

The Management of Sex Offenders – Follow-up Inspection

November 2007

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Northern Ireland
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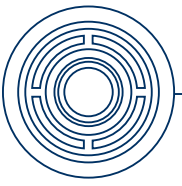
The Management of Sex Offenders – Follow-up Inspection

November 2007

Presented to the Houses of Parliament by the Secretary
of State for Northern Ireland under Section 49(2) of the
Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002.

**Criminal Justice Inspection
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List of abbreviations

ACC	Assistant Chief Constable
ASORMC	Area Sex Offender Risk Management Committee
CARE	Child Abuse and Rape Enquiry Unit (in police)
CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection
CSOGP	Community Sex Offender Groupwork Programme
DCU	District Command Unit
DRM	Designated Risk Manager
NISOSMC	Northern Ireland Sex Offender Strategic Management Committee
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NIPS	Northern Ireland Prison Service
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing
MASRAM	Multi-Agency Sex Offender Risk Assessment and Management
PBNI	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
PDP	Potentially Dangerous Person
PPT	Public Protection Team
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
SCR	Serious Case Review
SIO	Senior Investigating Officer
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
ViSOR	Violent Offender and Sex Offender Register



Chief Inspector's Foreword

CJI has reported twice on the risk management of sex offenders: first on the multi-agency sex offender risk assessment and management (MASRAM) process in March 2005; and then with specific reference to the murder of Mrs Attracta Harron in December 2006.

We agreed to undertake further inspection work during spring 2007 to assess progress in relation to specific aspects of sex offender risk management that were outstanding at the time of the previous inspections, particularly

- Progress on the December 2006 recommendations;
- Implementation of the new MASRAM Manual and Practice Guidelines which were introduced in October 2006; and
- Progress on other themes identified in previous inspection reports.

In addition, the agencies have undertaken their own reviews of specific cases, and a detailed audit has also been undertaken by the Northern Ireland Strategic Sex Offender Management Committee (NISOSMC). It is not our purpose to duplicate work previously undertaken, so in this instance we confine our six recommendations to developmental and housekeeping points.

Our overall conclusion is that there has been tangible progress in managing the risks posed by sex offenders since the first MASRAM inspection was undertaken in 2005, and that there have been further improvements since the new manual and practice guidelines were introduced in October 2006. The analysis that follows should be read in that context.

The MASRAM process applies to all adult sex offenders who are required to notify under the terms of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, and to certain other offenders about whom there are concerns. MASRAM represents coordination of the responsibilities of criminal justice agencies and other relevant bodies to manage the risk posed by these offenders. This will always be an area of public interest and there are a range of significant initiatives in hand that will require time to become properly established.

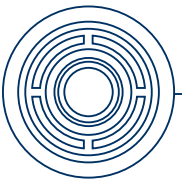
We therefore propose to next review progress in this area in 2010, unless asked by Ministers to undertake other work before then.



Kit Chivers
Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice
in Northern Ireland

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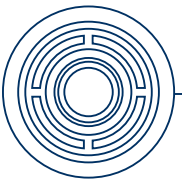






Recommendations

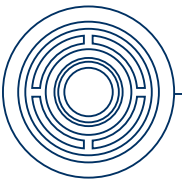
- CJI should be consulted on the draft guidance that will accompany new legislation to ensure that appropriate levels of external scrutiny are built into the process before it is finalised. (Chapter 1)
- The PSNI should set targets in local Policing Plans for their work in managing the risks posed by sex offenders for whom they are the Designated Risk Manager. (Chapter 1)
- PSNI dip sampling of case files should be extended to lower level managers, and NIPS managers should also begin to apply the practice of dip sampling. (Chapter 3)
- We reiterate the need for ongoing contact between practitioners, and the previous CJI recommendation for planned handover of cases between DRMs within and between agencies. (Chapter 3)
- The PSNI and NIPS should begin to promote the concept of a case management approach, informed by PBNi practice, pending establishment of a co-located team. (Chapter 3)
- The NISOSMC should offer training for sentencers and prosecutors in the usage of specialist sex offender legislation. (Chapter 3)



Section



Inspection Report



CHAPTER 1:

Progress against December 2006 Recommendations



CJI made seven recommendations in its December 2006 report. These are outlined in this chapter with commentary on progress to date.

