

1.1 *Summary of findings*

The evaluation found that ***GMOP has been as successful as can be reasonably expected*** given that it is a small project working within a very complex environment. The evaluation has also been undertaken after just less than a year: although GMOP began in October 2009, the first couple of months were used to establish the project with the main partners and other project set-up activities.

The evaluation of GMOP found that ***the project is effectively holding a mirror up to the more fundamental challenges of accommodating offenders***, for example, the general shortage of suitable accommodation, a lack of capacity within the criminal justice system, differences in access routes into accommodation in local authority areas. GMOP has attempted to overcome these barriers in the individual cases it has supported but this has taken considerable time and capacity.

The challenge of accommodating offenders will get harder: competition for affordable accommodation is expected to increase from all households as income levels reduce (eg, through unemployment, reduced welfare benefits, etc) and as supply decreases (the number of new homes being built will be considerably less in the future). The government proposes for local authorities to restrict access to social housing, to make better use of the private rented sector and for there to be a greater link between accommodation and employment.

The evaluation of GMOP suggests that ***whilst capacity to meet the housing needs of offenders is stretched, there is room for improvement in how existing capacity is used***. Capacity is expected to reduce as local authorities and Probation, amongst others, see their budgets from central government reduced. However, GMOP's evaluation highlights that there are a considerable number of organisations working to meet the housing needs of offenders, from within prison, the community and public sector – GMOP has spent quite a lot of time securing its 'spot' within this system but there's a question about whether such a complicated system is an effective use of resources or productive for offenders. Recent research by User Voice¹ suggests not: offenders in this research suggested they would like a single source of information. This supports findings from Total Place pilots.

There is ***a real need and opportunity for strategic partners to come together and revise the housing 'system' so that it is more effective in contributing to reduced reoffending***. This will require commitment from a wider number of people and organisations than are currently involved in commissioning arrangements for GMOP. GMOP has highlighted that it is not enough for housing support/prevention commissioners or a service provider to attempt to address the challenges if real change is to be achieved. Total Place pilot findings suggest that senior management responsibility and leadership are critical to success and, given the scale and complexity of the challenge, it would be appropriate for a GM partnership that brings together housing and criminal justice systems to lead on improvements.

¹ User Voice: <http://www.uservice.org>

1.2 GMOP – what has worked and why?

GMOP has been particularly successful in working with offenders with more complex accommodation requirements relating to their offences or other needs, ie, offenders with MAPPA (primarily those who are in the lowest risk category – level 1²), PPOs, and offenders with a disability. GMOP has secured particular success for offenders who need to move to other local authority areas, for example because they are subject to large exclusion areas and/or they need to start afresh away from involvement in gang-related crime.

Offenders originating and returning to Manchester are the main service user of GMOP. This reflects Probation's caseload (custody and in the community). However, use of GMOP by other authority areas does not compare and this warrants further investigation. It appears that GMOP has been more successful in local authority areas where the project is well known (for example, Threshold, the provider of GMOP, is based in Oldham), and where there are good working relationships, eg, in Trafford where a protocol is in development. It may be that GMOP is not working as much in some areas because other service provision exists.

GMOP is a pilot project, due to end in September 2011. As a pilot it has been very successful in changing its approach in response to performance monitoring and feedback. For example, at an early stage the service realised it was not achieving good levels of success with short sentence prisoners, so prison drop-in sessions were introduced. Similarly, the project struggled to gain access to female prisoners in HMP Styal. GMOP sought feedback from female prisoners about the service leaflet and made changes in response to this (just one measure taken by GMOP to improve access and working relationships) and subsequent outcomes from working with female prisoners have been some of the most positive, for example, enabling women to be reunited with their children.

GMOP is a housing support project funded by Probation and ten local authorities. The local authorities contributed to the project costs through the SP programme³ and therefore the project has been subject to contract management using the SP Quality Assessment Framework. In June 2010 GMOP was subject to the first quality review of security, health and safety, and in safeguarding and protection from abuse: it scored level Bs and one A which indicate a good quality service. A second review is due in January 2011.

