

Child Safeguarding Review of Criminal Cases 2016

Context

Probation Officers have statutory responsibility for those offenders who receive a Probation Order, Combination Order (Probation + Community Service) and Young Offenders who are released from Prison on Licence. Their core business is to work with these clients and address their offending behaviour. Nevertheless, the Service recognises that Safeguarding is everyone's business and it is in this context that the review was completed.

Background

The Probation and Aftercare Service is aware of its responsibilities for safeguarding and the Service chooses to keep practice in this area under review.

In 2014 JFCAS (the part of the Probation Service that deals with family law) was asked to review Probation Orders as a critical friend and make some recommendations. JFCAS have been asked to repeat the process.

Audit Process

The Probation Team Leader was asked to provide a number of cases for consideration. Each Probation Officer had at least one case put forward. Cases included one of the following features:

- Parents who are on Probation for neglect/domestic abuse where children remain in the family home
- Children who are on Probation for a sexualised offence
- Children who are "looked after"
- Children who are on the child protection register or an open case to the Children's Service

12 Cases were reviewed.

All JFCAS Officers took part in the review. On 19 May 2016 the team analysed one case together, the rest were then allocated to all members of the team who were asked to complete the review by 30th June. Reviewing involved reading Social Enquiry Reports (SER's), case notes and minutes of any meetings that the Probation Officer (PO) had access to and may have attended e.g. Jersey Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (JMAPP): Risk Assessment Management and Audit System (RAMAS), Children In Need (CIN) meetings. The Officer then interviewed the officer involved before completing the review document. The findings will be discussed in turn.

Does the SER alert the reader to the safeguarding issues?

All 12 review documents were marked Yes (100%). In one case that was reviewed a Probation Order was made without the benefit of an SER. The client had been known previously and so that SER was reviewed, this outlined all safeguarding issues. This is an excellent result. Comments included: "clearly highlights children and the associated issues", "Alerts the reader to the complicated situation regarding ex-partner and children" and "SER refers to family set up, raises concerns about the clients drug use and neglect of child". It is important that the Social Enquiry Report is able to articulate safeguarding issues clearly and accurately as this is often the initial process in which clients experience contact with the Probation Service. The SER is read by the Court and the client so the Probation Officer's awareness and portrayal of safeguarding issues sets a significant foundation for future work.

Does the work plan seek to address safeguarding issues?

In 9 (75%) of the cases reviewer felt that the work plan did seek to address safeguarding issues. Extracts from SER'S were noted in support of this position and included "Very comprehensive supervision plans that covered many areas of work." "Very thorough SER and comprehensive work plan." The other 3 were all marked "not sure". In all three of these cases the comments made by the reviewers included that there was no up to date plan recorded.

Do the interventions during the Probation Order seek to promote safeguarding?

In this the reviewers were asked to consider this in terms of **Comprehensively/Satisfactorily/Some significant gaps/not at all**. In 10 (83%) of the cases the reviewer noted that this had been done 'comprehensively' and in 2 (17%) the view was that there were significant gaps in the practice.

Reviewers notes include: 'exceptional recording of observations of children' and 'there was conversation about children during PO's interaction with adults and appropriate challenges noted'. In a further case the reviewer commented that despite the attitude of the client the Probation Officer tried very hard in various different ways to engage them.

From reading the files and talking to the Probation Officers it was ascertained that Probation Officers sought to promote safeguarding not only by addressing offending behaviour but by contact with other Agencies, particularly the Children Service, by means of email, telephone contact as well as attendance at meetings.

The two cases that were noted to have significant gaps were brought to the attention of the Team Manager.

Has a home visit been conducted?

Probation Service standards stipulate that a home visit should be undertaken by the Probation Officer to the client's address unless agreed otherwise by a manager. A home visit can be an important opportunity to ascertain the living environment of children and their families from both a physical and emotional perspective.

In 8 (67%) of the cases a home visit had been conducted. One reviewer comments: "Additionally, part of the Probation Officer planning showed that she was aware that previously services were not there so she ensured that she included extra home visits to ensure that someone monitored the children in the home situation and supported the family unit. This was above and beyond her remit but ensured that the children were safeguarded."

If no is a reason recorded?

There was no reason recorded in any of the 4 cases where a home visit had not been conducted.

Does the reason for NOT doing a home visit appear acceptable to the file reader?

For safeguarding purposes when the reason for not undertaking a home visit was articulated by the Officer it appeared acceptable in three of the four cases. In the fourth case, however, the reviewer was concerned for members of the household. This matter was raised with the officer involved and the Team Leader. A home visit was subsequently undertaken.

If a home visit has been undertaken has the child(ren) been seen?

In all 8 (100%) cases where a home visit had been undertaken and children were involved they had been seen. In 3 of those 8 cases the client was 'the child' and was seen in the presence of their family. As noted above one reviewer commented that the Probation Officer had 'recorded exceptional observations of the children'. The recording of observations about the presentation and demeanour of children is a particularly pleasing result as it was a recommendation that was made in the previous JFCAS audit of Probation Orders.

A question was raised about where home visits take place. One reviewer makes reference to the fact that the officer visited the client in his own home on two occasions and that the client's child was present on both occasions and no concerns were reported. However, both the Children's Service and the Probation Officer were aware of information which suggested that the client was, in reality living with his partner and her other children and not at the address provided and visited by the Probation Officer. There were concerns regarding domestic abuse within the relationship. Whilst this may have presented some challenges for the Probation Officer involved and consent would have been needed from the female in whose home the client was living, this was not insurmountable. The Children's Service were visiting and thought could also have been given to doing a joint visit to that home.