Recommendation 1

Government should bring forward legislation that would have the effect of ending automatic 50% remission for dangerous offenders, create more scope for indeterminate sentences and generally place Northern Ireland on a similar footing to England and Wales.

and

Recommendation 2

Article 26 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 should be reviewed in order that breaches can be dealt with more expeditiously and outcomes more appropriately mark the seriousness of failure to comply with PBNi supervision.

Both these recommendations were dealt with in December 2006 when the Criminal Justice Minister made a written statement to Parliament announcing his plans for revising the sentencing framework for Northern Ireland. The Minister declared that:

- Automatic 50% remission is to end;
- The Government will introduce extended and indeterminate public protection sentences. Under these new arrangements dangerous sexual and violent offenders could be detained in custody for the full term of their prison sentence, and there will be greater scope for indeterminate sentences;
- The new sentencing measures will require the establishment of additional support mechanisms. These include the creation of a new independent release body, similar to the Parole Board in England & Wales, and an executive recall unit;
- Released offenders would become subject to extended community supervision under licence conditions which, if breached, could result in their immediate recall to custody;
- Other supporting proposals indicated in the Minister's statement included establishment of a co-located public protection team, implementation of existing provisions for Drug Testing & Treatment Orders and provision for electronic monitoring.



Some of the provisions will require legislation and when implemented they will go a long way to strengthening public protection arrangements in Northern Ireland. The agencies will be preparing detailed guidance to accompany the legislation and they will also have to develop working arrangements to manage the new categories of offender who will enter the MASRAM process, such as a risk assessment model for violent offenders.

Each of the core agencies involved in MASRAM anticipates workload increases to accompany these changes, and are in the process of negotiating resources with Government to help them deliver appropriately. Recent experience in England and Wales suggests that Northern Ireland needs to plan carefully in order to deliver extended and indeterminate public protection sentences. Since the scope for indeterminate sentences was increased in England and Wales, the total number of prisoners with these sentences has risen from 5,475 to 9,500. Many of the prisoners have not been able to access the programmes they need to persuade the Parole Board they no longer represent a danger, leading in turn to human rights challenges in the High Court.

Recommendation 3

Future Serious Case Reviews should follow the more detailed and wide-ranging format that was utilised by the Probation Inspectorate for England and Wales in their enquiries into the murders of John Monckton and Naomi Bryant.

and


Recommendation 4

In the most serious cases giving rise to particular public concern, CJI should be asked to undertake future SCRs.

Current MASRAM arrangements stipulate that a Serious Case Review (SCR) should be commissioned when an offender who is in the MASRAM process is charged with a serious offence, or where a significant failure occurs in the management of any Category Three offender. SCRs consist of individual agency reviews which are completed internally. These reviews are then considered by an inter-agency panel that produces an overarching report. The purpose of SCRs is to identify issues and develop a plan to address those issues.

Three SCRs have been completed – in January 2006, April 2006 and April 2007. They dealt with cases from a similar period in MASRAMs history. The various reports identified progress achieved and highlighted similar problems to those identified elsewhere in inspection reports, and made a range of recommendations about matters such as communication between agencies, attendance at ASORMC meetings, improvements required in MASRAM recordkeeping and training, and clarity about who should fulfil the role of DRM. These matters are all being addressed within the new Manual and Practice Guidelines.

Draft guidance to accompany new legislation will specify the levels and types of investigation, including external inspection that are to be applied when MASRAM offenders commit serious further offences. This is a sensible approach, and **we recommend that CJI should be**



consulted on the draft guidance that will accompany new legislation to ensure that appropriate levels of external scrutiny are built into the process before it is finalised.

Recommendation 5

The NISOSMC should initiate work on an accommodation strategy as a priority, considering all options for providing this important service.

