the whole story, as they do not take into account the steps that some participants had taken towards overcoming their drug addiction and leading a crime free life.

The remainder of this chapter examines the offenders' views of the custodial and community stages of the scheme. We also explore their accounts of why they breached their licences and were recalled to prison.

### **The custodial phase**

As mentioned above, 10 of the 17 participants received custodial sentences, and of the five given DTTOs, four quickly breached their conditions and were subsequently recalled to prison. Thus, the majority of participants in our sample spent a considerable proportion of the fieldwork period in prison. This section is written on the basis of 12 first interviews carried out in prison and seven second interviews with offenders who were still in custody, for whom this aspect of the scheme therefore dominated their first year.

### ***Interventions and transfers***

Most of the sample had been immediately impressed and surprised at the availability in Bristol prison of a prison officer dedicated to the scheme. Many had known SPO1 for several years, respected him and enjoyed the new more personal relationship. In the early days of the scheme, and while offenders were still in Bristol prison, this aspect of the scheme appeared to work well and most offenders appreciated the fact

that their views and anxieties were given priority. They had been put in touch with the CARATs scheme and were receiving weekly visits from members of the probation team and the prison-based team. Participants compared this level of interest and attention favourably with past experiences of custodial remand. The POU team had also begun to address participants' immediate and longer-term problems. For example, (01) explained that the main benefits he had derived so far were in terms of "...communication with people at home and with [seconded senior prison officer]...it's benefited me already".

The ten participants who received custodial sentences served most of their time in prisons away from Bristol – the majority in Guys Marsh, Erlestoke and Leyhill. Other prisons included Exeter, The Weare, Dartmoor, Oxford, Drake Hall and Foston Hall. Transfer between these different prisons was a major feature of the offenders' experience during this custodial phase. Much of this experience was described in positive terms, but there were some criticisms and disappointments.

Most participants were appreciative of the fact that the scheme had succeeded in arranging their transfer from Bristol to prisons offering courses and facilities from which they could benefit. They understood that, had it not been for the scheme, they would not necessarily have gone to prisons suiting their needs. They were impressed and grateful for this. The majority participated at some stage in drug-related interventions while in prison, ranging from counselling work with CARATs to full-scale drug rehabilitation programmes (which included PASRO, STAR, 12 Step and LEAP). All said that they benefited from these courses. Several participants also took educational courses and qualifications, and some attended the ETS cognitive skills programme during their time in prison. Again, most felt that they would be able to capitalise on this experience on release. Many of the male offenders in our sample used their time in prison to build up their fitness and health in the gym. Two (08 and 09) gained qualifications in fitness training in the hope that this might enable them to obtain employment in the leisure industry as personal trainers.

Once offenders had been transferred, our interviews indicated that they were unable to develop the same relationship with liaison staff as had been achieved with the prison based POU team while they were in Bristol prison. As described in Chapter 4, at the time of our evaluation the link officer arrangement was on an unofficial and informal basis. Consequently, many participants in our sample seemed unaware that the

arrangement existed in the training prisons to which they were transferred and did not distinguish liaison officers from other prison staff. Generally, at the time we interviewed them it appeared that they were unaware of the efforts made on their behalf by prison link officers behind the scenes. One exception, (09), spoke highly of the link officer at Leyhill, who had evidently explained his role and had invited (09) to talk to him if he had any problems.

Even when staff regarded transfers as beneficial, participants did not always welcome them. For example, some who were moved to Leyhill open prison, having achieved D Category status, did not appreciate this move, finding the less structured regime difficult to cope with. In the opinion of (02), this was like "...starting over again – it's hard work". He and others who were transferred to Leyhill also found the easy availability of drugs troubling and did not identify with the majority of other inmates – a mix of sex offenders and some very long-term offenders coming to the end of their sentences. One participant, (03), had spent time in Leyhill prison on a previous sentence and told us that "...in a place like this it's easy to bypass testing – there are ways round it." although he claimed that on this occasion he was determined to stay clean. On the other hand, (03) conceded that Leyhill had a lot to offer in terms of education and training. At the time of our second interview he was attending Filton College three days a week, taking a course on HGV Technology. All those who spent time at Leyhill appreciated the home visits, which enabled them to begin to re-establish family relationships.

A negative consequence of having received drug treatment and counselling in prison was that most of the participants in our sample became resistant to going into residential placements following their release, notwithstanding the advice of the POU team who often identified a need for intensive follow-up work to assist those who leave prison drug free to remain clean. For example, (14) was offered a residential placement but refused. As we discuss below, for this participant and some others in our sample it soon became apparent that they did indeed need further help with their drug use if they were to avoid breach action.

In the previous chapter we noted that misunderstandings had arisen between the POU team and the governors of one of the prisons in relation to the decision as to whether participants were suitable for early release on HDC. Where participants were disappointed at the decision this seems to have had adversely affected their attitudes

and behaviour. In the case of (14), for instance, the scheme had recommended HDC but the prison rejected him, as he rightly surmised, because he carried the label 'prolific offender'. In his own words:

I was an angel in prison this time...11 months clean urine tests...at the end of the day I've never been so good - and I got less just because of the tag as a prolific offender.

As a result of his disappointment (14) became temporarily disaffected with the scheme, effectively thwarting his sentence plan and as noted above, failing to accept advice concerning his continuing need for drug counselling. In the case of (08) the opposite situation arose, the participant having felt pressured by the prison authorities into accepting HDC against his and the scheme's better judgment and, according to (08), with only two days notice. The POU team had been opposed to the early release but they had been overruled because (08) had successfully completed HDC on a previous sentence. This decision was to his detriment, not least because he had not yet undertaken an intensive drug treatment programme in custody. As we discussed in Chapter 4, difficulties relating to HDC decisions had subsequently been resolved in this establishment and we were not aware of similar disagreements at other prisons.

Attendance at gymnastics courses was another area of conflict between the POU scheme, participants, and the prison authorities. Two participants, (08) and (12), were given strong encouragement by prison gym officers to give priority to their courses and they were given work as gym orderlies and experience in running sessions. However, the decision of (08) to give priority to fitness training was in direct conflict with advice from POU staff and with his sentence plan as it had been agreed that he should focus on his drug problem by attending the '12 Step' programme in readiness for release. Similarly, (12) was in conflict with the POU on this issue and was disappointed that his case manager seemed unenthusiastic about his interest in gymnastics. He told us that he had been warned of the danger of 'cross-addicting' (substituting fitness training for drugs), but was adamant that his enthusiasm could only lead to a healthier life. At the point at which we saw (08) and (12) shortly before their release both men were optimistic that they could avoid a relapse and were confident that they could cope with any difficulties that might arise.



### *Relationships with POU staff while in custody*

When we first interviewed participants it was apparent that, for many of them, their relationship with the community based probation staff had already assumed much significance. Most of our sample had been initially impressed by the degree of attention promised to them and actually received on their recruitment to the scheme. With two exceptions, said to reflect personality clashes, participants reported that they got on well with their probation supervisors. They felt that they were being promised and actually receiving far more attention than would have been the case had they not been targeted by the scheme. Where they were seeing more than one member of staff this did not appear to be a problem at this stage. One (05) commented positively: “It’s like having two probation officers” – both equally helpful and interested in him. There was a general feeling that the probation officers on this scheme (unlike mainstream probation officers) were prepared to listen and to take on board offenders’ views.

