

Probation and After-Care Service



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Constable Shenton-Stone
Vice Chair – Public Accounts Committee
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Dear Constable Shenton-Stone

PAC COVID-19 Response

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to detail the Probation Service's response to the impact of COVID-19. For ease of reference I will take each point in the order of the questions in your letter.

1. A key part of our response involved utilising the six-person senior management team (SMT). Our Health and Safety Manager and a Team Manager were appointed as Business Continuity leads and would attend regular meetings with fellow representatives from government and Non-Ministerial departments. This collegiate approach was a feature of the response to COVID and one of the positives to emerge.

Initially, the SMT met on a daily basis to ensure that our working arrangements were safe and satisfactory for stakeholders and staff alike. The Service did not hand over any responsibilities to other departments but learned to adjust to different methods of working such as using Microsoft Teams and the StarLeaf application to undertake key work in the courts, prison and with clients. We met with key stakeholders to review progress in these areas. The SMT also used performance metrics to monitor performance - performance measures are agreed by the Probation Board and published in the Service's Annual Report. This monitoring revealed that most key performance indicators were achieved throughout the pandemic including the percentage of court orders completed and the reduction in risk of reconviction.

To mitigate the impact of the pandemic we agreed, with stakeholders, different ways to organise meetings-invariably using IT. These included the introduction of daily Community Adult Safeguarding Partnership (CASP)

meetings which were able to meet need quickly. The Service also adapted its work to provide fast-tracked reports to the prison governor in relation to risk assessments in the event of health considerations requiring the early release of some prisoners.

Another initiative the Service undertook was to exchange vehicles with the IHE department who explained that our community service vans were useful for transporting members of the public to COVID vaccination clinics.

2. As an essential service, the department continued to offer face to face work throughout the pandemic. The main difference was that staff worked increasingly from home, where possible and advised by the health department, and were assisted by the Service's investment in laptops and mobile phones. The return to "back to normal" involved split teams – and then later a return to a team that was predominantly office based though with the flexibility of remote working where appropriate. Some operations had to be temporarily suspended such as community service, Parish Hall Enquiry cover and group work. All three areas were prioritised once the Island came out of lockdown and resources were reallocated to the most pressing work. These priorities were identified and addressed by the SMT.

Staff who did not have direct client facing roles were offered for secondment – a number of our part time community service staff were approached but only one taken on.

3. The department monitored the effects of COVID 19 through regular SMT meetings and close supervision of staff in both individual and group settings to ascertain the demands of the pandemic. This approach revealed impacts on the staff, clients and stakeholders. The department used performance reports prepared by its Information Manager to monitor progress against key performance indicators. It was also necessary to meet regularly with the magistrates and prison managers to review the timeliness and standards of work prepared by the department. RAG ratings were undertaken by staff to assess clients who needed to be prioritised for face to face or home visit contacts. The priorities selected by the SMT involved safeguarding and public protection criteria as well as clients whose compliance with orders was becoming unsatisfactory. Significant work was undertaken in providing extra hand sanitisation and other PPE throughout-attention was also paid to converting some offices into discrete interview rooms that allowed for social distancing and ventilation

From a community service perspective, it was vital to continue our service to beneficiaries despite clients not being able to undertake work during lockdown. In this situation staff undertook maintenance work to provide continuity of service. When the scheme resumed it was not possible to

transport all clients in vans which meant that clients had to find their own way to placements. This was not without its challenges, but the arrangement kept the scheme in operation.

The Jersey Family Court Advisory Service (JFCAS) met children in suitable outdoor settings where appropriate during lockdown to continue providing a service for families and courts where parental relationships were particularly strained and likely to impact on the wellbeing of children.

A key feature of the department's work throughout the pandemic was the use of updated business continuity plans and enhanced risk assessments that were shared with staff.