Has there been multi-agency involvement in this case?

In 11 (92%) of cases there had been multi-agency involvement. In some of these cases it involved a significant amount of work in addition to the offender based work that the Probation Officer undertakes the client. The most notable case saw the Probation Officer attending a Professionals meeting, a JMAPP meeting, 6 care planning meetings, a Child in Need meeting as well as sending numerous emails to other Agencies. Multi agency work is often applauded as a far better approach than the "silo" mentality that resulted in incomplete information sharing that could put children at risk. This audit has highlighted the key role of Probation Officers in multi-agency for but it is nevertheless important not to underestimate the time demands that this commitment entails.

If yes, do the assessments and interventions adequately address safeguarding issues?

In 7 (64%) of the cases the reviewer found that the assessments and interventions adequately addressed safeguarding issues. In one case there was no multi-agency involvement, in the other 4 cases the reviewers felt that the multi-agency work was inadequate. However, in one case the apparent lack of adequately addressing safeguarding concerns was noted due to the stance that another agency was taking. There was evidence that the Probation Officer was attempting to address this appropriately. In another case, despite numerous emails from the Probation Officer the evidence suggested that The Children's Service was not addressing concerns adequately. Again, the Probation Officer had attempted to address this.

Reviewers made many positive comments: "High level of multi-agency working and sharing of information. High level of support and practical assistance to this client." "High level of multi-agency working and sharing of information" "The Probation Officer has clearly identified safeguarding issues, she notices when new ones come to light and acts on them"

There were two cases where it was felt that the Probation Officer was not adequately addressing safeguarding concerns and these were referred to the Team Leader.

Are there any immediate safeguarding concerns that need to be addressed?

There were only two cases (17%) where the answer to this question was deemed to be yes by the reviewer. As previously stated these were referred to the Team Leader at the time so that action could be taken rather than wait for the finalisation of this report.

Summary

As I trust has already been noted, in general the standard of safeguarding practice in the cases reviewed was high. In the majority of case Interviews with Probation Officers revealed a high commitment to safeguarding. The review of the cases demonstrated that the Probation Officers had attended training arranged by the Safeguarding Board, reflected on their practice and attempted to deliver interventions and services designed to promote the safety of children. The contribution to multi agency safeguarding meetings was significant although the impact on professional time was recognised.

It was also noted that in several cases Probation Officers went the 'extra mile' to try to ensure that other agencies actively took their responsibilities for safeguarding practices. They were aware of safeguarding issues, highlighted them to the appropriate agencies at times and took action above and beyond their remit if they felt that another agency work was lacking.

As well as providing a random audit of individual cases the purpose of the review was to see whether there were any recurring themes which may warrant discussion.

Recommendations:

Home visits

That thought is given, perhaps by way of a practice meeting, to home visits. Questions to be considered when there is a safeguarding component to the home visit could include:

- Whether home visits should be conducted at more than one address if the client has one address but spends the majority of their time at the home of someone else who has a child/ren who may or may not be the child/ren of the client? There will be issues of consent from the home owner to be considered.
- Do some cases need more than one home visit per quarter, if so, what circumstances require this?
- Should home visits be a pre-requisite to a release on a Young Offenders Licence?

Case Recording

There are already standards in place regarding case recording and assessments although it appears these are not always met. For instance there were some discussions with colleagues who indicated that they had undertaken a number of offending behaviour interventions with clients but had failed to adequately record this. Reviewers accepted that these interventions would have made an important contribution to safeguarding children so it is unfortunate that this would not always be reflected in the case recordings. Safeguarding discussions, decisions and actions taken should be recorded clearly. On one occasion a Probation Officer spoke of a decision made in discussion with the Team Manager outside a formal supervision session. The Team Manager had little recollection about the conversation and a different interpretation about advice given during a discussion. This occurred outside a formal supervision session and, whilst it is evidence that the manager makes himself available for consultation and advice when required, the lack of recording the decision led to confusion in this particular case. This is not meant to sound unduly critical and should be read within a culture of regular supervision. Nevertheless it is important that there is clarity about safeguarding decisions made by managers.

Work Plans/Assessments

In work plans and assessments there needs to be more clarity about what is meant by liaison with other agencies. Currently some work plans state, for example "liaison with Children Service". This does not detail what work the Probation Officer intends to do with the client. A more informative way of wording could be "to address anger management issues with client and ensure Children Service are updated to help inform their decisions regarding the children."

Jane Ferguson 01.09.16

Progress since the Review

- David Trott, Probation Team Leader, immediately addressed the two cases where there were concerns about safeguarding practice. This allowed for appropriate remedial action to be taken. In addition, one colleague has been able to access refresher training arranged by the Safeguarding Board
- Jane Ferguson has presented the review at a Probation Officer meeting. A further practice meeting is being arranged in November to share best practice when conducting home visits. The recommendation about home visits as a pre-requisite to release on a Young Offenders Licence has been accepted and the Service's Policy will be updated accordingly.
- All staff have been reminded about the importance of recording safeguarding discussions on the DAISY system.

Mike Cutland

14 October 2016