An accommodation strategy is being prepared by a sub-group of the NISOSMC. It will ultimately be incorporated within the guidance that will accompany new legislation. As part of its preparation the NISOSMC organised a two-day seminar in May 2007 for a wide range of interested parties.

Recommendation 6

The PSNI should provide wider internal access to the Violent Offender and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) information system.

PSNI confirm that ViSOR access has improved, and those who have had ViSOR training have found it very useful. Inspectors heard of good practice in some District Command Units (DCUs) such as Foyle, where most new officers now receive ViSOR training, visit the local Probation Office and have an accompanied home visit to a registered sex offender.

Inspectors again heard of some officers having difficulty in accessing ViSOR and feeling disempowered in challenging sex offenders appropriately. Senior police officials pointed out that their other IT

system, the Integrated Criminal Intelligence System (ICIS) should still provide the requisite information, and that ViSOR access has to be confined to a “need to know” basis.

Police also recognise the risk that co-existence of two IT systems may cause difficulties, so they have commissioned an external review of how the ViSOR and ICIS systems interact with each other. The findings of this review will inform future practice, including access to ViSOR.

In the medium to long term there would be major benefits in the PSNI, the NIPS and the PBNI having access to each others information systems. This should include ViSOR information through participation in a co-located team.

Recommendation 7

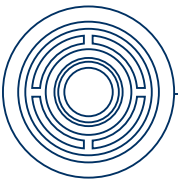
MASRAM work should feature in the Northern Ireland Policing Plan.

The 2007-2010 Northern Ireland Policing Plan sets two specific targets in relation to

- investigation of sex offences; and
- PSNIs contribution to MASRAM by regularly reviewing high risk cases.

This is positive progress in relation to the recommendation.

The Plan states that “*The effective management of sex offenders and improved investigation of violent crimes, including sex offences, are priority areas...*” (Page 6). It spells out in greater detail the PSNI’s future plans for contributing to sex offender management, particularly by suggesting the formation of public protection teams in each DCU.



The amalgamation of 29 DCUs into eight DCUs, which took place in April 2007, should assist the PSNI in this area of work. The population of registered sex offenders is increasing steadily, and most (52%) of them are managed solely by PSNI. There are now high public expectations in relation to how sex offenders are risk assessed and managed, and if PSNI is putting significant resources into the work, then the local policing plan should reflect this. The next stage is for risk management of sex offenders to be included in local DCUs Policing Plans. ***We therefore recommend that the PSNI should set targets in local Policing Plans for their work in managing the risks posed by sex offenders for whom they are the Designated Risk Manager.***

CHAPTER 2:

Progress in implementing the new MASRAM Manual and Practice Guidelines



The new MASRAM Manual and Practice Guidelines were designed to:

- Ensure robust risk management through rigorous assessment and defensible decision-making;
- Ensure uniformity of practice throughout Northern Ireland;
- Provide practitioners with best practice guidance; and
- Provide a working document that could be continuously updated.

In order to assess progress in implementation of the guidelines, CJI Inspectors conducted several interviews, viewed PSNI MASRAM files and observed five ASORMC meetings in May 2007. We heard some very difficult cases under discussion, and noted major investment of resources by all the agencies. Inspectors also took account of the findings of the NISOSMC internal audit which was undertaken between October 2006 – January 2007.

Key positive findings included:

- ASORMC meetings were not as repetitive or as long as previous meetings;
- The correct people were attending more frequently;
- Chairs were more authoritative in holding designated risk managers (DRMs) accountable for their performance;

- Documentation had improved;
- Reductions in risk levels were working well;
- Minutes were better;
- Participation by Category Three offenders was considered beneficial; and
- Inclusion of potentially dangerous persons (PDPs) was also found useful, especially by Social Services.

