

SENTENCERFOCUS

Cutting Crime – Protecting the Public – Working in Partnership

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Working to improve
the experience of
women offenders**

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“We’re working
hard to meet
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The Bridge opens its doors

Success rates exceptional

“We’re working hard to meet the challenges ahead”

Chief Executive, Mary Archer, looks at some of the issues affecting Essex Probation in the coming year

A new era is beginning for Essex Probation, as Government reviews its spending and drafts new legislation in the form of the **Rehabilitation Green Paper**. A combination of reducing resources and the strong possibility of competition for some of our work will require further creativity and initiative on our part to ensure that the county gets the service it needs.

Making savings quickly

Against overall Ministry of Justice savings of 23% over four years, our budget reduction will be 10% over the same period. We will need to deliver some of our savings quickly and others over the full four years. Savings of 5% will be made during the next financial year alone.

Our savings target is £1,000,000 in 2011-12. This looks substantial, and in the current year we will have already delivered savings and income generation. We will, however, achieve this new target. We will examine all of our costs, as well as where we might continue to generate income to reinvest in the Service.

It will take a lot of hard work to meet the target, and some difficult choices will no doubt have to be made, but we can deliver, and we do not anticipate compulsory redundancies.

Increasing levels of competition

We believe there will be an immediate need to enable Probation Trusts to deliver on important commitments to rehabilitation and public safety. The emphasis on community sentences in the Green Paper indicates where our focus needs to be.

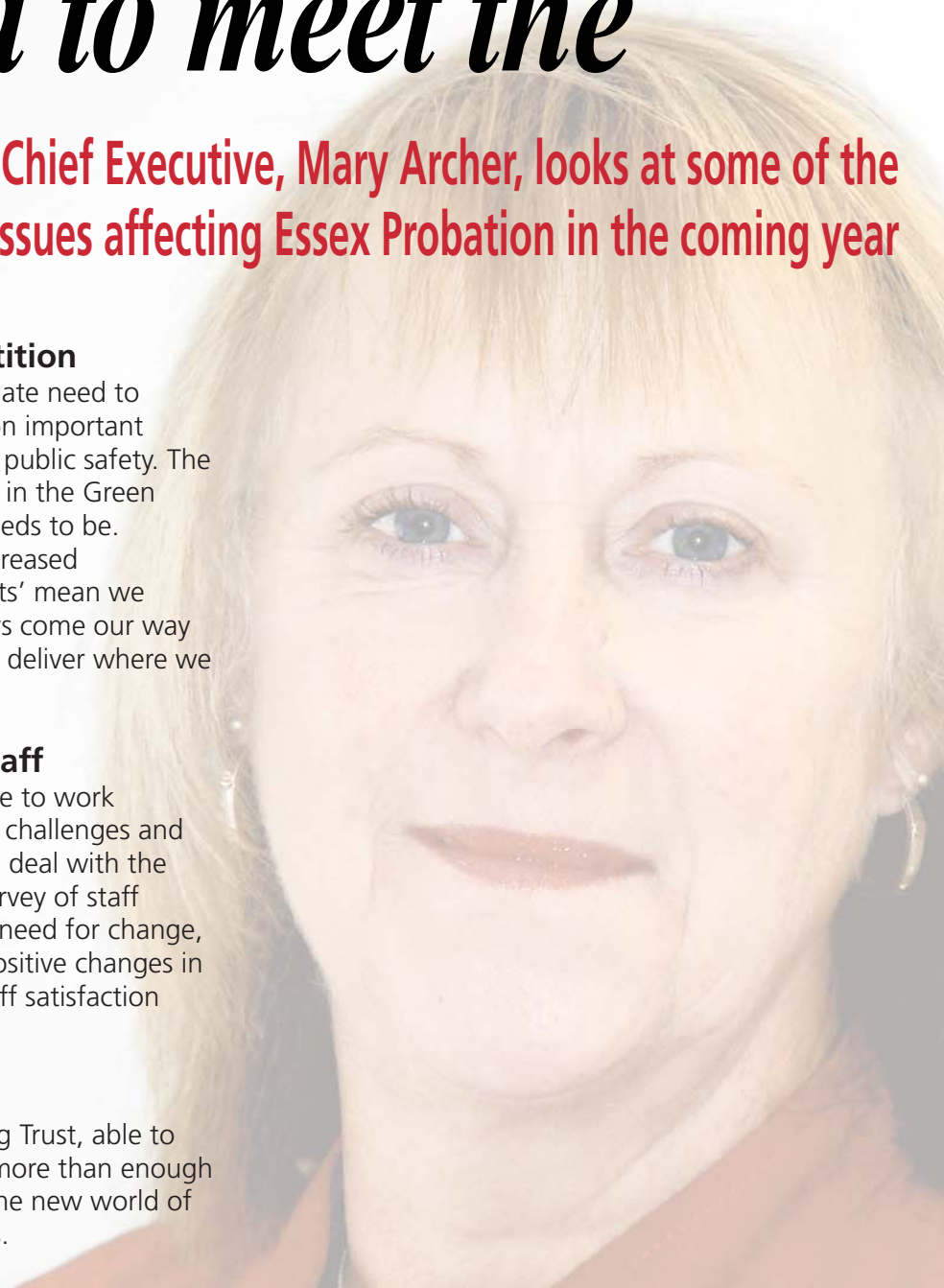
However, the new realities of increased competition and ‘payment by results’ mean we cannot assume the work will always come our way in future, but we will be looking to deliver where we are the best provider.

