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Celebrating 10 years of building safer communities together

Targeting those who offend most in our community

The Prolific and Priority Offenders Scheme (PPO) is a Government driven scheme which targets those offenders who cause the most damage to our community through repeat prolific offending. It aims to ensure that all agencies that could potentially be dealing with a prolific offender (for example, those dealing with drug and alcohol misuse), communicate with each other and co-ordinate their efforts effectively.

Government statistics state that out of 1 million active offenders, it is approximately 100,000 of these who commit 50% of all crime and 9% of crime can be attributed to 5,000 members of this group - so called 'super prolific' offenders. In North Devon we actively work with and target around 40 of the most active criminals in the area at any one time. Within this group to date we have achieved a 40% reduction in their offending over the last 6 months.

Prolific offender can mean different things in different parts of the country. In Devon a prolific offender is likely to be someone with a history of burglary, vehicle crime or drug and alcohol-related offences.



"Safer North Devon and other partners funded the first PPO scheme in North Devon in 2002 with £64,000 over two years," said Amanda Palmer, Safer North Devon Manager. "In 2004 a new scheme came into place targeting up to 40 offenders for our area for intensive management, including offenders on custodial or community sentences and juveniles.

"The PPO scheme has evolved since the early days in 2002 and is an important service and benefit to the local community," said Praveen Naidoo, Detective Inspector, Offender Intervention. "The scheme enables offenders prompt access to drug treatment. It provides support in accessing services they would ordinarily be entitled to as a member of the community. This might include finding suitable accommodation and helping offenders with any personal issues which might be contributing to their offending. Where offenders choose not to engage we target them and take every step to catch them, and convict them."

"The scheme is not a soft option. It is tough and takes time," continues Detective Inspector Naidoo. "Offenders usually stabilise on the scheme and then it is possible to start helping them into work and with the other requirements of their community order, which can include education and training schemes or additional drug or alcohol treatment.

“For the public, the scheme means less offending, less victims of crime locally and a reduction in local crime figures. There were almost 1,000 fewer victims across Devon and Cornwall between April and June of this year alone. Crime reduced across almost all categories, by a total of 908 reported incidents during this time. Devon and Cornwall remains one of the safest places to live in the country with the fourth lowest crime rate in England and Wales.”

The scheme is now funded through mainstreamed partner support and centrally funded services through the Devon Drug & Alcohol Action team. The scheme is a single initiative in three complementary strands.

Although these are applied at a national level, Safer North Devon, as the local Community Safety Partnership (CSP) utilises resources from partner agencies to tailor services at a local level.

The three strands of the PPO Scheme are:

Prevent & Deter – we work with young people considered to be at most risk of offending in the future. This strand is led by the Youth Offending Team (YOT).

Catch & Convict - we identify a small number of individuals deemed to be causing most harm to their communities, guided by a national framework, tailored to local requirements by the Local Criminal Justice Board. The Police, through the Chief Inspector locally, lead this strand.

Rehabilitate & Resettle - led by the Prison and Probation Services, working with a range of other agencies, this strand provides intensive support for prolific or priority offenders whilst they serve their sentences - whether they be sentenced in the community or in custody. This assistance is offered to prevent relapse into offending on release and subject to a swift return to the courts, should this occur.



“The PPO Operations Group which oversees the PPO scheme consists of multi agencies from Probation, Police, Prison, health, accommodation agencies, etc. who meet on a monthly basis to discuss the individuals on the local PPO scheme and the treatment which they have access too and their current progress or lack of progress,” said Amanda Palmer, Safer North Devon Manager. “The group’s objective is to discuss in more detail the individuals’ current situation, their needs, the treatment they have access too and any other areas which need to be considered in an aim to reduce their criminal activity.”

Once an individual is identified, schemes are expected to manage offenders through a combination of enforcement and rehabilitative measures to change behaviour. Schemes are expected to change behaviour through providing the specific support and rehabilitation needs of the offender, drawing upon relevant agencies and services to meet these.

In 2007, a National PPO scheme impact assessment¹ noted as an early indication of the success of the programme, the following:

Comparing the total number of convictions in the 17 months before and following the PPO programme shows that there has been a 43 per cent reduction in the offending of the entire PPO review group.

The PPO review group exhibited a sharp reduction in offending following entry onto the PPO programme. In the first 17 months of the scheme the PPOs had a reduction of 62 per cent in the overall level of convictions compared to the beginning of the scheme.

Notwithstanding, the results from the qualitative interviews with PPO staff and offenders support a positive assessment of the PPO programme and, while no firm conclusions can be drawn around the specific impact of the PPO scheme on levels of offending at this stage, the results are nonetheless encouraging.

PPOs were aware of the additional enforcement aspects of the scheme i.e. non compliers will be caught and convicted. The PPO programme was viewed by offenders as more stringent than their previous criminal justice experiences.

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Reference:

1. An impact assessment of the Prolific and other Priority Offender programme, Home Office Online Report 08/07.