However, this perception had suffered something of a reversal among the seven participants whom we interviewed a second time in custody about a year after their recruitment to the scheme. Four of this group felt they had been let down and that their expectations had not been realised. The main complaint was that they had not received as many visits while they were in custody as they had been led to expect. All of the seven interviewed for a second time in prison reported that the number of visits they were receiving in prison from probation staff had fallen off substantially over the year. Two in particular (11 and 13) complained of a definite reduction in the attention they had received. They also felt that they were being treated unfairly because they had only been able to achieve a few weeks in residential drug rehabilitation following their release from custody before being breached and recalled. Both complained that members of the POU team had not visited them for several months. Their disappointment was expressed as follows:

I was given a chance and I blew it. But it’s not like I just wandered off and didn’t tell them where I was. I made proper arrangements. I told them where I’d be.... I’ve failed so many times in my life. That’s what I thought this was about – because I can’t do it and because it’s not going to be easy. I thought they were going to be ready for this. If you’ve been

trying so long, what makes them think you're going to do it first time? It's not going to happen, it's going to take a while. It's not going to be easy.... It seems like you just get one chance and if you fail it, that's it. For seven months I've seen none of them.(11)

This participant thought that the lack of visits from probation staff may also have been because he was perceived as doing well at this stage. Nevertheless, he said that he would have appreciated occasional letters. Another participant, (13) whom we saw in Dartmoor, appreciated the distance involved, but would have also liked to have received more than the one letter he had been sent by the POU team. The fact that there was no liaison officer at Dartmoor appeared to have accentuated the feeling of (13) that he had been neglected since his return to prison.

A related bone of contention, expressed by three of the seven whom we saw for a second time in custody, was that they had not had continuity of contact with one case-worker. They had expected to build up a rapport with one particular person, and this had not happened. Again, in the words of (11):

I can't just get out of prison and start working with someone I haven't seen. I thought it was supposed to be compact and personalised for me – as opposed to probation being a regime for everybody – similar for all. I thought 'Prolifics' was going to be individually based on what each person needs – and they've left me for seven months to do what I want...

Another participant, (12) claimed that the probation officer who turned up for his ETS review was someone he did not know. He and one other participant (01) had felt frustration at what they perceived as a lack of communication between POU staff, as a result of which questions of importance to them sometimes went unanswered over the course of several visits.

Despite participants' evident need for support from the probation team while they were in custody, they expressed antipathy towards the prospect of four appointments a week following their release:

I don't mind being checked on regularly, but if I'm doing well, don't try to stick something in the way that might interrupt me – but if they see me stumbling, give me the help I need to get over it. (11)

Many saw four contacts per week with probation staff or other agencies as unrealistic:

I can't have all this stuff on my plate – they're bogging me down with too much ...to be honest with you, it seems like they're setting me up to fail. I can

honestly see myself being back in a couple of months – not from using, but for being breached for being late for appointments. (12)

Some felt that the requirement would put an unacceptable pressure on them at a time they were trying to focus on staying clean – attending NA meetings, etc:

A junkie coming out of gaol doesn't need that pressure – he'll just rebel by using drugs. (14)

These participants seemed to perceive no connection between their strongly expressed desire for support and the requirement of frequent post release appointments. Indeed, one participant spoke as though not keeping appointments could be used to 'punish' probation officers when he felt let down:

If they think they're going to come up for the last couple of months and tell me what I've got to do ... why should I? They ain't done nothing for me.(11)

This attitude was linked to another widely expressed complaint – that of constantly being told what to do. Some felt that they were more than capable of making their own decisions:

He was right on me – all over me – 'gotta do this, gotta do that' ... I wasn't ready for it.... All they're trying to do is force me into doing things – they're saying when you come out, we want you to do this, do that – I'm trying to say to them 'Hang about, I've just done 3 ½ years in prison, when I get out I want to see my family – I love my family to death – got a big family, a girlfriend of 9 years – got to put my commitment in there as well ....I'm paying for my crime now – when I get out – I understand about licence and that they're there for me if I need them – but I'm a strong enough character to know what I want. (08)

When faced with the reality of coping with their drug related problems following release, as we discuss below, perceptions tended to change and many participants conceded that they appreciated the intensive support they received from the probation team.

### ***Identity as a 'prolific offender'***

The offenders in our sample were keenly aware of their status as 'prolific offenders'. Most accepted that this term was a fair description in their case. Typically, they had friends who had been targeted by the scheme and they conveyed a sense of being members of a group, not only in Bristol prison but also in most other prisons to which they were transferred. A group mentality was perceptible during our interviews, when

respondents would lapse into the plural in expressing views of the scheme. During the early stages of the project, as noted in chapter 4, the prison officers in Bristol prison team sought to bring all those on the scheme on to one wing. However, this was not met with universal approval. One participant was highly critical of group work among prolific offenders:

You've got 8 criminals in a room – all they wanted to do was boast to each other – where do I come in the top 100 criminals – am I 30<sup>th</sup>, or 50<sup>th</sup>, or 2<sup>nd</sup> – am I the best one? That's what they were all going on about, and I thought – is that a good thing? You'd think that's something you'd be ashamed of really – not to embrace. I know in gaol it's quite good being on the Prolific Offender Unit – it's a sort of status if you know what I mean – but at the end of the day, it isn't good. (14)

Some felt nervous about the possibility of their being tainted by the attitudes of those they perceived as less committed than them:

It's easier for [SPO1] to see us all together I know – but some of the prolific offenders – they're just taking the \*\*\* – just playing a game at the moment. I'm worried about the ones not sold on the idea of the project bugging it up for the rest. I don't think I'm ready – if heroin was put in front of me – I couldn't say no – quite honestly I would probably take it. Some of the prolific offenders don't give a damn – they're quite young – don't care. I'm quite happy on my own, not knowing the others – dealing with it myself. This idea of all being together can work both ways. (3)

Others were concerned about the adverse effects on them of the prolific offender label. They felt that the label did them no favours with the authorities in prisons away from Bristol, where the scheme appeared not to be well understood, and gave us examples of adverse consequences they had suffered. For example, (02) complained that his request for help with post-release accommodation had been shunted between the prison Housing Department and the POU: “So basically, being a prolific offender stopped me finding accommodation”. There were also complains about the effect of the prolific offender label on decisions regarding HDC (as we noted above) and on applications to alter prisoners' security category.

Finally, some offenders expressed anxiety as to what the label might mean post-release, especially when seeking employment. One was not sure whether he would, by law, have to reveal his status as a 'prolific offender' in a job application:

For a normal person who's never heard of it before, 'prolific offender' doesn't sound very desirable. I don't know – will I be breaking the law if I don't? (02)

### *Concerns about accommodation*

As we noted earlier in this chapter, most of the participants in our sample did not have stable accommodation to which they would return on release from prison. Whereas during first interviews there was no sense of urgency about this problem, by the time of our second interviews in custody, offenders who were still uncertain where they would live expressed anxiety and in a few cases disappointment and anger towards the POU. Typical of this attitude was an offender who reported to us that he had been asking about his accommodation for months without anything being done and shortly before his release had been offered accommodation in a bail hostel:

Have they got anything sorted, when are they going to get anything sorted? I've already told them, after 20 months inside, I don't want to go to a bail hostel with smackheads and everyone. I'm clean, I've been doing well this sentence. I've been told in the '12 Step' programme to keep myself safe and away from all that, and that's what I've done in gaol. Now they're putting me in a bail hostel. (12)

The suggestion that he might initially be accommodated in a bail hostel was similarly resented by (01):

I haven't worked on my recovery just to go to a bail hostel – I'm not willing to take that risk.

