Learning points derived from Serious Further Offence Full Reviews.

The Probation Service supervises approximately 200,000 offenders in the community at any one time and of these 200,000, only 0.36% was charged with having committed an SFO during 2004/05. Three quarters of these cases were found to have been managed satisfactorily during the SFO review process, and did not require a Full Review. The remaining SFOs proceeded to a full review either because they were being managed at MAPPA Level 3 or because there were identified concerns that required further analysis and management action by the supervising Area. The key purpose of the full review is to identify and address any shortcomings and tease out any learning points that could helpfully improve practice.

While the learning points arising from Full Reviews addressed a range of organisational and operational issues, four themed areas of practice have emerged in the joint PPU and HMI Probation analysis of learning points:

- quality of OASys risk of harm assessments;
- identification and weighting of domestic abuse issues;
- quality of enforcement, and;
- communication with partnership agencies.

The learning points arising from full reviews have helped Probation Areas to improve case management locally and have also begun to inform national policy. Recommendations arising from learning points have contributed to NPD’s new Domestic Abuse Strategy, NPD’s Assessment and Risk of Harm Action Plan, revised MAPPA policy, national guidance on Case Transfers, and the new Serious Organised Crime Agency joint initiative.

The Full Review should assess the impact of both offender management and operational factors on the conduct of the case. The supervising Area must identify and implement remedial learning points to address any shortcomings that are identified during the review; this can range from addressing individual staff competency levels to revising the Area’s policy or use of resources.

All Full Reviews are scrutinised by PPU and HMI Probation and recommendations arising from this are fed back to Area Board Chairs, Chief Officers and Regional Managers. The implementation of Full Review learning points, and HMI Probation and PPU’s recommendations are discussed by Regional Managers with Area representatives at bi-annual SFO Seminars. Areas are required to update PPU and HMI Probation on actions they have taken to implement any identified learning points.

Risk of Harm Assessments

1. The most common learning points relate to incomplete OASys risk of harm assessments. Recommendations resulting from Full Reviews which have been implemented by Areas include:
• Further, improved training for Offender Managers who undertake OASys assessments;
• Improved communication within the Area, and the implementation of systems to trigger timely reviews;
• Better clarification of the role of Middle Managers in assessing risk of harm, and;
• Better risk of harm procedures for cases which are transferred between Probation Areas.

2. Areas are beginning to use the SFO review process as a benchmark for quality assuring local risk assessment procedures.

**Domestic Abuse**

3. A number of SFO Full Reviews identified failures by Areas to recognise the significance of domestic abuse in offending behaviour. Recommendations to Areas have been:

• Better sharing of information between the Probation Service and the Police;
• Improved domestic abuse awareness training, and;
• Implementation of evidence-based domestic abuse risk assessment tools such as the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA).

**Enforcement**

4. Inadequate enforcement has been recognised in a significant number of Full Reviews. Recommendations to Areas has included:

• Suggestions to enable Areas to improve case administration systems to trigger proper recording of attendance, absence and breach actions;
• Better prioritisation of workload/resources where failure to appropriately enforce orders are due organisational factors such as staff sickness or vacancies.

**Sharing of Information**

5. In a number of SFO cases, gaps were identified in the sharing of important information between the Probation Service and partnership agencies, and vice versa. Recommendations include:

• Encouraging clear inter-agency protocols, and;
• Supporting the reflection and ability to learn from SFOs concerning offenders being managed at MAPPA level 3. These cases are discussed at MAPPA Strategic Management Boards.

November 2005, Public Protection Unit.