

### Enver Solomon writes on recent developments in criminal justice.

#### Prolific and Other Priority Offender Programme

A focus on so called 'prolific and other priority' offenders has been a key part of the government's approach to criminal justice in recent years. It is based on the government's belief that a small number of offenders are responsible for a disproportionate amount of all crime. Since September 2004 prolific and other priority offender (PPO) programmes have been established across England and Wales prioritising and directing considerable resources to these offenders. The Home Office recently published an evaluation of the programmes which highlighted a number of key findings.

- **Offending and reconviction** – The evaluation found that there had been a 43 per cent reduction in the offending of the entire PPO cohort when comparing the total number of convictions in the 17 months before and following the PPO programme. It also found that there had been a reduction in the rate of their offending after starting the programme. However, the evaluation concluded that the specific impact of the PPO programme on re-offending as distinct from other interventions and factors that may also have influenced offending levels amongst PPOs, was limited. It concluded: 'it is not possible to state the extent to which the reduction in offending observed in the PPO cohort is solely attributable to the PPO intervention'.
- **Offenders views and experience** – The majority of offenders were largely positive about the programme. They considered the programme to be more demanding and stringent than their previous criminal justice experiences. The majority also valued the additional support and interventions received as part of the programme.
- **Practitioners' views** – Overall, staff were positive about the scheme and its objective to both 'catch and convict and rehabilitate and resettlement' offenders.

The evaluation is available at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/rdsolr0807.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/rdsolr0807.pdf). A critique of the government's PPO strategy is provided in *Crime, persistent offenders and the justice gap* by Richard Garside, the director of CCJS, published by the Crime and Society Foundation at CCJS. It is available at [www.crimeandsociety.org.uk/briefings/jgap.html](http://www.crimeandsociety.org.uk/briefings/jgap.html).

#### Ministry of Justice

On 9 May the new Ministry of Justice came into operation. The Ministry takes over responsibility for the National Offender Management Service and sentencing policy from the Home Office. Policing, drugs, anti-social behaviour, the prolific and other priority offender strategy and overall crime reduction policy all remain in the Home Office.

It is interesting to note that although NOMS and sentencing policy moves to the new Ministry of Justice the Home Secretary will continue to play a major role. A statement outlining the organisational changes said: 'In order to maintain the Government's clear focus on public protection and crime reduction, the Home

Secretary will continue to have a core role in decision-making in this area, reflecting his responsibilities for crime reduction.'

At the same time a new all powerful cabinet committee on Crime and Criminal Justice, chaired by the Prime Minister is being created. It will play a pivotal role in determining future policy, as was highlighted by the government: 'The new Secretary of State for Justice will work with the Home Secretary, the Attorney General and other ministers to ensure flexible and effective responses to different types of crime, from anti-social behaviour, to serious and organised criminality, including through the expansion of summary powers. Government policy in this area will, in future, be decided by a new Cabinet Committee on Crime and the Criminal Justice System, chaired by the Prime Minister.'

To mark the launch of the new Ministry of Justice, two publications were unveiled. The first, *Justice – a new approach* by the first Secretary of State for Justice, Lord Falconer, is available at [www.justice.gov.uk/docs/Justice-a-new-approach.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/Justice-a-new-approach.pdf). The report states boldly: 'The Ministry of Justice is a new institution with a new approach. We are neither the ministry of prisons, nor are we the ministry for judges or lawyers. The new Ministry of Justice starts life from a simple premise – the justice system is here to serve the public. We must give the public the system it deserves'.

A second report, *Penal policy – a background paper* sets out the government's latest approach to tackling the continuing rise in prison numbers. The report sets out a series of policy proposals including:

- The Sentencing Guidelines Council to review whether guidelines currently 'fully reflect the principles set out in the Criminal Justice Act 2003' and to review how it currently functions.
- New arrangements to allow for 'non-dangerous prisoners' to be recalled to custody for a term of no more than 28 days.
- Plans for Suspended Sentence Orders to apply only to indictable offences, including either way offences, but not to summary (less serious) offences as is currently the case.
- Plans to test 'higher intensity community orders' as an alternative to custody for offenders who might otherwise get a short prison sentence of less than 12 months.

The report is available at [www.justice.gov.uk/docs/Penal-Policy-Final.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/Penal-Policy-Final.pdf).

#### Protection of Children from Sex Offenders

In June the Home Office published the conclusions of a wide-ranging review of the protection of children from sex offenders. The review sets out a number of new initiatives including:

**Disclosure** – There will be a duty on Multi-Agency Public Protection Authorities (MAPPAs) to consider the disclosure of information on offenders in every case. The presumption will be that the authorities will disclose information if they consider that a particular offender presents a 'risk of serious harm' to children. A pilot will also be established to provide a process for members of the public to register with the police child protection concerns relating to a named individual. If that individual is a convicted child sex offender and is considered a risk to the public, there is a presumption that the information will be disclosed to the relevant member of the public.

**Treatment programmes** – The Home Office intends to develop the use of greater drug treatment in combination with psychological treatment. It is also planning to provide more treatment opportunities for non convicted individuals concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviour. Finally there are plans to look at the possibility of joining up prison and probation treatment programmes so that there is a continuation from custody into the community.

**Technology** – The use of satellite tagging and tracking to monitor high risk sex offenders is to be reviewed and compulsory polygraph (lie detector) tests for sex offenders are to be piloted.

**Public information and raising public awareness** – A community awareness programme is to be piloted to provide child protection advice and develop information to give parents and carers the necessary knowledge to help safeguard children. At the same time public awareness of how sex offenders are managed is to be enhanced by providing accessible, widely available information and ensuring the effective communication of the work of MAPPAs.

The full report, *Review of the protection of children from sex offenders*, is available at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/chid-sex-offender-review-130607](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/chid-sex-offender-review-130607).