There were also concerns:

- It was considered unrealistic to submit reports 14 days in advance as they would be out of date by the time of the ASORMC;
- Some ASORMCs still had too many cases;
- There were delays in circulating minutes and action points;
- There was detailed debate about issues that were often hypothetical or could not be resolved by those present, and about the wording of minutes, which meant that some meetings did not adhere to time; and
- Case handovers needed to be formalised.

More detailed commentary is provided below in relation to themes that were highlighted in previous inspections and were expected to improve under the new guidelines.



Backup arrangements are required to ensure attendance by core agencies at ASORMC meetings

PSNI representation at ASORMC meetings has improved since specific personnel have been identified for MASRAM roles. There is more consistent attendance, and the PSNI representatives are generally better informed about cases under discussion. Inspectors observed some very good work by PSNI DRMs who were conversant with the main issues in their cases, and produced helpful written reports for the ASORMC. Others clearly struggled with the role and are having to learn quickly.

There were difficulties with Social Services representation in some of the ASORMC meetings that Inspectors observed. Although a Social Services representative was always present, they were sometimes not conversant with all the cases being discussed. Inspectors recognise that it is impossible for Social Services representatives to speak on behalf of every trust, or to agree action steps on behalf of others for whom they hold no accountability: whereas most MASRAM offenders who are known to social workers are in touch with mental health and learning disability teams, it has traditionally been childcare social workers who attend most ASORMCs, which is often inappropriate as they do not know the offenders.


The Review of Public Administration (RPA) changes have led to current uncertainty about who should represent Social Services at ASORMC meetings. However once new arrangements are clarified, then it should be easier for MASRAM to engage with five trusts than with 11. This opportunity should also be used to clarify

the level of authority required from Social Services representatives, and the specialism from which their representatives should attend. As is the case for all MASRAM participants, it is quite appropriate for social services deputies to attend meetings as long as they are appropriately briefed.

The NIPS has taken a positive step in setting up an internal multidisciplinary review process, chaired by the chief psychologist, to monitor progress of Category Three offenders in custody. It has also been recently agreed that the NIPS will fulfil the DRM role for remand prisoners, and that the PBNi will fulfil the DRM role for sentenced prisoners. This is a sensible model, though Inspectors' observations suggest there has been some confusion during the early stages of this arrangement, and it will require time to become properly established.

The prison ASORMC which inspectors observed showed areas that clearly require improvement: the NIPS was represented by an acting governor who had no MASRAM training and was uncertain about the DRM role; there was a lack of clarity about the role of the prison psychologist in relation to completing risk assessments for prisoners; and a probation officer had a wasted journey because the prisoner whose case she attended to discuss had been transferred to another prison without prior notification.

The NIPS recognises that it needs to prepare staff for the DRM role and to resource its MASRAM work properly. They outlined concerns about operational issues such as timely notification of cases and accuracy of risk assessments. The NISOSMC and its subcommittees are the proper forum for dealing with such



matters. If they do not provide progress then the agencies concerned need to meet and agree a way forward.

Chairs are expected to exercise greater authority, holding others accountable no matter which agency or rank

There was evidence of the new requirements for ASORMC chairpersons – all PBNi personnel – being fulfilled in each meeting that we observed. The chairs were seen to hold all participants accountable, regardless of their agency or rank. They had clearly engaged with the spirit of the new guidelines, and sometimes had to work hard in coaching other participants who were not sufficiently up to speed with the requirements of their roles.

The overall agenda time is not to exceed five hours, with built in breaks

Nearly all the meetings that were observed and audited had evidence of a time frame being applied. Inspectors observed improved adherence to time scheduling, though there was still a lot of time spent on clarifying issues. Built-in breaks were also provided and helped maintain levels of concentration.

There are allocated time slots for each case: 60 minutes for Category Three cases and 30 minutes for Category Two cases. A maximum of 10 Category Two cases are to be discussed at any meeting

Prolonged discussion about difficult cases - often involving hypothetical situations over which the ASORMC would be unable to exercise control - sometimes led to the time limits being exceeded. However, nearly all cases adhered to their time slot

and the maximum number of cases was not exceeded in any meeting.