It is worth highlighting some of the features of the GMOP service that appear to have enabled success to inform future commissioning decisions:

- GMOP has provided a **personal and responsive service to service users**. A personalisation fund (the result of an early project underspend) has enabled GMOP to support offenders to access accommodation in a way that is appropriate to their individual needs. For example, an offender with mental health issues was able to get a taxi from prison to where they needed to be to access suitable

² Insofar as these levels of risk were recorded

³ This was a ring-fenced programme of funding aimed at preventing crisis and enabling vulnerable people to live independently. The ring fence has been removed and funding is now paid as part of the local government formula grant, ie, local authorities can choose how this funding is spent

accommodation using this fund – there was a real risk of this offender being unable to cope with the journey without the use of a taxi

- GMOP has made **information about housing** in GM widely available through a website and through the provision of information to other agencies, and it has **brought agencies together** in a way that hasn't been done before. The Greater Manchester Offender Sustainable Housing group (GMOSH) has been introduced since GMOP began, bringing partners together, albeit at a provider and agency level
- GMOP has undertaken **housing and support need assessments in custody**. The Total Place pilots also indicate that this early identification of need is critical to a smooth transition on leaving prison to suitable accommodation and support services
- GMOP has worked hard to develop **clear roles and responsibilities** with different agencies (important bearing in mind the complexity and number of agencies working with offenders), to **maintain regular contact** with other professionals to improve pathways for offenders, particularly Probation Offender Managers, and it has enabled and participated in **multi-agency case meetings** where appropriate and co-ordinated action has been agreed
- GMOP has evidently **listened to the service user** and their preferences, enabling improved access to GMOP, a better use of GMOP and other agency capacity in locating suitable housing and – hopefully – enabling a better outcome for the service user.

Finally, it is worth highlighting success in the commissioning arrangements that have supported GMOP. A regular project board meets with GMOP to identify barriers to success and to provide guidance to GMOP to overcome these. In particular, individuals from Probation, and Rochdale, Tameside and Salford Councils have demonstrated ongoing commitment to the project. However, it is noticeable that these authorities are not receiving a proportionate output for their investment of time and funding.

1.3 GMOP – what hasn't worked and why?

GMOP has struggled to get referrals for short-sentence prisoners and female prisoners. The former reflects a well-documented issue – short-sentence prisoners do not remain in prison long enough to receive appropriate advice or information and do not have an external advocate/representative working on their behalf to secure the information, advice and accommodation they need. Outcomes for short-sentence prisoners are also low in comparison to other cases, with GMOP losing contact with the individual. As mentioned earlier GMOP has, in both cases, taken action to improve referrals, but there is a question about whether the signposting provided at prison drop-in will be successful in achieving outcomes. In relation to female prisoners, relationships with HMP Styal are now reported to be good and the number of referrals has increased considerably as a result.

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GMOP has not been successful in working with referrals made less than six to eight weeks before release/Notice to Quit – the service has simply not had enough capacity to respond in these cases.

It appears that there is a low use of by Asian and Asian British: Pakistani offenders when compared to the ethnicity of Probation's caseload. This evaluation has not identified why this is the case so further work to understand this is needed.

GMOP works with offenders for a short period of time and has therefore struggled to engage with service users in order to assess the quality of its service and how it could be improved. However, at the time of concluding the evaluation two service users have expressed an interest in working with GMOP to inform improvements. The next SP QAF review will consider service user engagement.

There are a considerable number of reported and evident barriers to GMOP's success and these are documented in more detail in section 5.5. In summary they are:

- **Communication issues** with Probation, prisons and Approved Premises, and between Probation and Approved Premises. It appears that communication with prisoners not based in the GM area is also a challenge: this is recognised in other research as an issue
- **Information sharing** with Probation and Approved Premises has been problematic, with one stakeholder suggesting that GMOP has added to the bureaucracy in this area. GMOP has worked with Probation and Approved Premises to establish training and information-sharing protocols and to revise referral forms so they are simpler to fill in. However, it is reported that these forms remain incomplete in many cases and GMOP's capacity is used to fill in the gaps.

