Reducing Offending in Partnership
**Introduction**

Helping make communities safer is a key objective of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), the Youth Justice Agency (YJA), Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) the Department of Justice (DOJ), as well as other organisations working within the Criminal Justice sector.

While recorded crime in Northern Ireland is low in comparison to other areas of the UK, we know that fear of crime remains high and that there is particular concern in communities about priority or prolific offenders.

With this in mind the DOJ, PBNI, NIPS, PSNI and YJA have come together to form a partnership aimed at reducing crime and dealing with the most prolific offenders. This partnership is called ‘Reducing Offending in Partnership’ or ‘ROP’.
What exactly is Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP)?

Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP) is a Northern Ireland-wide approach to the management of priority, or prolific offenders.

It is based on evidence that it is prolific offenders who commit acquisitive crime such as robberies, burglaries and thefts and who impact most upon the community.

The core objective of ROP is to bring together the right agencies to ensure that the right interventions are undertaken with the right offenders at the right time. These interventions have the aim of disrupting the offender’s criminal activity thereby reducing their re-offending.

A range of Criminal Justice agencies, including PSNI, PBNI, YJA and DOJ are working together within ROP.

The ultimate aim of this partnership is to reduce crime and re-offending, and improve public confidence the Criminal Justice system.
There are three strands to ROP:

**Prevent and Deter**
To reduce crime and antisocial behaviour involving young people through early identification and effective intervention strategies.

**Catch and Control**
Pro-active approach by police and partner agencies against those individuals who persist in their offending behaviour and who are then closely monitored by police using tactics ranging from disruption visits, surveillance, intelligence gathering, stop and search, vehicle stops and prison intervention. Rigorous enforcement of bail and Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO) conditions also form part of the regime. Under the “Catch and Control” strand, Reducing Offending Units (ROUs) have been established in every Police District across Northern Ireland.

**Rehabilitate and Resettle**
Joint approach by all agencies to provide a gateway out of crime for offenders.
What is new about ROP?

ROP is about providing a more co-ordinated and joined up approach to dealing with prolific offenders. The relevant agencies work together and share information in a more inclusive and cohesive manner and deliver a set of interventions with the aim of disrupting the offender’s criminal activity. It is a local response to local problems.

How do you identify the Priority Offenders?

Police in ROUs use a matrix to identify Priority (prolific) Offenders in a particular area. This provides a basis for discussion with partner agencies, based on the risk assessments carried out on those offenders by the respective agencies, leading to confirmation of those offenders deemed to be priority.

How do you know that ROP works?

A pilot project has already been carried out in Ballymena (‘H’ District). There has been an evaluation of that pilot and it shows that ROP has been successful in reducing crime and keeping communities safer. The evaluation demonstrates that by working together to manage Priority Offenders there is a clear decision making process leading to greater ownership and a reduction in crime and reoffending. In 2012, 68% of Priority Offenders in Ballymena (/Coleraine) reduced their offending whilst engaged with ROP.
Case Study 1

Michael (not his real name) was nominated a ‘Priority Offender’ in May 2011. He was part of a small group, who were involved in stealing from retail premises.

After an initial meeting with Michael, he voluntarily agreed to work with ROP as he wasn’t subject to any statutory conditions or orders.

To date and since being released on bail in 2011 and agreeing to work with ROP Michael has not been in police custody for any criminal offence.

He was referred by the ROU to a project named ‘Springboard’, where he participated in an initiative called the ‘Wider Horizons Programme’. This programme provides an opportunity for young unemployed adults to learn new skills, build capacity through personal and professional development and provide understanding of global citizenship.

The initiative is funded by the International Fund for Ireland, Department for Employment & Learning and FAS.

After successfully completing this programme Michael was referred to ‘Source, Network Personnel’ by ROU, which delivers training and employment initiatives throughout Northern Ireland. Their core aim is to deliver a professional client-focused mentoring service to assist and support voluntary clients: - overcome their personal barriers to employment, avail of skills to employment, and find employment.