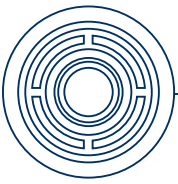
There is still significant pressure on the MASRAM system, with over 60 prisoners awaiting initial categorisation at the time of writing. So, while our overall impression was that levels of participation and effectiveness are improving, the agencies will need to apply a businesslike focus, especially as numbers increase with the addition of violent offenders in 2008.

DRM reports are to be completed and circulated prior to ASORMCs; Reports for the High Risk Committee are to be submitted seven days in advance

A total of 27 audited meetings had evidence of pre-prepared written DRM reports, though they were more likely to be circulated at the meeting than 14 days in advance as required by the guidelines. The trend was that practice has been improving as the new guidelines become more established.

However, Inspectors observed cases where the NIPS and the PSNI DRMs did not realise they should have a written report prepared, and were not conversant with aspects of the cases for which they were responsible. In these situations, the DRMs looked to the ASORMC chairs to provide guidance about case management expectations. It is to be expected that each agency will ensure that it's appointed DRMs will achieve higher levels of practice before the next inspection in 2010.

The written reports which Inspectors saw were more succinct than previous reports, and provided a better focus for ASORMC meetings.



Category Three offenders are to be invited to attend ASORMCs

Category Three sex offenders are now being invited to participate in ASORMC meetings in the community on a pilot basis for 12 months until August 2007. Depending on evaluation of this pilot, the next likely step is to extend the offer of participation to Category Three violent offenders in the community.

Inspectors were told that most invitees have refused the offer to participate in their meeting, though there has been good learning when they have participated. Agencies report that they need to control the environment, and hence the venue for meetings, when Category Three offenders are participating.

“Potentially Dangerous Persons” (PDPs) are now also included in MASRAM arrangements

Potentially Dangerous Persons (PDPs) have now been brought into MASRAM arrangements – there were 16 PDPs involved at March 31st 2007:

- 1 x High Risk;
- 4 x Medium Risk;
- 11 x Low Risk (the risk was reduced because they were in custody).

Tightly defined criteria are being applied to involvement of PDPs, and human rights challenges are being posed by some of these cases – as they are unconvicted of current charges at the point of being brought into MASRAM arrangements.

The process requires that PDPs should be referred to MASRAM by police Senior Investigating Officers (SIOs) once charged with an offence. As yet there is limited awareness of this process on the part of SIOs, and not all PDPs are being referred into MASRAM, so it is expected that their numbers will increase.

New documentation to be introduced

Of the 56 separate ASORMC meetings that were audited, 21 had used the new forms. There was a trend towards increased usage as the sample period progressed.

The documentation viewed by Inspectors reflected an improvement on past practice – the new forms demonstrated the sequence of case management, allocation of responsibilities and feedback on previous decisions more clearly. However, the documents are still voluminous and difficult to follow.

There is scope to further improve the MASRAM documentation; and there is also a good case for increasing the use of electronic communication, which is already partially in place e.g. High Risk Committee papers are circulated on compact disc.

Minute taking is to be streamlined

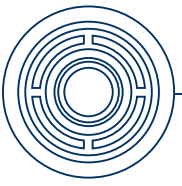
The minutes viewed by Inspectors were an improvement on previous practice as they reflected more clearly the case management process and outcomes. However the logistics of taking minutes and circulating them remain complicated and slow due to limited administrative support for the police MASRAM Unit who fulfil this responsibility.



The roles of Social Services, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) are clearly spelled out

The NIHE has now agreed a protocol for its engagement with ASORMCs that helpfully clarifies roles and responsibilities.

The NISOSMC has expanded to incorporate another VCS representative – a Womens’ Aid representative who also chairs a new victims sub-group; and a forensic sub-group has also been established. There is still no representation of VCS groups that deal with offenders.



CHAPTER 3:

Progress in addressing other themes identified in previous inspection reports



There are some other themes that have been raised in previous inspections, and which are not directly addressed by the Practice Guidelines but still merit comment in this follow-up.