Engaged and committed staff

Essex Probation employees continue to work exceptionally hard to meet existing challenges and are encouraged to suggest ways to deal with the new challenges ahead. A recent survey of staff showed that 96% understood the need for change, while 63% stated they had seen positive changes in recent months. Overall levels of staff satisfaction remain high.

Determination to succeed

Essex Probation is a well performing Trust, able to move forward positively and with more than enough determination to be successful in the new world of competition and reduced resources.



Great news about The Bridge

Pioneering project continues to deliver exceptional success rates

171 people have completed The Bridge
(80% completions)

73% have not re-offended since



Essex Probation Director Pete Mangan speaking to guests at The Bridge open day

Probation Director Pete Mangan described the successful work of The Bridge to more than 30 invited guests, at the project's recent open day. The Bridge, he said, provides well resourced, innovative and intensive support to some of the most prolific offenders in Essex.

Its ability to respond quickly, within 24 hours of a referral, means they receive the help they need almost immediately, and is a major factor in managing to engage the reluctant offender.

The fact that 73% of this particular offender group have not reoffended since is also a tribute to all the agencies working alongside the three partners, Essex Probation, FTC Training and Nacro, he said.

Ahead of its time

Long before the Big Society idea, The Bridge programme was already working to change the lives of 'revolving door' offenders. Conceived by Essex Probation in 2008, and

delivered in partnership with FTC Training and Nacro, its aim is to break the re-offending habits of individuals facing short-term imprisonment.

***The Bridge is for offenders who would otherwise go to short-term custody, which we know increases their risk of reoffending. It is particularly suitable for those who are difficult to engage, with a history of poor compliance with community sentences. It can be used where an earlier community sentence has been breached.**

Intensive support

It has evolved into a successful project delivering tailored one-to-one mentoring, group-work and practical support to some of the most difficult and vulnerable offenders in the county. Joined up work by Probation, FTC and Nacro is a key strength.

More structured lives

Some said users wouldn't travel long

distances to The Bridge's Witham base, or would be simply too undisciplined to stay the course.

Many participants say the programme imposes much-needed structure in their lives, a reason to leave the area where they live, forcing them out of their comfort zone, encouraging them to behave differently – more responsibly – away from the negative influences of their usual peer group.

