

Seminar Two 15th December 2009 Management Issues group notes

Discretion/legitimacy/consistency

1. In response to the question of limited discretion and its impact on the offender/offender manager relationship there was considerable discussion about initiatives to improve compliance. For example, in Lincs they were trying to achieve a target of 70% appointments offered kept (current performance 68%). Initiatives included text messaging as reminders, additional verbal warnings, changing what constituted acceptable/unacceptable absences and developing a specific role of compliance mentor – some areas had one-off projects with mentors whilst others had managed to get these roles as part of the main stream budgets.
2. Discussion about whether these aided formal or substantive compliance? Many felt that text messaging etc helped achieve formal compliance substantive compliance less so. This was challenged by some who felt that texting aided those who wanted to comply but who were disorganised and chaotic to actually achieve compliance. It also showed a commitment and interest on the part of the agency that the offender kept appointment.
3. Notts reported that they had looked at the issue of acceptable/unacceptable absences particularly in relation to a local employer who frequently called in staff at short notice/changed shifts. Officers were encouraged to re-arrange and give appointments later in the week rather than record it as ‘unacceptable’. This had helped improve relationships.
4. This led onto discussion about confusing messages for offenders. Some offices/units very rigid i.e. strict on time so offenders learnt you could not be even 15 minutes late for drug treatment within a DRR but you could be ½ hr late for your probation appointment!
5. Participants did not want to have less discretion but suggested that their role as manager was frequently about ensuring consistency and fairness in terms of practice between offenders, officers and offices. Was this an appropriate use of SPO time when they had other roles e.g. working with partner agencies? In some areas senior practitioners had previously undertaken this work but with the loss of this role, SPOs found themselves torn between more strategic work and the operational quality monitoring.

Induction processes

1. Participants discussed the experience for offenders of induction processes which usually involved excessive paperwork, the expectation they signed papers that they had not read (may not be able to read) or may not have understood. Often induction appointments were with a rota'd officer rather than their offender manager. Often offenders were seeing a number of different people at the beginning so there was little emphasis on building relationships and this is not helpful to the process of change. These processes were largely mechanisms for the agency to meet its own organisational requirements i.e. targets. Processes overwhelming purpose!
2. This issue was taken up with the panel and there was discussion about the induction phase as being a key point when it might be possible to develop substantive compliance by working with the offender –particularly by developing a shared responsibility to making the order work.

Compliance within DRRs

1. Many offenders were still using drugs –DRRs are not abstinence orders but they may be burgling less and getting work etc. Discussion about whether this was formal compliance – courts were often unwilling to breach but a concern that such offenders were not necessarily engaged in the process of change.

2. Discussion about whether you can require substantive compliance? Generally the view was that this had to be earned by the supervisor from the offender. Some discussion that this could fit with the notion of a criminal career –offending may lessen in seriousness or volume before it stops.

More intense relationships

1. Transitions project in West Midlands –working with young people – providing close support both by staff, mentors and volunteers. This was achieving high levels of compliance and requiring little formal enforcement. Staff would visit and meet the young people for coffee –young people would ring when they felt under pressure -based on a welfare model of intervention.
2. Another initiative was to identify when young people were going to be making the transition between youth services into adult services during the lifetime of the order. Recognition that staff had to facilitate the transition otherwise young people quickly failed.
3. Another participant spoke of the intensity of work of the PPO –with high risk offenders. Generally the view that higher risk /lower volume caseloads allowed better quality relationships and more resources to achieve change and do good work.

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