With the assistance of Source Network Personnel, Michael embarked on training programmes specialising in horticulture. Practical experience was offered on an ongoing basis. In addition, PBN sourced voluntary work placements for him.

Prior to sentencing PBN consulted with ROU prior to completing the pre-sentence report to assist the court. Michael received 240 hours community service and was fined £2,000 - payable to a local charity.

Michael is now in full time employment and continues to develop his skill base by attending college. He has demonstrated a positive attitude regarding changing his offending behaviour and lifestyle. He has shown a willingness to engage with all and any agency, to help him address his past offending and prevent him re-offending in future.
Case study 2

Mark (not his real name) is 19 and was placed on the Priority Offenders List following a serious assault and robbery which occurred in 2012. At the time of the assault, Mark was under the influence of alcohol and drugs, and he was increasingly coming before the Courts for offences linked to his misuse of drugs. He had previous convictions for burglary and theft, criminal damage and possession of ‘Class C’ drugs.

At the time of assault he was in final stages of an 18 month Probation Order. Immediately following this he was moved to weekly contact with his Probation Officer, and continued on this basis until his Order expired at the start of November. From that point forward he has engaged on a voluntary basis through the ROP programme.

A primary focus of his supervision was motivating him to look at his substance misuse (which began when he was aged 9), and in particular a growing dependency on cannabis which he has been very resistant to acknowledging. Through one to one work in probation supervision, he has reached the point whereby he has requested a referral to drugs counselling, and has expressed a desire to be free from substance misuse for the first time. He has also undertaken PBNI’s Victim Awareness Programme, and has been able to identify and empathise with the consequences of his offending.

Mark has also engaged with NIACRO’s Jobtrack Programme, and has successfully attained a Forklift Licence to date, as well as having drawn up a CV and disclosure statement to assist with applying for work. He has expressed an interest in further vocational training, and is actively looking at opportunities in this area.

As a result of cutting back on his cannabis use, family relationships have improved, and he finds his parents encouraging and supporting him on his current pathway.

Mark’s progress to date has been considerable, and there is certainly room for optimism that this will be the turning point for him in building a life free from criminality.
Case study 3

Maurice (not his real name), aged 17, had a history of substance misuse from the age of 14 and was regularly in debt to local drug dealers. He became involved in crimes against his own community (burglary; theft; etc) to fund his habit and as a result spent a considerable period of time in custody between the age of 15 – 17. This cycle of crime (release from custody; substance misuse increases; pressure to fund which leads to further crime; custody) impacted on his education placements. Family relationships also became fragmented and his peer connections became solely those involved in criminality.

Maurice’s involvement with ROP began with a pre-release meeting at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre as he approached the end of his period of custody. Staff from ROU, YJA, PBNI, Health Trust and Community Addictions attended along with Maurice and his parents and a series of interventions, to be offered upon release, were agreed. Through this joined-up approach, an intensive support package was implemented which required regular communication between all these stakeholders, often on a weekly and sometimes daily basis.

Home visits were undertaken jointly by ROU and YJA staff to monitor progress, address risks and support Maurice in re-engaging in activities within his local community (e.g. local gym, GAA, mentoring service, alternative education) as it was recognised that his substance misuse greatly reduced with a constructive daily routine. He was encouraged to engage with specialist services to address substance misuse and mental health concerns and this support included arranging appointments, transport and where necessary, accompanying Maurice to his appointments.

This enabled professionals and family members to build a picture of Maurice’s behaviour; his level of engagement with support services, and to what extent he was using substances. He was then challenged and supported to address these issues and ultimately break the cycle before further re-offending occurred.

At time of writing, Maurice has sustained a four month period without re-offending or remands in custody, he has maintained an education placement and continues to engage positively with relevant support services. Family relationships have strengthened and improved and Maurice is actively seeking employment.
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