For those with work commitments, staff run Saturday sessions. Of the 44 current offenders, five are employed full-time and attend Saturday classes.

Exceptional results

Time spent on The Bridge really can improve lives. For one PPO, the experience was so positive he now works alongside Bridge staff as a part-time peer mentor – an inspiration and reminder to others on the programme that their lives really can change for the better.

The Bridge works with a wide range of other agencies

Open Road Family Mosaic Victim Support

Westminster Drugs Project Alcoholics Anonymous

Essex Police World Wide Volunteers New Horizons

Business Link The Keep Project OASIS NEEDAS

Swan Housing CRI (Drugs) YMCA Wingspan

The Prince's Trust 4Children Essex DAAT CDAS

Disability Essex Fire Service MIND CDAT

SOVA InTouch The Haven Project Local Authorities

Job Centre Plus Rosemead Family Intervention Project

Dropping to Amber status in 2009-10 forced us to reconsider the systems we use to monitor our performance...

The Performance and Information & Systems units joined forces to design and build the **TIM (Timeliness Improvement Monitor)** database, which tracks and records pending and completed assessments as well as commencements. TIM is cemented into our practice and it is hard to imagine

life without it. In reality, though, this amazing leap in performance was the result of the hard work and focus of everyone involved in the process, as well as a change in culture.

Our Performance Leaps!

After some increasingly good performance, by January 2010 it had flopped into the doldrums. We needed a big heave from all staff to move us back to where we belonged...

NB: The graphs you see are representative of all the other OASys measures, which saw similarly impressive leaps. For instance: for OM08 Tier 2 & 3 OASys Timeliness we are now ranked 3rd nationally, and for OM16 Risk Management Timeliness we are now ranked 2nd.

1

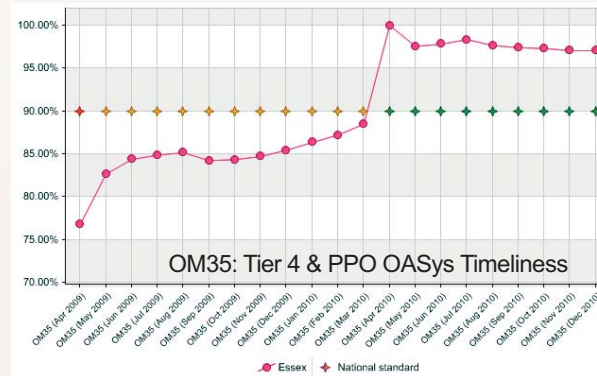
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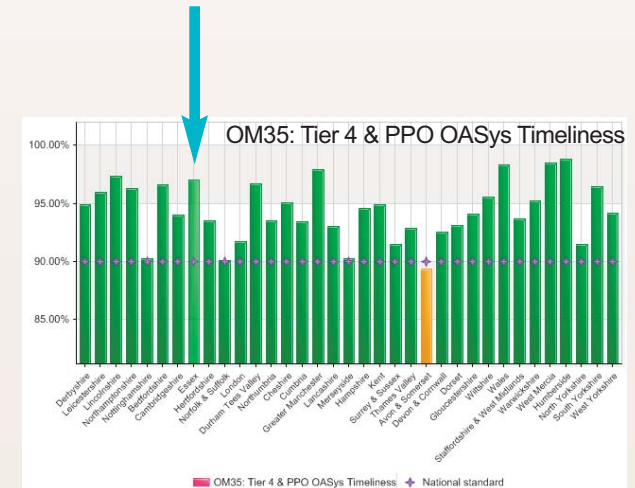
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What next?

1 April 2010: A massive jump in our performance!



2 January 2011: This graphic shows the impact of everyone's hard work. We are 6th best nationally, one place off achieving a Level 4 'Exceptional' rating on the PTRS. This gives us something to aim for in the last few months of this performance year.



