

# A LOCAL SERVICE WITH A FUTURE ALIGNED WITH YOURS...

**PROBATION**  
association  
The Voice Of Probation Employers

## Together We Can Reduce Crime And Make Communities Safer

The advent of the Policing and Crime Bill and the emerging legal framework requiring probation to engage with local authorities in the production of Local Area Agreements provides opportunities for both probation and local authorities.

Each has large scale, daily engagement with a section of society that can benefit the other – local authority departments with the public and probation with offenders.

Whether the issue is protecting vulnerable children or targeting areas of high crime and anti-social behaviour, the potential for a new era of local partnership work is clear.

The Probation Association - the

organisation representing the 42 Probations Boards and Trusts of England and Wales - believes that this partnership can also be the key to unlocking further advances in the reduction of reoffending.

### *Tradition*

Local probation staff have been working with offenders for more than 100 years.

The service across England and Wales is one of the oldest and best in the world and has a proud tradition of working in partnership with other local organisations.

The Probation of Offenders Act, 1907, enabled courts to assist and advise offenders towards rehabilitation and formally introduced probation officers to work with offenders.

The principle that probation should remain a locally controlled service was enshrined in the 1930s and 40 years later unpaid work – commonly referred to as community service - was introduced.

Now called Community Payback, unpaid work has since developed into a service providing millions of hours of free labour to communities, often in partnership with local authorities (see below).

Despite the creation of a centrally-directed National Probation Service in 2001, the service remains alone among criminal justice agencies in having a structure within which virtually all of its staff are locally employed by area boards or trusts.

Financed by the Ministry of Justice, the 42 Probation Boards and Trusts of England and Wales set a strategic direction for their local management teams and provide oversight of local policy and strategy.

## Providing Real Benefits To Local Communities

In the six years to 2006 (the latest figures), there has been a 23 per cent reduction in the number of offences committed by offenders within one year of commencing a court order under probation supervision.

One of the most frequently used of the 12 possible requirements of a Community Order is Community Payback. This not only punishes offenders by requiring them to work in their home area (which is nearly always where they have offended), it is also able to prepare

unemployed offenders for work - the best step an offender can take away from a life of crime.

Community Payback projects are identified by the public as well as local probation staff, often in partnership with local authorities, voluntary organisations, and other community groups.

Every year more than 50,000 offenders complete Community Payback providing over six million hours of free labour to local communities – worth £33million if paid at the national minimum wage.

# Probation Is Working: Community Sentences Break Cycle Of Crime

Reoffending is estimated to cost more than £10 billion every year in England and Wales – with an additional and unquantifiable human cost in terms of victim trauma and community suffering.

Imprisonment is the correct sentence for the most serious and persistent offenders. But for those who might otherwise receive a short spell behind bars, a community sentence is usually the most effective response.

A one year prison sentence costs taxpayers around £37,000, with two-thirds of offenders going on to commit another crime within two years of release.

In contrast, a 12-month community order costs less than £2,000 and has a recidivism rate of around 50 per cent.

There are a range of reasons why modern, flexible community sentences, supervised by local probation staff, are more effective than short-term prison sentences.

When sending someone to prison, judges and magistrates have little say over what will happen to them. Due to factors such as prisoner “churn” (the movement of prisoners within the system) and early release, it can be difficult to place short-term prisoners on any programme to address their offending behaviour.

However, when placing someone on a community sentence, judges and magistrates can specify what should happen to the offender - in order to both punish and rehabilitate.

Probation staff are expert assessors of the factors which influence someone to break the law. Having assessed every offender, staff in each of the 42 local probation areas work in partnership with statutory, voluntary and private sector organisations to improve their attitudes towards:

- Housing and homelessness
- Education, training and employment
- Substance misuse
- Mental and physical health
- Children and families
- Offending behaviour programmes (as ordered by Courts)
- Finance, benefit and debt

These are known as the “Seven Pathways To Reduce Reoffending”. Many probation areas are introducing Local Delivery Units co-terminous with local authority boundaries to facilitate CDRP/LSP/LAA arrangements and provide regular postcode base information on offender risk and the quantification of offenders assessed as being deficient within one or more of the pathways.



## The Benefits of Closer Strategic Partnerships

The Probation Association believes that:

- Developing closer local and national strategic and operational relationships between probation and the Local Government Association and individual local authorities will benefit both sides and is overdue
- The advent of the CDRP/LAA/LSP framework and the expected “responsible authority” status for Probation Trusts renders the benefits of these relationships and the timing to be of immediate relevance
- The most effective way to achieve Ministry of Justice performance outcomes is for Probation Trusts to have sufficient flexibility and autonomy to demonstrate the necessary local leadership and to allocate sufficient resources to local planning and partnership arrangements within the CDRP/LSP/LAA framework

The Probation Association is suggesting to the Ministry of Justice that future versions of the performance framework for probation would better reflect the balance between necessary local democratic accountability and accountability to the Secretary of State, by including local crime reduction performance criteria.

We acknowledge the helpful contribution to the national debate on “localism” made by the LGA publications *Going Straight: Reducing Re- Offending in Local Communities* in 2005 and *Neighbourhood by Neighbourhood – local action to reduce reoffending* in 2006.

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