Some of those who felt let down by the scheme had been offered residential rehabilitation, but had declined:

But I don't want to be going from one institution to another, you know? When I get out - my liberty – it's exactly that, it's my liberty if you know what I mean. If I chose to break the law again and get stuck inside again, then that's my choice. At the end of the day that's my liberty...I didn't want rehab – I knew I'd breach it straight away... I'm not willing to put myself through that now and start all over again. I'll do all the appointments and that – but I'd be more or less my own boss – I can sort out my own days. (02)

Participants complained that, while unlimited funds seemed to be available for rehabilitation centres, there was nothing for other forms of accommodation. As we describe below, difficulties relating to accommodation were a trigger in the drug relapse and subsequent recall of several participants.

## **In the community**

In this section we focus upon the views and experiences of nine of the original 17 participants during the short periods they spent in the community before the end of our fieldwork.<sup>5</sup> The section draws not only on our interviews with offenders, but also on case related discussions we conducted with members of the POU team who were responsible for supervising them.

It must be reiterated that for the majority of respondents our evaluation leaves them only part way through their involvement in the scheme. Our timescale was such that, of the 13 participants who remained on the scheme into the second year, only nine had experienced any time in the community within our fieldwork period. Of the nine, only two (01 and 15) had spent significant periods out of prison – 11 months and 8 months respectively. Both were interviewed. The remainder had all been recalled on one or more occasions, of whom four were interviewed at some point following their release. We were able to explore these offenders' views of the post-release aspect of the scheme, including any benefits gained in the short time they had been at liberty. We also gained insights into what motivated two participants to fulfil the terms of post-release licences and to stay off drugs, whilst others relapsed or failed to comply in other ways.

### ***Perceived benefits of the scheme***

All 13 respondents identified benefits they had derived from the scheme during the time they were on licence or serving community orders. Some mentioned practical and financial benefits, notably the two participants who had completed residential drug treatment courses (15) and (16), and who were highly appreciative of the fact that the POU had funded this treatment. Although (16) had relapsed, breached a DTTO order and been returned to prison during the fieldwork period, the POU had helped her to return to the same rehabilitation centre, where she completed a further six months of treatment. Both (15) and (16) also appreciated financial support

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<sup>5</sup> Another two were released only two and four weeks respectively before the end of our fieldwork but it was not possible to interview either of these within our timescale.

received from the scheme to buy clothes, and in the case of (16), items of furniture and bedding.

Several respondents had drawn on skills learned on courses attended while on the scheme. One who had been recalled for a breach of hostel rules was nevertheless proud that he had not lapsed back into drug use. He described how, even when in one of his old haunts with easy availability of drugs, he had been able to put into practice what he had learned. Others talked of their new-found skill in thinking before acting. As noted above, (08) had 'recalled' himself to prison. He described how he had written down all the pros and cons and come to his decision:

They set me thinking. They put all these things across to me... One thing they have done for me – they make me think a lot more than I used to. They've definitely helped with that. Everything I do, I think about before I do it.

As we saw in the preceding sections, whereas the prospect of high intensity supervision had caused apprehension, in practice this was widely viewed as the most valuable aspect of the scheme. Several benefits were seen to flow from this requirement. Indeed, those who had had previous experience of far less demanding requirements during previous sentences compared the scheme favourably with that experience.

For one, you know they're there – they always let you know they're there – not like probation. I always knew they were watching my progress ... You hear a lot of prolific offenders blagging them off ... the thing is with Prolifics, yeah – if you want the help, they're there to give it to you. If I need anything, they give me it. (08)

While receiving residential drug treatment participants appreciated the fact that they could contact the POU team if they felt the need for additional support:

I've always had 'Prolific Offenders' at the end of the phone. I've needed the extra support. They've come and seen me a few times and when I get out they're there for me. I think the world of [names of two members of the probation team]. You can call them all the names in the world but they don't give up. (16)

Some participants expressed the importance of this relationship in terms of being befriended and helped on a personal level, rather than simply because this was their probation officer's job:

I thought – ‘What’s happening here – why are they taking so much interest?’ It made me think what they were saying was what they were meaning. I feel all these people are genuine. I’ll be gutted if they’re not. I’ll be devastated if it all comes to nothing. (03)

They ring me up; they genuinely want me to stay clean. They are there for me; I’m not just any statistic. (16)

Although participants who had relapsed or who were struggling in other ways tended to miss appointments with their supervisors, most acknowledged that the four appointments per week obligation was not, in practice, any great hardship. It seemed that despite misgivings expressed before their release from prison, following their release the benefits of the support they received outweighed any inconvenience. Several spoke of the structure this had contributed to their lives, not only in terms of the one-to-one meetings with their case managers but through the tasks set for them in connection with future employment, attendance at relevant courses and counselling sessions. One participant, who had initially complained to us about the requirement “encroaching on his liberty”, later expressed gratitude for the help he received on a daily basis when he began to relapse into heavy drug use.

In comparing their involvement in the scheme with previous experience of probation, the latter tended to be portrayed as combining minimal and meaningless contact with an authoritarian approach. Several described the rote performance, as they saw it, of probation officers working ‘to a book’, without any apparent effort to focus on their individual needs. The POU team was seen as available in times of need, concerned with their particular problems, and willing to exercise discretion. In the words of (15):

For 10 years I’ve been putting my fingers up to authority and probation officers... x and y aren’t probation officers – well they are, but to me they’re friends. If I get fed up any day I can talk to them – they’ve said I can just pick up the phone ... they don’t pressure you into nothing – if you want help it’s there.

Others mentioned that the POU team had helped them gain or regain a measure of self-reliance. These included (11), who felt that he had benefited from the



encouragement he had been given to set his own targets for change and to take responsibility for his life in a way that was new to him. He had not derived this benefit from previous periods of probation supervision:

All the probation I've had before – has never helped – never tried to get close enough to understand. They're always doing it from the book. I clicked with her when she asked what *I* wanted, what I thought I needed. This is different. Instead of telling me you must do this and that, it's 'what do you think is going to help you?' 'Why do you need it?' Then slowly getting into it.

This approach appears to have enabled some participants to recognise the need to ask for and accept help in a way that would have been foreign to them in the past:

I thought I could do it all on my own, but I can't. I'm a bit of a fighter out there – ashamed to say it – I can hold my own and all that – don't need no one to help me. But I've shed a tear up there thinking 'you can't do this – got to use those people'. (03)

They knew I didn't want to come here [to a residential drug centre] but they just gave me suggestions, didn't threaten me. They took time out to talk me through it, the pluses and minus sides. (15)

It seems that the level of trust they placed in their probation officers enabled these participants to admit to their problems and failings. One, (14), said that being able to admit to a drug dependency was something that he would never previously have done. He now believed that, should he relapse into drug use, help would be there.

Some described their pride in changes in themselves, which had been recognised by others. They found this particularly gratifying when it involved re-establishing damaged relationships with their families. Regaining these relationships was in itself a motivation and a support for the future:

My mum's helping me out. If I feel like using, I ring mum up – she'll say come down and have a chat – and before you know it, I'll be alright again. I have a drink, see mates. (10)

### *Surveillance*

Despite earlier fears expressed while still in custody, following their release participants appeared to regard police surveillance as a non-issue. None believed that over the period in which we conducted our fieldwork they had been under

surveillance. They were correct in thinking that, since they were in such close contact with the POU probation team, the team regarded police surveillance as unnecessary. As we have seen, decisions to recall participants were mainly in the light of breaches of reporting requirements often associated with drug relapse, thus ensuring that they were returned to custody before this conduct triggered further offending.

Participants recognised that, as they had been targeted as high-risk offenders, there was a high probability that they would be swiftly arrested should they re-offend. This may have acted as a deterrent:

They'd know if they left it a while the crime figures would go up – they'd rather just get rid of the problem straight away. They'd be on my case straight away. (01)

One other participant (10) explained how he occasionally thought about the possibility that he was subject to surveillance, before reminding himself that since he was doing no wrong, he had nothing to fear. However, as he remarked: “It’s hard to break the habit of looking over your shoulder after nine years”.