3 The Future: Performance has really improved over the years, but most notably in the last 12 months. Whilst current performance is really good, it has decreased slightly each month since the start of this performance year. This is a trend that needs reversing over the next couple of months, so that we are best placed to attack the new performance year. A continued drop, however small, could impact on our overall rating at the end of this year.

You asked us...

A selection of questions from Probation-Courts events

Q. What is the re-offending rate in Essex?

A. Reoffending rates should be more simple to identify! However, getting information is much more complicated than we would like. If you look at reoffending for prolific offenders on The Bridge (see [Page 3](#)) the story is a great one so far. We have also looked at rates for people who are put on one of our programmes, and across Essex over two years, 83% of participants did not come back to us. This, as you can imagine, is very rough and ready stuff, (they could be elsewhere, or ill, or worse) but, like you, we have found it frustrating not to know more than our own anecdotal information, encouraging though that is.

Statistical data is confusing and can refer to general offending in Essex, which in many cases does not involve Probation supervision. While the statistics tell us that aggregated adult reoffending for Essex Probation is 9.7%, the methodology is complicated. Probation Statistics Quarterly Brief, now replaced by Offender Management statistics, can be found on the Ministry of Justice website. If you want to delve further, a look for Local Adult Reoffending in the same website will produce some stats.

Q. Can you say why the criteria for alcohol treatment has changed?

A. At one time, we paid local providers for alcohol treatment. The Ministry of Justice decided that as this was treatment, it should be paid for out of the Health pot. Local providers have indicated also that only those who are physically dependent on alcohol can

receive treatment. For those who are assessed as psychologically dependent, or binge drinkers, there is little or no current provision outside Probation. .

Q. Do you not feel that you are missing a large number of offenders dependent on alcohol?

A. No. Our staff work with users in Supervision, or during the ATR programme, and liaise with Alcoholics Anonymous, who can deliver one to one mentoring where appropriate. The latest government drug strategy acknowledges the importance of making more provision for alcohol problems. One of our Directors and a specialist manager are discussing these issues with the health commissioners this month. We will also be keeping a weather eye out on next steps when GP commissioning comes in.

Q. What if we are sentencing someone to a Community Order but we note that the underlying issue that kicks off their offending is alcohol, though the offender is not an alcoholic?

A. If you sentence them to a Supervision Requirement, all of their issues will be looked at, including alcohol – OASys, our assessment system, has a section devoted to it. Our staff are trained to provide Brief Intervention and have materials to help them. Offenders are encouraged to approach AA. We are also involved in a pilot for a new programme, in conjunction with HMP Chelmsford, commencing February. We will be letting you know more about this as it progresses.

Q. Recent media coverage showed offenders sitting down on the job and doing little or no unpaid work. How can we be sure that offenders in Essex do work hard and work the hours they have been sentenced to? Can we be assured that all of our offenders are properly supervised?

A. As a result of seeing the Tonight programme coverage of UW in some other parts of the country, we approached BBC Essex and did a long piece on what happens in Essex. We had some very encouraging phone-ins during the programme also. We start Unpaid Work within two weeks of sentence. The first week is taken up with further assessment.



We know where all of our groups are and spot checks are undertaken. UW supervisors also rate and record the quality of work undertaken by each offender, and this is reported back to their Offender Manager.

You asked us...

Please look for the new Annual Report on Community Payback on our website.
(www.essexprobation.org.uk)

Q. The OGRS Score: Is it based on an offender's offending history?

A. Yes. It is a statistically valid tool which predicts whether offenders with similar characteristics will reoffend. It is one factor we take into account in assessing an offender.

Q. I have rarely seen the Attendance Centre mentioned in a PSR?

A. You will be seeing it more, now that the adult Attendance Centre is available.

Q. It would be good to see the work of the Chelmsford Attendance Centre extended into the adult court. Is this possible?

A. Yes. If not proposed, please ask us if the person is suitable and we will investigate the possibility. The Centre has capacity for 50-60 comfortably, subject to staff availability, with 18-36 hours being the preferred length of order.