PSNI failings in communication and commitment; specialist staff in each DCU

This issue has been addressed by PSNI Circular 37/05 which sets out detailed requirements for police officers who fulfil MASRAM roles. Each DCU now has identified officers responsible for sex offender management, which has led to improvements. However, as noted in Chapter 2 there are still areas of concern where some PSNI DRMs are not fully conversant with the specialist role of a DRM.

Even with specialist MASRAM officers, Inspectors again heard of police lacking confidence when undertaking home visits because they were unsure of their powers. Changes which are currently being considered to the 2003 Sex Offenders Act may strengthen police powers. However, this specialist work can only be properly undertaken by motivated and well-trained officers.

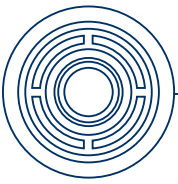
If PSNI is able to deliver on its aspiration to establish Public Protection Teams in each DCU this will represent a significant advance, not least by retaining a local input into risk management of sex offenders.

Care must be taken however to ensure the role of these teams is not diluted by requiring them to address a wide range of additional responsibilities. It will also be important for the PSNI to retain the specialist knowledge and experience that have already been developed, particularly by officers who work in the central MASRAM Unit. In the initial MASRAM inspection report of 2005, CJI recommended that

“PSNI should re-examine its internal structuring of MASRAM operations, and place them within a single branch – ideally Criminal Justice Department. (Para 3.10).”

We recognise the extent of change currently ongoing within PSNI, but reiterate the need for this recommendation to be implemented in the interests of best risk management of sex offenders.

Inspectors saw evidence of the relevant Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) routinely dip sampling Category Three cases to ensure adherence to Circular 37/05 requirements. This is good practice, which is also a standard feature of the PBNIs offender management, but is not routinely applied in the NIPS. Given the increasing prominence of sex offender management in all agencies, **we recommend that the PSNI dip sampling of case files should be extended to lower level managers, and also that NIPS managers should begin to apply the practice of dip sampling.**



PSNI training continues to improve – MASRAM training is now being delivered to all new recruits at the police college, and training has also been given to CARE Unit staff and detectives.

CJI had previously highlighted the fact that all DRMs need to be in regular communication between meetings in order to handle their cases effectively. However Inspectors again observed that for some DRMs the MASRAM process is confined to attending meetings. This was confirmed by feedback by DRMs and managers from all agencies. **We therefore reiterate the need for ongoing contact between practitioners, and the previous CJI recommendation for planned handover of cases between DRMs within and between agencies.**

Application of a case management approach

Case management remains an important, but still misunderstood, issue. This is largely because it is not a routine policing or prison role, and possibly also because the majority of police and prison managers have never themselves had to manage sex offenders.

Case management means the DRM should maintain an active written file which reports in a coherent sequence how the offender is managed, with reviews and updates, and with actions and consequences spelled out.

Since police are now the DRMs for 52% of Northern Ireland's registered sex offenders (PBNI = 40%; NIPS = 7%), it is imperative that they manage in a proper and accountable manner. Case management is central to the role of PBNI and Social Services staff, and the other core agencies

could learn from their experience.

Good case management also requires managerial oversight to ensure accountability and provide support. The PSNI has already begun to provide oversight and dip sampling of Category Three cases, but some officers expressed concern that, as caseloads increase, Category Two cases may be inappropriately deprioritised, and that Category One cases may be even further reduced in significance. It is positive that PSNI have now introduced risk management plans for Category One offenders in a bid to standardise practice and provide guidance. Extension of dip-sampling to include lower level offenders would provide another way to enhance case management.

Accreditation of staff who fulfil case management roles is another component of good practice. In the longer term, the NISOSMC might wish to consider whether DRMs should become accredited, and uniformed services may also wish to consider civilianising the DRM role. If this is done it will obviously be imperative that civilian DRMs have the full authority of their agency in undertaking the role.