### **Successful completion of licences/orders or initial failure**

This final section summarises what appeared to be the key factors associated with successful completion of periods of supervision in the community, or initial failure resulting in breach and recall. The following case illustrations comprise the two participants who succeeded in completing a period on licence (01) and a DTTO order (15), and two who relapsed and were recalled during the evaluation period (10 and 14). These cases illustrate the intensive work undertaken by the POU team in supporting participants through post release licences and community orders.

### **Participant 01**

While he was in custody 01 remained drug free and received treatment and counselling for an obsessive compulsion disorder, although not for other problems and goals identified in his sentence plan (anger management, parenting skills and victim awareness). The POU team and 01 identified a need for help to avoid a relapse on leaving prison. Other areas of need at this stage identified by 01 following his release related to anger management (seen as a major issue by 01), finances and help to prepare for employment. At the time we last saw 01 the POU was attempting to arrange a suitable anger management course. He had been referred to a drug project from which he was receiving counselling, and to a Job Centre where he was shortly to attend

a 'progress to work' course. 01 was critical of some aspects of the custodial phase of his involvement in the scheme, tending to blame the probation team for their inability to secure a place in a dry house away from Bristol pending the availability of council housing.

Post release, when we last saw 01, six months into his licence period, he believed that he had benefited from the intensive supervision he had received from his supervisor and from the referrals made on his behalf. He found the structure better than he had ever received when under probation supervision. But he attributed his success in abstaining from drug use and desisting from further offending primarily to a desire not to revert to his former way of life. The main motivating factor for 01 was his relationship with his son and partner. He mentioned that his father had left him when he was a child and he did not wish to behave in the same way towards his own son. This relationship meant that he had "more to live with now" and was therefore more inclined to think about the consequences of his behaviour. He admitted to us that he had been tempted to re-offend (he was experiencing financial problems at that time) but had not succumbed: "I think it's because I've got a family now.... for my son really. I don't want to go back to gaol."

## **Participant 15**

15 was sufficiently committed to changing his lifestyle at this stage to ask for help in securing accommodation away from Bristol where he completed the residential stage of treatment. For 15, success meant forgoing alcohol as well as drugs as one quickly led to another. He told us that he had managed to stay off drugs for about a year between 2000-2001 without any outside help but he now accepted that he had been overly confident and "full of myself". The POU team, he felt, had given him the confidence to go into drug rehabilitation and was working hard on his behalf.

When we saw 15 a year later he was living independently having successfully completed all stages of his drug treatment. His DTTO order had come to an end, the judge having congratulated him on his "achievement in changing my life". He had, he told us, found the requirements of residential rehabilitation "harder than going to gaol" but had only positive comments to make about the staff and the POU team, who had continued to visit once a fortnight "to see that everything was alright". But like 01, 15 believed that ultimately it is down to the individual whether they take advantage of a scheme such as this. Also like 01, 15 ascribed the motivation not to revert to his old lifestyle to relationships with key members of his family, in particular his mother, whose trust he had regained. Whereas his mother had disowned him as a result of his drug use and offending, having completed residential drug rehabilitation and remained drug free for some months since leaving the drug centre, he now talked regularly to his mother and visited her whenever possible.

In addition, 15 identified a new willingness to ask for help where in the past he would assume he could cope alone. He had also ensured that he was fully occupied and therefore not at risk of relapsing through any lack of focus and direction in his life. He was taking a performing arts course and hoped to progress to a two year B Tech course the following year. For the first time in his life he had been open about the fact that he was dyslexic, and having

sought help with his written work, had received all the support he needed. He had learnt that it pays to be honest in his dealings with people. In the past he has always lied about his lifestyle so this is “the first time I’ve been truly open and not ashamed of my past”. Despite these support mechanisms, 15 was aware that it was only a year since he had stopped using drugs and he was aware of the dangers of becoming complacent. He was therefore attending Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and intended to continue with them.

### **Participant 10**

10 was released from custody in December 2003. Without accommodation to go to, the scheme arranged emergency accommodation for him in a B & B. Whilst he found this acceptable as a short-term measure, he was keen to move into a flat of his own, preferably located near his mother’s home. 10 continued to keep his appointments. He had aspirations to work in the leisure industry as a personal trainer. However, after about 8 weeks, he had relapsed back into drug use, saying that he was bored with not enough to do. The scheme organised appointments for him with Bristol Drugs Project, Narcotics Anonymous and a GP with a view to receiving a ‘blocker’. However, although acknowledging that he found this support helpful, he was finally recalled to prison on suspicion of offending.

10 was released again after another three months. He admitted that whilst he had not been happy at being recalled, he had ultimately come to feel that “it was for the best”. He could now see that this recall had given him a second chance – he had not been able to abstain from, or control his drug use. In prison, he was able to detox once again, work with CARATs and receive counselling. He was proud to have stayed off drugs on this occasion – even in Leyhill where it seems they are readily available.

We saw 10 again four weeks after his second release, when he again expressed a desire to abstain from drug use. He was living independently in a flat near to his mother, with whom he had a positive and beneficial relationship. He had plans to attend a course in fitness training the following September. Although he missed the excitement of his previous life of offending and drug use he had no wish, he said, to “go down that road again.” At that point 10 was attending his appointments, describing these as giving his life a structure and keeping him from feeling bored, without making him feel pressured. But 10 also admitted that this time he was less sure of his ability to stay off drugs: “I don’t know why, but this time I haven’t come out thinking I can definitely do it. I feel more unsure – mixed...”

### **Participant 14**

On his release, 14 was offered the alternatives of residential rehabilitation, which he rejected as he did not want to spend another six months “in custody”, a bed in a dry house (also unsatisfactory as it was close to Christmas and he wanted to be able to drink over Christmas), or a bail hostel, which he rejected as it was located in the heart of the Bristol drugs scene. Instead he returned home reluctantly to his parents – also in an area offering easy availability of drugs. Initially 14 did well. He was proud of his successful efforts in finding casual employment, and sticking to his four weekly appointments. He evidently felt ambivalent about these appointments, saying on the one hand

that he was just going through the motions and that they did not materially affect his behaviour generally, but on the other that he was always given useful tasks to carry out, valuing in particular the help he was being given regarding employment. However, after about six weeks, following the break-up of his relationship with his girlfriend, he described himself as depressed and bored: "I just felt low..had nothing to do on night times. I'm not a clubber or a drinker any more". Living at home, albeit with a very supportive mother, began to pall as he felt the need (at the age of 30) to break away from home.

14 spoke of his desire to move away from Bristol, but a chance meeting with a former drug-using acquaintance led to a full relapse into heroin use some four weeks after his release. 14 expressed pride in the fact that he had admitted this relapse to his probation officer and said that he would never have done such a thing before his participation on the scheme. At the time we last interviewed him, two weeks following his relapse, he was in almost daily contact with the probation team who were striving to find a placement for him in a residential rehabilitation centre away from Bristol. For this he was grateful and impressed. Approximately 8 weeks after his release he moved into a residential rehab.

Against the advice of his probation officer 14 subsequently left the rehabilitation centre after completing the primary phase of the programme, and having begun to miss appointments he was breached and recalled to prison. But at the time of writing he was reported as working well with the scheme in prison and keen to continue on his release.