Offenders receive travel assistance. If they can prove they are in general hardship we will pay up to £10, but if a magistrate said that we should offer more, we could look at that.

Q. What is the gender split between tutors running the Integrated domestic Abuse

Programme?

A. One male and one female, as far as possible. Never two males, but sometimes two females if we need to.

Q. What is the success rate for IDAP?

A. We have already passed the National Completion Rate target of 63% with 68%. This is good, but it does not answer your question. It's not about 'bums on seats', and we do not allow offenders just to become 'passengers'. It is an interactive programme and offenders have to engage.

IDAP is relatively new, and we have similar problems as with other probation work in obtaining decent statistics on its success. However, our Womens Safety Workers, who maintain contact with wives and partners after the programme, let us know if things are going wrong. We do know that domestic abuse reduces, or in some cases its seriousness reduces, in programme participants.

● Good news: we hope to be piloting a new programme – an interesting one – and we think that by next week we will know whether we have been chosen. Ask us at the next sentencer-probation event.

Q. Would we know if offenders re-offended after completing the IDAP programme?

A. We place the safety of the victim and/or any new partners at the heart of what we do, both before the group starts and after completion.

Feedback is received from the Women Safety Workers, who continue to have contact with wives

and partners for six months following the programme. We will have moved them on to other groups such as Women's Aid, before we reduce our contact with them, and we would usually hear from those groups, or directly from victims, if offending started again.

Q. What is the definition of a short term sentence, and does it include breach?

A. Any sentence under 12 months, and yes it does include breach.

Q. Is there always someone available to do FDRs and Oral Reports?

A. Yes. They will, however, do a quick risk assessment to assess suitability of an oral/FDR and, may ask for an adjournment based on this. However, we will be doing ODRs/FDRs in the majority of cases and SDRs will be the exception to the rule, particularly as we aim to provide the courts with a speedier service next year. If staff are busy enough that they cannot produce a report on the day in magistrates' courts, they will ask for five days. This should be rare. Any problems you encounter in this respect, please contact your local courts link manager.

Q. What are the reasons for delaying the start of programmes for some offenders? Why can't things move more quickly?

A. Sometimes offenders need to improve their learning skills, or may have other problems that need addressing prior to programme commencement and

You asked us...

therefore things need to be sequenced. Furthermore, whilst the actual programme groups may not have started, preparation and pre-work will have already started.

The groupwork elements of some popular programmes had been subject to delays, but our performance on this has improved.

Q. What is the current performance of IDAP? Is it possible for feedback to be provided if an offender is not subsequently placed on IDAP?

A. IDAP is performing well, and there is currently no waiting list. The only reasons an offender would not be placed on the programme would be if it compromised the identity of partners or victims, or if screening reveals issues such as a learning difficulty, or if there are practical issues, like shift patterns could not be changed. In such cases, the Order can be returned to Court and a one to one programme put in place or another sentence given. We are quite likely to consider a Specified Activity programme as a replacement, in which 15 sessions of one to one work takes place, using similar material to IDAP.

There is an agreement with the courts service that a transfer from IDAP to this one-to-one programme can be a paper exercise with court officials. This happens rarely, however.

Q. Why are women not put on IDAP?

A. The programme is set up specifically for men. There is no group programme available for women as

yet, so we will deal on an individual basis with the very few women coming through the courts for domestic violence offences.

Q. Why do some reports have to be so lengthy? Why can't they be shorter and more relevant?

A. We do recognise that FDRs are gaining in popularity, although there's an interesting difference in opinion between magistrates on the quantity of content in reports.

We recognise that some reports, SDRs for example, can be lengthy. We will ask Managers to discuss this matter with OMs, with a view to avoiding superfluous information being included which is not related to a person's offending.