There are a number of accommodation-related challenges:

- **A lack of suitable and settled accommodation** (all types) has presented a real challenge to GMOP. Whilst the project has made some, small-scale attempts, to overcome these, eg, through the development of a service level agreement for four units of accommodation with New Charter Housing, and a protocol with Trafford MBC and Trafford Housing Trust, it remains an ongoing and time-consuming exercise for GMOP to identify then secure accommodation. An analysis of GMOP input compared to output suggests a considerable amount of wasted time and a real likelihood that accommodation outcomes are not the most suitable – they are simply the only option available
- **Access routes to accommodation are diverse** (despite the introduction of Pinpoint, a GM choice-based lettings system), with different policies and practice in existence and no specific references to offenders within policies. Housing providers often fail to respond to queries and appeals, even when these come directly from the offender. GMOP's capacity is used to chase these up
- **Access to supported housing is a challenge:** assessments for supported accommodation are often not conducted whilst offenders are in custody, or there

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are delays in supported accommodation providers undertaking assessments. The problem is felt to be one of a lack of availability in supported accommodation but this is not clearly communicated to GMOP

- There appears to be **poor and possibly illegal practice in conducting homelessness assessments**, with some homelessness services refusing to take an application until the individual has left prison. This issue has been raised by the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) research and prior to this; yet no visible action has been taken. There are however very good practices reported, for example, Stockport MBC, which others could learn from
 - There is a **lack of suitable accommodation for people with a disability and/or health problems**. Probation also reports that there are some difficulties in working with social care to secure assessments
 - **Accommodation requirements for sex offenders are not clearly communicated**, with GMOP and Probation spending time locating suitable accommodation only for the Sex Offender Management Unit (SOMU) to state this isn't appropriate
- 4 **There has been some resistance to working with GMOP**, overcome by considerable input from GMOP (350 hours at the end of October 2010). Whilst resistance was primarily at the start of the project, as staff change in partner organisations GMOP has to re-introduce the project. There are still some individuals who feel that GMOP has added to their workload rather than detracted from it.
 - 5 GMOP has highlighted that **limited capacity of other agencies** is a barrier to success. Lack of capacity in Probation to address housing issues has been hopefully overcome by a new Approved Premises Accommodation Worker but restructures in the early stages of GMOP's existence presented a short-term barrier. Lack of capacity in prisons, particularly HMP Buckley, has also presented a challenge. In HMP Buckley a staff shortage and withdrawal of housing advice has meant that GMOP does not provide a service there.
 - 6 **GMOP is a small service** and is therefore easily affected by staff sickness, turnover and other events, eg, changes in staff in other agencies. The service has taken action to manage the caseload to ensure continuity, and the waiting list to ensure priority cases are worked with. However, the size of the team means that the service hasn't been able to reach all the specified priority offender groups, to respond to referrals earlier than six to eight weeks prior to release or closer to release eg, within three to five days before re-assessment and referrals have left custody or Approved Premises without support (particularly short-sentence prisoners). An attempt was made to bring in an additional worker through the Future Jobs Fund, but they failed to attend the interview.
 - 7 **There is more that commissioners could do to support GMOP's success**, for example by raising awareness of the service locally and visibly supporting the service to other agencies, and by providing information to GMOP about issues that may impact on their ability to meet need, for example, staff changes. Commissioner

input in terms of their time and project funding is not proportionate to the number of offenders originating from their local authority area using GMOP. It was accepted that this would be the case when the project was commissioned, but as resources reduce it's possible that partners will wish to revisit this.

1.4 What questions remain from the evaluation?

There are a number of questions that remain from the evaluation and require further investigation:

- Why does the ethnicity of GMOP's service users not reflect the ethnicity of Probation's caseload, particularly Asian/Asian British offenders?
- GMOP reports that most service users have a support need relating to mental health and/or substance misuse, and the number of complex cases suggests that a higher level could be expected, but data recorded for the project does not reflect this. Is there a recording issue?
- The impact of other services operating in each local authority on the number of referrals to GMOP is not known. Are these affecting the level of GMOP referrals, or are there other factors?
- Supported accommodation is often used for higher risk offenders, clearly after attempts to find other forms of accommodation (without support) have been exhausted. It is reported that Offender Managers, amongst others, also prefer this form of accommodation as it means the offender has contact with someone on a regular basis. However, there is a question about whether this is an appropriate use of support resources
- An assumption has to be made that settled and suitable accommodation does contribute to reduced reoffending outcomes, as the data provided by GMOP does not enable this to be a statement of fact. However, is it possible for data to be linked to other agencies, eg, Probation, the police, to measure effectiveness in the longer term?