The two participants who succeeded in completing their post-release licences, and were thus no longer under supervision when our fieldwork period came to an end (01) and (15) were dissimilar in their personal circumstances and in the kinds of support they received from the POU. (01) had a partner and child with whom he lived during the seven months he spent on licence under supervision of the scheme, whereas (15), a single man with no children, accepted a residential drug treatment placement in a town some distance from Bristol as a condition of a DTTO order. However, these two participants had both spoken to us of their motivation to end their drug dependency. They had deliberately distanced themselves from drug using associates in Bristol, and both appeared to have faced up to the fact that they needed help with their addiction and other related problems if they were to resist the temptation to revert to their former lifestyles. Although (15) was single and had no children, when we first saw him at the beginning of a placement in a residential drug centre he was attending a full time course at college. He told us that he was at last facing up to his need for treatment and was cautiously optimistic that he could do so with the help of the scheme.

In considering what went wrong for other participants, the factors they themselves mentioned most frequently as precipitating drug relapse and breach of licence conditions were difficulties in relationships with family members and unsatisfactory accommodation. Some offenders also described themselves as vulnerable to a relapse through boredom. Their lives, it seemed, felt empty without drugs and unlike (01) and (15) they had yet to find an alternative focus. Participant (10) described himself as missing the buzz of offending and drug use. It had been his way of life for nine years. Cases (10) and (14) illustrate that, although motivation to succeed had seemed high when we first interviewed these participants, and they had kept to their regime of weekly appointments, this structure was evidently not enough to prevent a relapse. Participant (14), who relapsed into heroin use some six weeks after his release from custody, illustrates the combined impact of unsatisfactory accommodation, relationship difficulties, and a lifestyle that lacked structure and incentives to remain drug free.

Several participants stressed the importance of securing independent accommodation. They saw it as a major incentive to stop offending and to stay drug free. They perceived accommodation of their own as a major prize and something they would not wish to lose. This was captured well by (14):

They haven't sussed that if you you've got nothing to lose, why behave? If you've got out of prison and there was accommodation for us somewhere that was 'ours' – we'd probably feel more likely to behave... Because we've never had anything – if you give us something, we're more likely to behave to keep that and toe the line. When you've got nothing to lose, why behave?

However, as is evident in case (10), if such accommodation is located in areas in which drugs dealers are prevalent, even the incentive of having something of value to lose may not be enough to enable those who are heavily drug dependent to resist the temptation of a readily available supply.

The explanation that some participants and their supervisors gave for their relapse into drug misuse and subsequent breach action was that they had not faced up to their inability to overcome their drug dependency without intensive, long-term support. The unwillingness of three participants to accept the offer of accommodation in rehabilitation centres on release from custody (03), (08), and (14) was seen by the team as indicative of this form of denial. These three participants did, however, come to acknowledge that they had underestimated the difficulties of abstaining from drug

use following their release. As (03) observed, “I thought I could bowl straight out of prison and deal with it myself”. Having been unable to stay off drugs whilst in a probation hostel in Bristol (he was asked to leave as a result of his failure to stay ‘clean’), (03) was eventually breached and returned to prison. At the time we last saw him (a third interview was carried out while he was at the hostel prior to his recall) he told us that he now realised that he needed the intensive support that he would receive in residential rehabilitation. Two months after his release from prison (in August 2004) he was receiving drug maintenance and a ‘blocker’, was keeping regular appointments with the Bristol Specialist Drug Service, and was attending a local drop-in service for additional counselling. His POU caseworker considered that on this occasion there was evidence of a determination to succeed: “Before, he’d always walked past the drop-in”- coupled with a greater willingness to accept the advice of the POU.

Even when participants did accept POU funding for residential drug treatment the majority (four of the five in our sample) struggled with the requirement to abstain from drug use, absconded during their first placement and were returned to prison. One of these participants (16) had been heavily addicted to heroin for 11 years and described herself as having been “deeply involved with drugs” - she offended daily to support her addiction – and as a consequence it was “so hard to stop.” The course of (16)’s involvement with the POU illustrates that, for those who have been addicted to drugs for a number of years and who have multiple problems (in the case of (16) these including mental health problems), it is unrealistic to expect major changes in drug use and lifestyle in the short term. Having been recalled, (16) continued to be supported by the POU and was funded for a second residential placement. The fact that she completed this six month placement (albeit she began to use heroin again during the last few weeks of the placement) was seen by the POU as indicative of the positive impact of the scheme. Like some others whose progress we followed for a short period in the community, there was no evidence that this participant was re-offending on the same scale as before her involvement in the scheme. In short, our interviews with staff and participants suggest that the individualised and intensive nature of the supervision provided by the probation team enabled participants to make significant progress towards a drug free lifestyle. Having experienced the ‘stick’ of swift recall to prison following a breach of licence or DTTO conditions, there was in some cases a greater readiness to engage with the scheme and to accept the need for support.

## **6 THE IMPACT OF THE SCHEME ON OFFENDING AND DRUG USE**

As we explained in Chapter 3, the evaluation did not include a statistical examination of the impact of the scheme on rates of reconviction. Moreover, although we followed progress of 17 participants over a period of approximately 18 months, few spent significant amounts of time at liberty. Our timescale was too short to enable us to examine their behaviour and attitudes to drug use and offending once they had left the scheme. Subject to these constraints, there are clear indications that the scheme has been effective in targeting prolific offenders and in reducing their rates of offending through a combination of intensive supervision and a swift response to non-compliance with the conditions of licences or community orders. This is supported by the crime statistics relating to offences with which the targeted offenders are most frequently associated.

### **Offending and drug use while participating in the scheme**

During the evaluation period offending on the part of the 17 participants was significantly curtailed, not simply because the majority spent much of this period in custody, but also because following their release they were subject to close supervision by the POU team. Over a period of approximately 15 months prior to their selection by the scheme, between them the 17 offenders were charged with a total of 459 offences. The majority of the charges were in respect of household burglary. While they were participating in the scheme (from early 2003) through to the end of our fieldwork (August 2004) only one of the 17 offenders was known by the POU to have lapsed into his previous pattern of offending. Two had been charged with a property offence (one of whom had completed her licence) and there had been suspicions of further offending by two others at the point at which they were recalled. Police statistics confirm this picture. From the point at which the 17 offenders joined the scheme through to the end of September 2004 (approximately 23 months) only nine charges were brought against seven of the offenders.

Twelve participants were recalled to prison during the evaluation period, but in most cases this was for reasons other than offending, such as breaching DTTO orders. The high revocation rates for offenders serving DTTO orders is consistent with the findings of an evaluation of pilot DTTOs (Hough et al., 2003; Turnbull et al., 2000) and with other studies of drug-using offenders serving community penalties. The



DTTO evaluation concluded that failure to complete such orders is unsurprising given that the target group comprises offenders with long histories of prolific offending, many with entrenched drug problems. However, through swift enforcement and expedited recall the scheme succeeded in bring participants back to court before previous patterns of offending were re-established.

Measurement of success by reference to relapse into drug use is less positive. All but two of the 13 participants who remained on the scheme into the second year of the evaluation tested positive for Class A drugs while under supervision in the community. However, according to POU staff these offenders did not slip further into drug abuse as a result of the intensive support they received and/or because they were swiftly recalled to prison. None of the 11 had relapsed to their former levels of drug use, and some had abstained from drug use for longer periods than in the past. POU staff also reported that offenders who had been recalled to prison expressed themselves willing to work again with the prison based team and with the probation team following their release.

There was some indication of positive change in attitudes within the group if 13 participants. As we described in chapter 5, all of the participants mentioned benefits they had derived from the scheme. All valued the high level of support they received from members of the prison and probation teams. This was variously described as helping to bring structure into their lives, encouraging self-reliance, and enabling them to recognise the need for, and accept help with, their drug dependency and related problems. The majority succeeded in attending the requisite four appointments per week during the first three months of supervision. Probation staff regarded the fact that participants generally kept their appointments as a significant achievement. As one probation officer and some participants observed, engaging with the probation service is a big step in itself.