CJI's review of files indicates continued improvement in police file management, though there is still scope for further progress. As was the case when we last inspected, the PSNI in South Belfast leads the way. Their case management systems are impressive, both in terms of recording work with individual offenders and the managerial oversight that is exercised of their sex offender cases at all levels. **We therefore recommend that PSNI and NIPS should begin to promote the concept of a case management approach, informed by PBNI practice, pending establishment of a co-located team.**



Availability of programmes in custody, including for deniers

Many imprisoned sex offenders do not undertake programmes while in custody, either because they do not wish to, or because they are not eligible for a range of reasons including insufficient time to serve, illiteracy, denying their offences or deemed to be too low a risk level. This issue, which is not unique to Northern Ireland, is outlined in greater detail in other CJI reports e.g. the MASRAM report of March 2005, and the Northern Ireland Resettlement Strategy report of June 2007.

Ultimately, no sex offenders whom courts require to complete a programme are missing out, as PBNI has not failed to offer anyone a Community Sex Offender Groupwork programme (CSOGP) in the community. However, it would be beneficial if more were able to undertake programmes while in prison, not least because it would reduce pressure on programmes in the community where the logistics of programme delivery are very demanding.

The PBNI and the NIPS have now developed a programme for sex offenders who are held in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre. However, the challenge to devise a programme for sex offenders who are in denial is a more significant matter which remains outstanding.

Usage of specialist legislation

As confidence has grown among practitioners, especially PSNI officers, the numbers of Sexual Offences Prevention Orders (SOPOs) has increased. Latest figures show that in April 2007 there were some 30 offenders in Northern Ireland subject to SOPOs and nine subject

to Risk of Sexual Harm Orders (ROSHOs).

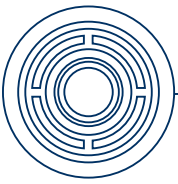
The PSNI have begun to routinely consider applying for SOPOs at point of conviction, because at this stage the evidence to support a successful application is more readily available. This is a proactive approach which is to be commended. However police report that sentencers and prosecutors are not familiar with the legislative basis or evidential requirements or provisions of SOPOs and ROSHOs. ***We therefore recommend that the NISOSMC offer training for sentencers and prosecutors in the usage of specialist sex offender legislation.***

New developments

There are a number of developments currently underway which will assist the risk management of sex offenders, though it is as yet too early to evaluate progress. As new initiatives emerge, it will be important for the NISOSMC to keep relevant partners abreast of developments e.g. the Life Sentence Review Commissioners (LSRC) in relation to new lifer standards.

The NISOSMC core agencies – the PSNI, PBNI and the NIPS – have undertaken to pilot the Harris Dynamic Risk Assessment for sex offenders in the community for one year from June 2007. A similar pilot is underway in Scotland and both pilots will be jointly evaluated.

While over 60 people have been trained, the PSNI and NIPS anticipate difficulty in fulfilling their responsibility in this pilot exercise because of staff changes. Yet the NISOSMC is rightly resolute that the individual agencies must fulfil their commitments, which are not an interagency responsibility.




The National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers (NOTA) NI branch has produced a number of helpful briefing papers for members of the public on various topics:

- How do the statutory agencies protect the public from sex offenders in Northern Ireland?
- What kind of treatment programmes are there for sex offenders in Northern Ireland?
- Does treatment of sex offenders work?
- Who commits sexual offences and what's the risk in Northern Ireland?

PSNI have piloted the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC) model for dealing with domestic violence in East Antrim during 2006-07. The evidence shows that arrests are up and recidivism is down, so there are plans to extend the practice – which is compatible with MASRAMs work with violent offenders/PDPs.

There are ongoing cross-border developments – Garda Síochána Inspectors are invited to ASORMCs although as yet there are no designated local Garda contacts with specific responsibility for sex offenders. Some Gardaí and Probation Officers from the Republic of Ireland joined in the Harris risk assessment training; and there is improving communication about specific cases, one of which recently resulted in a three-year prison sentence for breach of a SOPO, with helpful prosecution evidence supplied by An Garda Síochána.



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