Q. Have we got the capacity to deal with offenders?

A. We have the capacity for offenders, although we will try to divert those who do not necessarily need direct supervision to other disposals such as fines, curfews and attendance centres.

Q. If the PSR author recommends that the offender is suitable for a programme, but the offender says they did not get on with the PSR author what happens?

A. An interview to discuss your offending, in preparation for a report, can be difficult for anybody. We expect staff to challenge offenders with robust questions. It is not our job to agree with offenders,

nor to be auxiliary defence lawyers, so some expectations might be dashed during this process. Offenders can sometimes appear compliant at the report stage, and then have second thoughts. It is up to the Offender Manager to motivate the offender. However, if there is a continuing problem over the relationship with an Offender Manager later on, there is always the opportunity to take this up with one of their managers. Such claims are unlikely to have much influence at the PSR stage, however.

Q. Would you recommend IDAP twice?

A. Yes. It will always be decided on an individual basis and following consultation with programme staff.

Q. Is it worth digging into an offender's past history, if the sentence has been spent and the offence was more than a decade ago?

A. Past offending is often relevant. Also, gaps in conviction history do not necessarily mean that no offences were committed.

We would not expect staff to deal in detail in a report with offending of a different type or a long time previously. We may also have police intelligence which should not affect sentencing, but will affect how we manage risk when they become our responsibility.

Q. Would things like the number of call-outs be taken into account when compiling a domestic violence report?

You asked us...

A. Previous call-outs are vital information, giving an indication of the history and frequency of past behaviour, and forming a very important part of the risk assessment.

Q. What is the channel for complaints from the court to Probation about, for instance, court officers or reports?

A. We advise that complaints (and indeed compliments) be put in writing, or even a phone call made, to managers in your local office. The link manager will be present at sentencers' events. Details are also on our website, at: essexprobation.org.uk. (under Contact Information, find LDU structure, and look for manager's name and 'Court Lead')

Q. Some Breach reports do not appear to give enough information.

A. However, Offender Managers have been asked to be succinct, providing just enough information to prove a case. The Statement of Facts should pertain to the case in hand. Should you go on to sentence, however, we would need to expand at that point with a Response to Supervision report.

Q. Most violent offences are alcohol-fuelled. Where does this fit with the ART Programme?

A. The Anger Control Training sequence (ACT*) breaks the anger and aggression down into a process that highlights the triggers of any given incident. Alcohol is one, but there can be others.

*Part of the programme

The scenarios used by group members are often related to realistic events, like nights out. Tutors ensure all group members walk through the process, acknowledging how alcohol affects their thinking and behaviour.

We also look at alternative behaviour in both the Anger Control Training sessions and the 'Skillstreaming' (social skills) sessions, which again examine realistic scenarios and look at how people could have acted differently. Offenders are expected to do 'homework', practising what they learn, and bringing back to the group examples of potential or actual incidents, for further examination.

Q. What is the timespan of the ART Programme

A. ART contains 18 groupwork sessions, 10 pre- and post-work sessions, two psychometric sessions (the second session of which is now incorporated into the final session), and two 3-way sessions (the first 3-way session now being included as part of the pre-work sessions). A total of 29 sessions, from start to finish. This will last just over seven months.

Q. Are there any problems or resource restrictions preventing offenders getting onto the ART Programme?

A. Whilst there were resource problems in the past, these have been addressed in the last year by getting more tutors trained to deliver the programme.

Some offenders may find themselves waiting to start the groupwork element of the ART programme –

which gives the impression of a delayed start overall – but a number of weeks is required beforehand anyway in order to complete the accredited pre-work.

However, unless there are specific concerns or issues with an individual which need to be addressed before ART commences, an offender will be instructed to attend the next available ART group, either in their base office or another office in North or South Essex.

Q. How is successful completion of ART evaluated?

A. Participants undertake a number of psychometric tests throughout the course of the programme, which are combined at the end to produce a final group score. This score provides an overall measure of success.