### **Divisional crime statistics: patterns of offending in relation to targeted offences**

The other main indicator of effectiveness cited by senior police officers and members of the Bristol POU was the apparent impact of the scheme on area crime rates in respect of the targeted offences. Crime figures supplied by Avon and Somerset constabulary show a downward trend in recorded incidents of household burglary and vehicle crime in all three districts following the implementation of the scheme in

April 2002. Figures 6.1 to 6.3 show the monthly rates of recorded cases of household burglary.

Figure 6.2 Domestic Burglary, B District

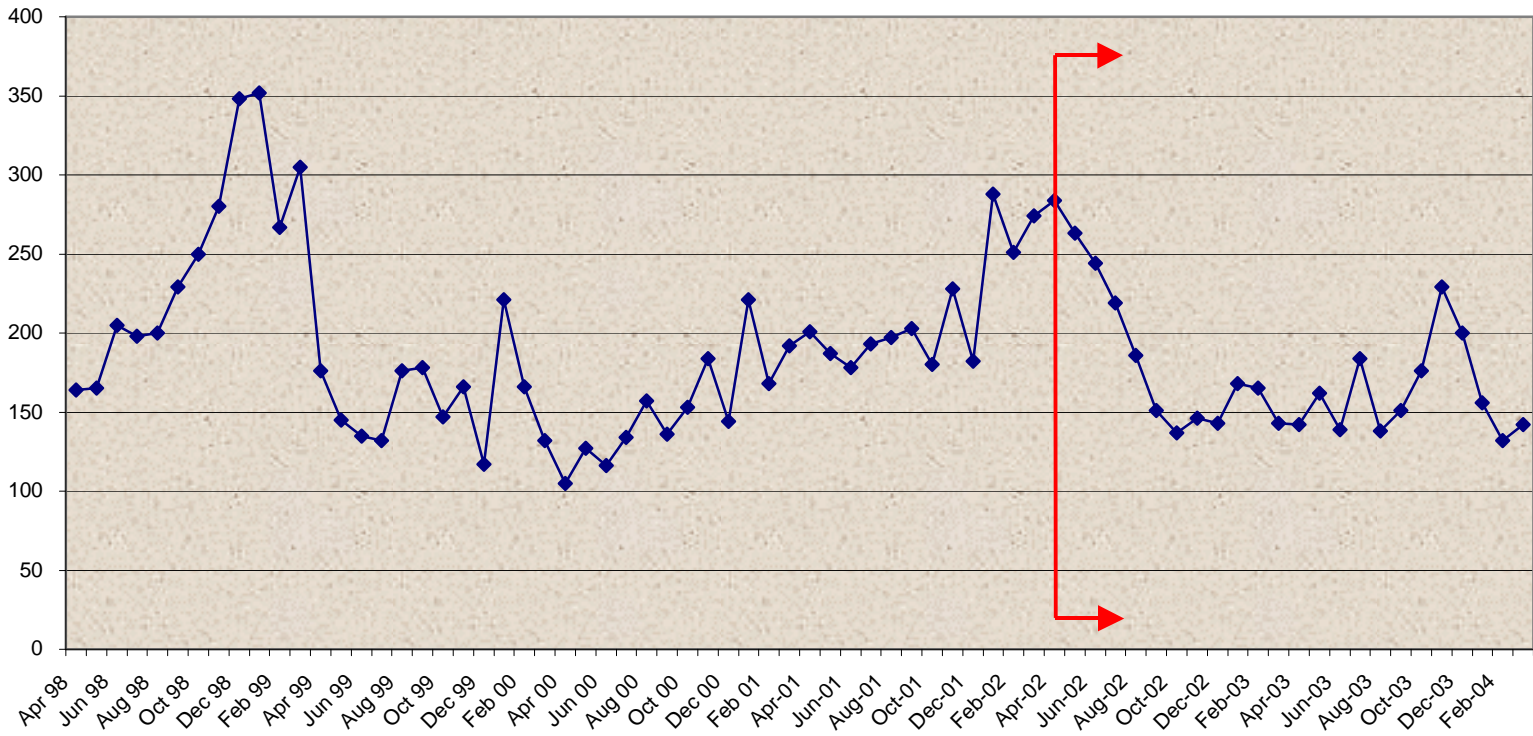


Figure 6.3 Domestic Burglary, C District

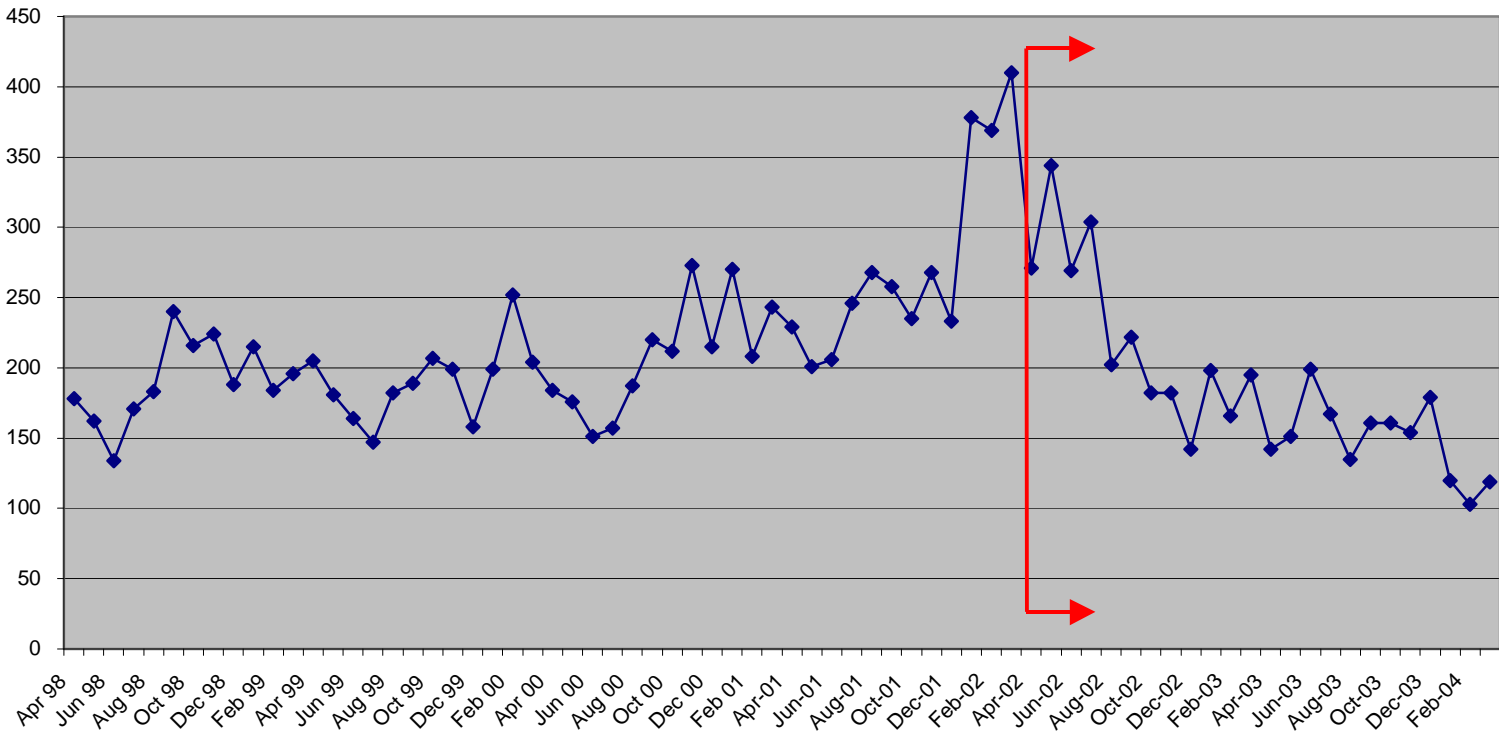
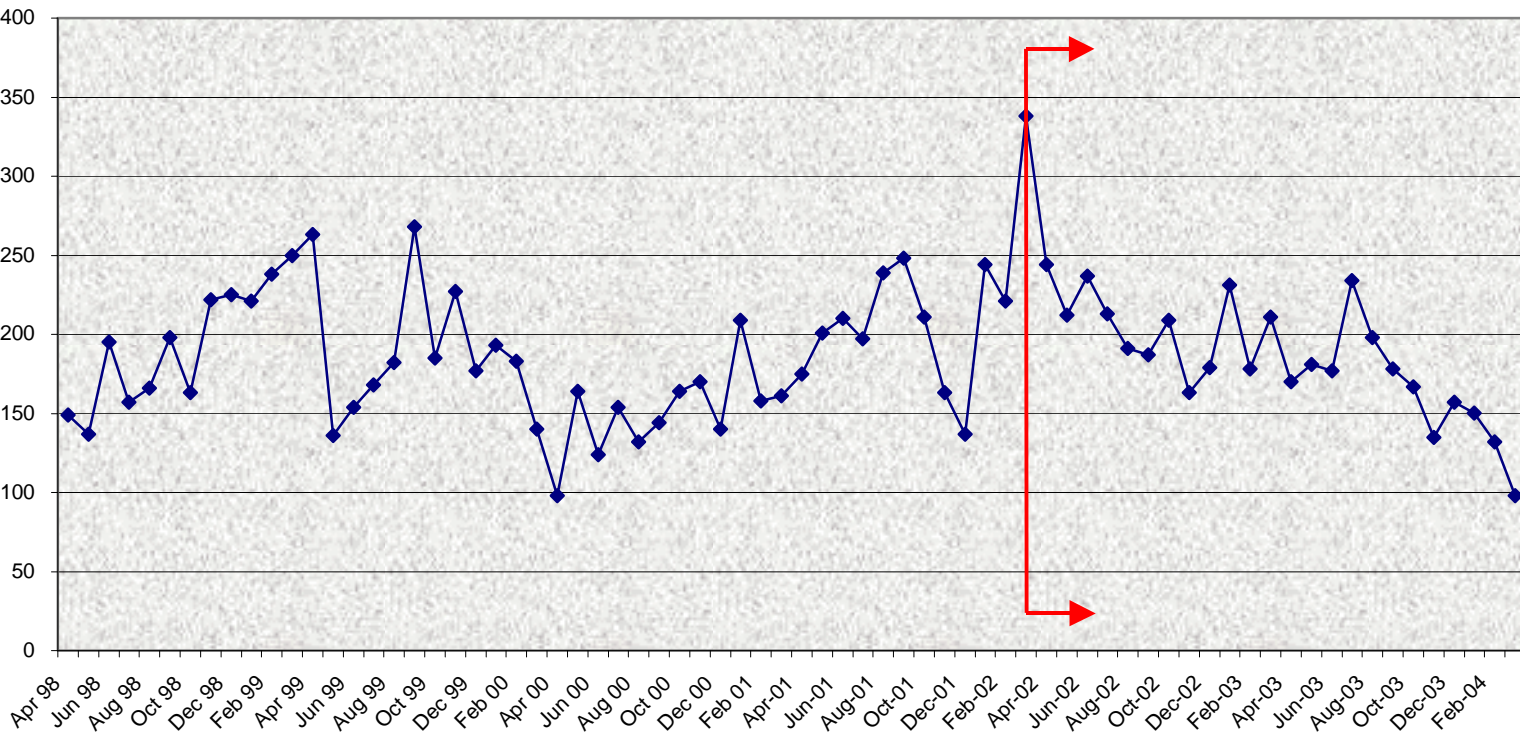


Figure 6.1 Domestic Burglary, A District



Although all three of these charts show monthly variations in the numbers of offences recorded, by April 2003 the numbers of recorded incidents of domestic burglary across the three districts (451) was 43 per cent lower than in April 2002 (793). Over

the same period there was a far shallower decline across the remainder of the force (the statistics show an 11 per cent reduction in the number of recorded cases of domestic burglary outside Bristol). As the scheme was extended to other districts (from mid 2003), these also experienced a more marked reduction in rates of burglary and vehicle crime.

Caution is needed in drawing conclusions from these crime figures. As was pointed out to us by the police inspectors whom we interviewed, other factors, in particular adoption of the National Intelligence Model, may have contributed to the fall in rates of burglary and vehicle crime since the scheme came into operation. The fact that national rates of recorded burglary have declined since 2002 (though not at the same rate as in the Bristol districts) indicates that other factors may be influential, such as a fall in rates of reporting. It was also suspected by the police inspectors that there has been some measure of displacement to other types of crime, notably shoplifting. Nevertheless, the extent of the reduction in targeted offences in Bristol and subsequently in other districts as the scheme was extended throughout Avon and Somerset, does suggest that the strategy of targeting prolific burglars has made a significant contribution to the downward trend. It will, of course, be important to examine the direction of these trends over the longer term.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this evaluation was to examine the operation of the Bristol component of ASPOS from the perspective of staff from the three agencies and that of participants. Although it is not within our remit to make specific recommendations with regard to future work with prolific offenders following the implementation of the National PPO Strategy, ASPOS has come to be viewed as a model of good practice. In this concluding chapter we therefore summarise what appear to be the main learning points from the evaluation in relation to the organisation and delivery of the scheme.

### **Good practice**

The partnership between the police, probation and prison services was widely regarded as fundamental to the ability of schemes to target the most active offenders and to reduce their offending through rehabilitative work and swift enforcement. In the view of probation and police staff whom we interviewed this was one of the most successful aspects of the Bristol component of ASPOS. At both senior management and operational levels there was a commitment to the two-pronged approach of intensive supervision and support coupled with demanding reporting requirements and strict enforcement and early detection of further offending. There was broad consensus that the following were the main aspects of organisation and delivery if the scheme was to work effectively:

- strong leadership and staff who are experienced and trained to work with drug dependent offenders;
- intelligence-led systems for selecting prolific offenders and for deploying resources to monitor their conduct;
- location of schemes within intelligence units in police stations;
- inclusion of dedicated police officers in all aspects of the work;
- prioritisation for drug treatment and relevant courses/programmes in prison;

- the appointment of prison liaison officers whose role is to keep probation teams informed of progress and act as a link between participants and probation staff;
- protocols consistent with national guidelines re data protection that enable intelligence sharing between the police and prison services;
- swift response to breach of licence or community order and speedy recall when a licence was revoked;
- resettlement work at prisons geared to areas to which participants will be released;
- frequent contact with probation staff (at least four times a week in the early stages) enabling staff to provide high level of support and close monitoring;
- small caseloads, enabling probation staff to provide intensive 1:1 support tailored to individual needs;
- continuity of contact with one, at most two, members of the probation team;
- swift access to residential drug treatment;
- continuation of work on priority problems in the event of drug relapse and/or re-offending;

## **Improving future work with prolific offenders**

### *In custody*

Our evaluation highlighted aspects of the partnership between the POU scheme and the Prison Service that needed to be strengthened. Difficulties had arisen in relation to the timing of transfers of participants to other prisons, decisions regarding suitability for release on HDC, adherence to sentence plans, and communication with the POU team regarding participants' progress. These difficulties were attributed to the scheme and the prison authorities having different core objectives and priorities (prioritisation of prolific offenders for rehabilitative interventions was not a Prison Service performance indicator), and to constraints arising from prison overcrowding. In addition, POU staff identified weaknesses in the resettlement provision for participants. They saw a case for transferring participants to establishments in their home areas for the last few weeks of their sentence to enable the team to undertake intensive resettlement work. Staff recognised that such issues could not be resolved

in an ad hoc way, but needed to be tackled at the regional and national level (within the national PPO strategy). Specific improvements suggested by the team were:

- provision of dedicated liaison staff in prisons to which prolific offenders are regularly transferred;
- retention of participants in local prison until sentence plans are completed;
- prioritisation for drug treatment and other courses/programmes relevant to sentence plans;
- systems throughout the prison service to ensure that rehabilitative work begun in one prison is continued when participants are transferred;
- involvement of POU case managers in decisions concerning transfer, attendance at programmes/courses, and HDC; and
- return to a local prison for intensive resettlement work 3-4 weeks prior to release in the home area.

