

## Regional target setting

In late 2006, the North West office of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) introduced a new regional approach to target setting for service providers. NOMS is part of the new Ministry of Justice. Working with the UK's prison and probation services and other partners, it aims to bridge the gap between custody and community and to reduce re-offending by 10% by 2010.

### Regional commissioning

Commissioning is a key part of NOMS' strategy and operations and involves selecting the best possible service providers from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. NOMS also: co-ordinates the providers' services; manages their performance through Service Level Agreements (SLA) and targets; and maximises accountability and value for money. Across England and Wales, NOMS funds over 1,100 service providers. NOMS has devolved responsibility for managing offenders and reducing re-offending to nine regional offices in England and one in Wales.

NOMS North West implements NOMS policy in Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside. The region has 16 prisons and five probation areas.

### Previous approach

The previous method of target setting led to anomalies in which planned target provision exceeded potential offender referrals. As a result of using a single formula for a wide range of provision, some targets were not met and resources were wasted.

"Our new regional approach to target setting enables us to get away from the previous 'one size fits all' approach," says NOMS North West Commissioning Manager, Sue Taylor. "It allows us to begin to match the services we commission to the specific needs of offenders in the North West. After all, what is relevant for one region is not necessarily relevant in another region."

### The new approach explained

Starting in 2007/08, NOMS North West's new approach is to increase regional autonomy and flexibility in determining targets relevant to regional and local needs.

"Regional target setting is important for us and for NOMS nationally because, by decentralising decision making and allowing regional flexibility, we can much more effectively tackle re-offending and make good use of scarce resources," says Sue Taylor.

The success of the new approach depends on: collaborative working between NOMS North West and service providers; strong strategic direction from the Regional Offender Manager (ROM); pro-active and effective involvement of the National Probation Service (NPS) Regional Manager; positive engagement of chairs and chief officers in North West probation areas; and the commitment of all parties to help reduce re-offending.

John Millington, Treasurer of Greater Manchester Probation Area, says: "This new approach is very positive. Regional collaboration on the allocation of SLA targets enables areas to more accurately deploy resources according to local needs."

### Adopting the new approach

The new approach is based on a strong and positive relationship between NOMS North West and service providers, involving:

- **strategic understanding** between the ROM and the chairs of North West probation boards and chief officers on commissioning and provider roles and priorities for 2007/08
- **early information and engagement** – the Regional Offender Management Unit (ROMU) and NPS Regional Manager hosted a workshop in October 2006 to prepare service providers for the new target setting process. NOMS Performance Management Unit (PMU) representatives attended to brief probation senior managers on the new process and targets
- **confirming strategic direction between the ROM and chief officers and chairs** – in January 2007 the ROM met key leaders, including the NPS Regional Manager, to

confirm strategic direction and outline parameters for the new target setting process (details were circulated to regional probation leaders)

- **joint working with the National Treatment Agency (NTA)** – there was early engagement with NTA, ROMU and the NPS Regional Manager to develop a joint approach to target setting for drug rehabilitation requirements and build on NTA information to develop the Regional Commissioning Plan

- **Probation area co-ordination by the NPS Regional Manager** – working with senior managers across the North West, NPS Regional Manager Andrew Underdown developed a coherent proposal, endorsed by chief officers and negotiated regionally with the North West ROM unit.

“Many people have contributed to the effective implementation of our new approach,” says Sue Taylor. “The NOMS Commissioning & Contestability and NOMS PMU teams have always been on hand to give expert advice and guidance. Much credit goes to the NPS North West Regional Manager and chairs and chief officers – without their co-operation and forward-looking approach, we could never have made this happen. Finally, North West ROMU support staff have worked tirelessly to implement this new approach.”

### **Achievements to date**

NOMS North West and its partners have worked to tight timescales and overcome challenges to implement the new regional approach to target setting. In only a short time their achievements include:

- drug rehabilitation targets better tied to local need – NTA research on levels of drug misuse in the North West was used to inform the debate on target adjustment
- more domestic violence programmes, to meet demand and prioritise public protection
- a slight reduction in sex offender treatment programmes, which more accurately reflects what is achievable
- closer working with other commissioners such as the NTA
- increased involvement of service providers in determining local need and commitment to regional target setting
- laying positive foundations for future working and alignment of planning/commissioning cycles for 2008/09 and beyond
- improved local ownership of targets that are realistic and achievable given public knowledge of the North West offender profile
- targets set relatively early, enabling probation areas to plan 2007/08 delivery

Peter Murray, Assistant Chief Officer Merseyside Probation Area, who has been closely involved throughout the process, says: “Although the new approach to target setting is complex and the timescales tight, my overriding impression is of a sense of real co-operation among everyone involved – the final outcomes are positive for the North West.” “We will only see the full benefits of our new approach at the end of the 2007/08 year,” says Sue Taylor. “We expect it to be successful though, and we’re committed to making it work. We think this is the way forward and we would like to see all NOMS regions given even more flexibility in determining targets in the future.”

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### **Executive summary**

NOMS North West recently introduced a new, more focused and flexible regional approach to target setting for service providers. The previous ‘one size fits all’ approach had led to some targets not being met and sometimes inadequate use of resources.

Benefits of the new approach include: drug rehabilitation targets better tied to local need; more domestic violence programmes; closer working with other service commissioners; increased involvement of service providers; improved local ownership of targets; and the earlier setting of targets, facilitating planning.