1.5 Recommendations for GMOP and commissioning arrangements in the short term

Based on the evaluation findings **it is recommended that GMOP's focus is refreshed for the remaining contract period.** It should target:

- **Short-sentence prisoners**, providing casework support in prisons: whilst GMOP has been successful in supported more complex cases, these offenders already have the support of other agencies, eg, Probation. Short-sentence prisoners have very little, if any, intervention in their pathway to suitable and settled accommodation
- **Offenders for whom a cross-authority move is needed for a positive outcome** (prioritising essential moves, then desirable moves). GMOP has clearly been

successful in this area, and there remains a need that Probation and others do not appear to be able to fill, particularly as accommodation policies and practices are different throughout the GM area. User Voice research also suggests that this type of service is needed by prisoners

- **Female prisoners.** There is evidence to suggest that women find it particularly difficult to access accommodation, having different needs from men that are often related to family. GMOP has demonstrated success in this area, albeit a bit later than intended, with reported outcomes felt to be more sustainable.

GMOP's approach to date has been a combination of signposting and casework. However, the evaluation has highlighted that outcomes from signposting interventions are not really known, and that the complexity of cases requires a more personalised and in-depth approach. It is recommended that **GMOP should focus on casework**. It is also recommended that GMOP should be **proactive in enabling reconnections with family and friends** (this may resolve some accommodation needs and achieve better outcomes), it should seek to **extend its personalised approach**, and it should use its increased involvement in prisons to identify **opportunities for earlier intervention in the criminal justice system**.

To support GMOP's success until the end of the contract it is recommended that commissioners:

- **Improve communication and information-sharing**, engaging prisons as a commissioner and bring staff from the various agencies together to review communication and information-sharing
- **Improve access to accommodation**, by:
 - Exploring the use of technology to enable accommodation and support assessments to be undertaken in prisons
 - Ensuring reviews and appeals are responded to promptly (and considering the assignment of offenders as a high priority)
 - Enabling GMOP involvement in SOMU and at MAPPA meetings
 - Reviewing the approach to homelessness assessments for offenders in custody, leading the introduction of protocols and service level agreements (rather than GMOP leading these)
 - Taking local responsibility for maintaining website sections (this will be needed when GMOP concludes).
- **Engage with Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) and Greater Manchester housing officers** to develop an approach to **accommodating** offenders successfully in the short and longer term (after GMOP's contract has ended). Commissioners should consider:
 - Identifying an AGMA/GM housing officer champion to lead on the work
 - Establishing an action plan to undertake work longer term (see 4.6)
 - Enabling a link between GMOSH and the Reducing Re-offending Group
 - Supporting GMOSH to deliver action plans

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- Identifying a local commissioning 'champion' in each local authority area to raise awareness of GMOP within local Community Safety Partnerships and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
 - Agreeing appropriate measures of success for GMOP to reflect revised targets
 - Identifying whether GMOP's data can be linked with Delius (Probation's caseload management system) and Greater Manchester Police (involve GMAC).
- **Undertake** research to understand:
 - If there are barriers for Asian offenders to access GMOP
 - How support needs, eg, mental health and substance misuse are taken into consideration in locating accommodation
 - The impact of existing and related services in each local authority area
 - Whether supported accommodation is an appropriate use of housing support and/or accommodation for higher risk offenders, and what the related barriers are to accommodating these offenders, eg, arson
 - Whether more could be done to enable family and friends to provide a suitable housing option
 - The impact of welfare, social housing and criminal justice reform on accommodating offenders.

1.6 Recommendations for the longer term

It is clear there is a need for a much improved housing 'system' that is capable of supporting reduced reoffending. GMOP cannot achieve these improvements. It is recommended that the following action is taken by the relevant AGMA commissions (and their supporting groups) to achieve improvements.

Establish an AGMA strategic accommodation plan for offenders, based on the following (not exhaustive):

- Wider AGMA ambitions to address inequalities and achieve sustainability (including economic growth), and specific plans to tackle areas of deprivation and crime hotspots
- A knowledge of accommodation and related needs of offenders eg, health and offending behaviour. There is an opportunity to link data about accommodation needs and how these are met, with data generated through the Strategic Assessment due in January 2011
- An understanding of the collective capacity to meet offender needs within the area across:
 - Criminal justice, housing and health/social care systems
 - Education, employment and training as a route to increasing income and housing choice.

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- A review of current outcomes from the collective capacity alongside the offenders housing pathway, from point of arrest
- Knowledge of the supply of accommodation in GM and factors affecting access to this, eg, welfare reform, social housing reform
- Engagement with an offender 'voice' in GM, families and communities
- Consideration to performance and payment, eg, payment by results, payment for a number of bedspaces, etc.

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