Since we began our evaluation there have been two major national developments that can be expected to strengthen the partnership between the Prison Service and the Probation Service, and in consequence, to address some of the problems highlighted by our research. The first is the National PPO Strategy. Guidance relating to the Catch and Convict strand of the PPO Strategy sets out the role and responsibilities of the Prison Service (Catch and Convict Framework Supplementary Annex 2004, p 9). There is a clear expectation in the guidance that the Service will identify all targeted PPOs and prioritise them for prison interventions from which they may benefit (notably offending behaviour and drug programmes) and for resettlement work. It needs to be recognised that such prioritisation raises an important issue of principle, as it seems inevitable that other prisoners will spend longer on the waiting list for core programmes or may even miss the opportunity to attend.

The other major development that will have implications for the operation and effectiveness of future PPO schemes is the creation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). The service will bring together the prison and probation services with a view to providing 'end to end offender management', whether prisoners are serving sentences in prison, the community, or both. (National Probation Service Bulletin July 2004). Regional Offender Managers will have direct responsibility for budget allocation and will lead performance at regional level, while the 42 local probation boards will be required to 'refocus their role around statutory

responsibility for managing offenders, while maintaining their local links with other criminal justice agencies'. As Martin Narey, the Chief Executive of NOMS, has pointed out, there is an expectation of 'a philosophical change, where the prison looks beyond the point of discharge and towards integration of the offender back into the community' (Prison Service News 2004). Narey also expects frontline prison officers to become 'much more outward looking ...to ensure that when people leave prison they have already begun to focus on issues such as education, drugs, accommodation and job issues.'

Several members of the POU observed that ASPOS is, in fact, an example of NOMS in action, with the added benefit of the partnership with the police service. Some members of POU saw in NOMS an opportunity to build on their existing achievements in providing targeted and 'seamless' interventions from the point at which offenders come within the terms of the scheme.

### *In the community*

There were concerns that the rapid extension of the scheme throughout Avon and Somerset had resulted in the recruitment of some member of probation staff who lacked relevant experience or who had not received adequate training to work with participants whose prolific offending is driven by the need to support a long standing class A drug addiction. Future funding of schemes and their timescales for implementation need to ensure that staff are suitably experienced and receive training in all aspects of the work.

Access to a range of services and opportunities in the community is essential if ex-prisoners are to reintegrate successfully and establish new support structures away from their criminal and drug using associates. Consistent with other studies of prolific offender schemes (for example Tupman et al., 2001), and of prisoners' resettlement needs (Lewis et al., 2003), the main obstacles faced by the scheme were in relation to accessing drug services and housing provision. Our evaluation highlighted the fact that efforts to fast track drug-using offenders into treatment or drug maintenance programmes are not always successful. ASPOS has addressed some of the limitations of drug throughcare provision by providing a planned and co-ordinated service for participants both in custody and following their release. However, the withdrawal of funds for residential drug treatment was a major disappointment, as staff feared that



this would result in a shortfall in provision. The POU team also identified a pressing need for Primary Care Trusts to take a larger role in the provision of medication and other drug services in the community. As has been demonstrated in research into the impact of DTTOs on offending (Hough et al., 2003), if there is delay in accessing treatment this tends to result in failure to complete drug programmes, high rates of revocation of orders, and also reconviction.

The establishment of NOMS and the national PPO strategy may provide an opportunity to overcome some of these gaps in treatment provision in the community. One other national development - the National Rehabilitation Action Plan - soon to come into effect, will entail commitments from mainstream service outside the criminal justice system to meet resettlement needs in relation to housing, health, drugs, finance, education and employment. It may be that this initiative will help in achieving a more effective partnership with mainstream services. Meanwhile, those involved in the Bristol POU suggested the following priority needs – recognising the resource constraints that operate in all of these areas:

- effective systems to ensure rapid assessment and referral to residential drug treatment;
- fast track access to non-residential medical services and drug treatment;
- provision by Local Authorities and Housing Associations of a range of suitable accommodation, including independent housing and drug free hostels;
- prioritisation for admission to accredited probation programmes; and
- protocols for information sharing between the scheme and other agencies - especially Health Services and CJITs - that are consistent with national standards re confidentiality and data protection.

### **Assessing the cost effectiveness of prolific offender schemes**

Many of the recommendations for improving the effectiveness of prolific offender schemes have resource implications for the criminal justice system and also for other mainstream services. The issue of how best to fund future schemes and improve access to public services is outside our remit. Staff and managers whom we interviewed argued for mainstream funding for schemes within the new national framework, and for priority access to services in the community. But such aspirations

need to be seen in the context of the many competing demands for scarce resources, not least from other groups who may be regarded as more deserving.

As was pointed out in the Catch and Convict Framework Guidance, underpinning the PPO Strategy is an expectation that schemes will generate savings to the criminal justice system and mainstream statutory services through reductions in offending and drug use. It will be important therefore for future schemes to be able to demonstrate such savings in order that these may be set against their costs. Attempts to quantify the cost-effectiveness of prolific offender schemes, such as that of Tupman et al. (2001) in relation to the Arc project, have been inconclusive. This is partly because early evaluations have often been based on schemes that have not been funded beyond the pilot phase, but also because, as Tupman et al. argued, measuring the impact of a scheme in terms of crimes *not* committed is highly problematic. As we saw in Chapter 6, the evaluation of the Bristol component of ASPOS indicates that the scheme has been successful in catching and convicting offenders who commit a large volume of acquisitive crime. There is also evidence of considerably lower rates of offending by those targeted. This largely reflects the fact that, following their conviction, a high proportion of participants receive custodial sentences. However, our evaluation also highlights the benefits of intensive support following release from custody or during residential rehabilitation, coupled with prompt enforcement action in the event of non-compliance with orders or licence conditions.

Future studies will need to provide a more systematic examination of the effectiveness of the rehabilitative and the enforcement elements of schemes than was possible in the present evaluation. While the key outcome measure would be reduction in offending (both during supervision and at the end of a follow up period of at least two years), it would also be valuable to include other measures of positive change in relation to problems associated with offending behaviour, in particular: drug use; securing stable accommodation; maintaining relationships with partners/parents; improved mental health; changed attitudes to offending; and steps towards obtaining employment. If prolific offender schemes are here to stay, there is also a need for systematic monitoring of their work (in custody and in the community) in order to assess the extent to which the performance targets of each of the three agencies are being achieved. Performance monitoring should be designed in such a way that it meets requirements for routine management information as well as providing a basis for a cost-effectiveness analysis.

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