These tests measure qualitative changes in individual participants' attitudes, at regular intervals, and are designed to deduce whether or not they have become more 'pro-social' and less violent in their attitudes and responses to given situations.

Visit our website at:
www.essexprobation.org.uk

The **WOW!** factor

Women offenders can present unique and challenging issues for us to manage. That's why the Women Offenders Working Group has been set up to develop strategies to improve the experience of women on probation...

The 2007 Corston Report drew attention to the poor and unequal experiences of women offenders, stating: "Treating men and women the same results in inequality of outcome."

The stats speak for themselves: 37% of women in custody self-harm, compared to 7% of men; 55 women committed suicide in prison between 2002-2008; the female prison population nearly doubled between 1996 and 2006 (though locally it has fallen recently, again).

What are we doing?

Recognising that different approaches are needed to assist women offenders, WOW has been set up to address the many issues affecting them. The group includes a rep from each LDU and from every function, bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table.

A benchmarking exercise has already started, shining a spotlight on five main areas: court reports, compliance and breach work, case management, Interventions, and

sentence planning.

SPOCs will ensure the WOW agenda is promoted in each LDU and at meetings with partner organisations. Local women's services directories will also provide important information.

Multi-layered solutions

To help WOW draw up a plan of what needs to be improved, we are aiming to involve women offenders themselves, seeking out their views in a semi-structured questionnaire and

Work
in progress.
Watch this
space



within a number of focus groups involving frontline staff. We will promote women offenders' involvement using the Reception plasma screens.

Diversity Officer Helen Pearce and the I&S team at Cullen Mill have also been involved, helping to produce useful diversity data, while the training needs of staff working with women offenders is also being addressed by the Training department.

A vital end-product

WOW's work is ongoing, but is set to deliver a new strategy for working with women offenders, with the ultimate aim of providing better and more equal outcomes for women.

A recent meeting of the WOW group at Cullen Mill

From the Essex Probation casebook:

Convicted armed robber becomes successful businessman

Jack was convicted of four cash-in-transit robberies, when working as an employee of a security cash delivery company. He used his inside knowledge of operational techniques to plan and carry out the perfect crimes. He would have carried out many more had his accomplice not had a change of heart and reported Jack to the Police.

Extradited to the UK

Jack fled to New Zealand with a large sum of money and the intention of starting a new life for himself there, but he was picked up in an immigration swoop at the farm where he was working. He was held

in detention then eventually extradited back to the UK to face the robbery charges.

He was sentenced at the Crown Court to a period of custody, with the time Jack had already spent in custody in New Zealand credited to his prison time.

Probation steps in

Jack was eventually released from prison into the supervision of Essex Probation last year and, with the encouragement of his Offender Manager, re-trained as a tree surgeon and horticultural landscaper.

New business success

A year down the line and Jack has his

own company and employs two staff (one of whom is also an ex-offender). Jack puts his success down to his own determination to make his life good again and the many "kicks up the backside" from his Offender Manager when his own motivation started to slip. "I have four months left on my Prison Licence," said Jack. "I can't see myself failing now. I was lucky in that I had the makings of a plan, and an Offender Manager who was prepared to believe in me and help me see it through."



Community Payback Annual Report

now online

Our 2010 Community Payback Annual Report is now available to download from the Essex Probation website:

www.essexprobation.org.uk/publications_6.html

The report is full of facts, figures and personal testimonies which illustrate the good work being done by our Community Payback teams across Essex.

Punishment, community benefit, and rehabilitation

We are clear that Community Payback is predominantly a punishment for crimes committed and we make sure that our projects are hard work, visible to the public and make a difference to communities.

We also take a longer term view. Alongside the important punishment, skills can be taught which can help prevent offending in the future.



SNOW PROBLEM

Thurrock Council sent this picture of our Unpaid Workers doing their stuff to help them out during December's Big Freeze