4. Not applicable.
5. The Chief Probation Officer is ultimately responsible for monitoring the performance of services established in response to the pandemic. The lessons learnt have been discussed within SMT and reports prepared for the Probation Board. Some of the lessons learned have already been incorporated into "business as usual" such as the increased use of technology for some meetings with prisoners and for other stakeholder meetings. This has tended to reduce staff time and increase attendance thereby achieving efficiencies. The department has also replaced a number of paper-based systems with more streamlined electronic procedures-including several court processes.
6. The SMT reviewed the key strategic priorities of the services outlined in its Annual Report and ensured that work was prioritised around these critical areas. Overall contact and work with clients both in the criminal and family court arenas was successful as demonstrated through attainment of KPIs and positive client feedback. Supervision of Probation Officers revealed that several clients were feeling isolated and vulnerable necessitating increased input from the Service. There was also recognition about the impact of the pandemic on children and in some families where lockdown pressures had elevated the risk of domestic abuse. Staff were alive to this.

In terms of doing things differently, there could have been more attention paid to the division of Teams A and B as some staff were in a team without their line manager who they had to contact on a virtual basis. Another frustration was the lack of online resources that we could "signpost" clients to during lockdown. In hindsight, these could have been developed more quickly although there was of course a period of adjustment for everyone. The Service also learnt that different styles of supervision were required for staff during the pandemic-some were more anxious than others and welcomed regular

support whereas other team members were more comfortable in working more independently.

7. The Service consulted with the Human Resources department to discuss possible staff reallocation. It was accepted that the department was an essential service although non client facing staff were put forward for possible redeployment.
8. A review of the C&AG reports indicates that most relevant to the Probation Service is the review concerning the healthcare response to the pandemic. The Service has already started to document risk assessments to support its guidance to staff. There has been some reflective evaluation of business continuity although it would be interesting to review this more formally and consider how other departments have managed this process. Similarly, although staff health and wellbeing were at the centre of much of the department's work, there has not been a formal "lessons learnt" exercise.

The response to the pandemic has brought about lasting changes to working practices including the introduction of enhanced flexible working (which has coincided with reduced sickness absence), increased use of IT for meetings and an appetite to consider whether meetings are necessary. Overall, there has been an increased culture of questioning the "old way" and a willingness to try new initiatives.

9. Whilst the SMT is not convinced that any service can be fully "future proofed" we have continued to adopt some of the working practices introduced during the pandemic such as increased flexible working, extra sanitisation measures, use of IT and better defined prioritisation when experiencing resource pressures. It is also noteworthy that several new staff have joined within the last 18 months so are accustomed to a service culture of having to adapt at pace and work with increased initiative. The pandemic has also made the SMT more conscious of business continuity and risk management and these areas are given more attention at strategic departmental meetings.
10. Not particularly relevant although the ordering of PPE went smoothly overall.
11. As reported earlier, the Service produces its performance results in an Annual Report but is also accountable to the Probation Board which meets on five to six occasions a year. There are also impromptu briefings provided to board members outside of formal meetings. The Board has monitored the work of the Service throughout the pandemic. Throughout the year there have been regular meetings with Finance Business Partners and Internal Audit who have

monitored the work of the department including finance and risk management. In terms of budget, the Service was able to report an underspend.

Three things that could be improved would include the timeliness of reports to the Magistrates Court, the division of the team during the pandemic and the delay in identifying a range of online resources for clients.

12. I think the department spent considerable care in communicating with clients and other external stakeholders. Every client was contacted about their responsibilities under the terms of court orders whilst also being asked how they were coping with the pressures of the pandemic. Community service beneficiaries were contacted about any delays and some were able to benefit from work performed by staff.

Strategically, the Service operated within several multi agency forums ranging from judicial groups, the Justice and Home Affairs strategic group, safeguarding and public protection forums. There were also media releases to advise about developments within the Service.

I hope the above portrays a full picture of the Service's response to the pandemic. Please contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely



Mike Cutland
Chief Probation Officer