

Press Release

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FIRST BIRTHDAY FOR OFFENDER COMMUNITY PAYBACK JACKETS IN THAMES VALLEY

High-visibility orange jackets for offenders to wear on Community Payback sentences have reached their one year anniversary in Thames Valley today.

The jackets, with 'Community Payback' branding, are being worn by over 10,000 offenders a month at over 2,000 projects that are visible to the public in England and Wales.

The success of the jackets is clear. The public have had a chance to have their say on the projects offenders carry out and can now see the work done to repay communities. Findings from two surveys carried out after the introductions of the jackets show that public awareness of the sentence has increased from 49 per cent in November last year to 74 per cent in April. Justice is being seen to be done.

Chief Probation Officer Gerry Marshall said:

'In Thames Valley, offenders on Community Payback had been wearing high visibility vests for some time prior to the national launch in December 2008.

'This was in part for health and safety reasons, just as workers in many jobs are required to wear similar high visibility vests, but it also served to make more recognisable to the general public the significant work that is undertaken by offenders on Community Payback. Since December 2008 the high visibility vests have conformed to the national style with the Community Payback logo clearly displayed.

'The public in Thames Valley are more aware of the significant number of hours contributed by Community Payback to projects, which is approaching 300,00 per year in our area. We know this has raised the profile of Community Payback as members of local communities sometimes take the time to stop and thank the work groups for the visible improvements to local amenities and we have an increased number of emails sent by members of the public commenting on our work.

'Following the initial introduction of these new style vests offenders have accepted that they are part of the expectation when undertaking Community Payback.

'When, as recently happened, a supervisor witnesses an offender on Community Payback explaining to a young person what the work involved and warning them not to get involved in offending, we believe it has been a success.'

Justice Minister Claire Ward said:

"These jackets have exceeded expectations in their first year. The public wanted to see this happen and have an absolute right to know what punishments offenders are carrying out in the community.

"This is one of the ways we are opening up the criminal justice system and trying to raise confidence in community sentences which can be really effective in punishing offenders, paying back to wronged communities and cutting re-offending. Over the last year, offenders have undertaken £48 million worth of work for the community – this is a real success story."

The roll out of these jackets stemmed from the review of 'Engaging communities in fighting crime' published by Louise Casey in June last year.

A large scale vote was carried out across the country in April to give the public a greater say in how criminals in orange jackets should pay back to the community. A total of 18,000 people voted for what Community Payback they would like to see offenders in 54 areas across the country carry out first from a list of five projects per area. The three week vote through the directgov website was part of the "Justice Seen, Justice Done" campaign to raise awareness of Community Payback as a tough punishment for criminals.

In Slough the winning project was a large area of disused land at Moray Drive which had become overgrown and had fallen victim to fly-tipping. The Community Payback Team worked 333 hours to clear the rubbish and undergrowth from the area, making it safe for young people to use.

On June 18, 2009 the project was visited by representatives from Slough Borough Council, Thames Valley Probation, Thames Valley Housing, local press and residents of Moray Drive.

Questionnaires were distributed to houses in the vicinity to monitor the residents' response to the work completed. Initial indicators suggest that the public's response to the project was positive, and the campaign has helped to increase public awareness of the role of Thames Valley Probation and Community Payback.

Two further runner-up projects at Lerwick Drive (155 hours of unpaid work) and Meadfield Road (243 hours) were also completed .

Courts are now able to hand out tougher and more intense penalties for a range of offenders who are ordered to carry out work such as picking up litter, renovating community centres, clearing undergrowth and cleaning up graffiti for local communities.

Community Payback jackets are worn at projects visible to the public. Last year (2008/09) over 62,000 offenders completed Community Payback and over eight million hours of work were undertaken. This work was valued at over £48 million (if paid at the minimum wage).

Notes to Editors

1. Louise Casey's 'Engaging communities in fighting crime' review can be found at: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/crime.aspx>
2. To suggest projects across Probation areas in England and Wales go to: www.direct.gov.uk/CommunityPayback.
3. Figures that show public awareness of Community Payback has increased from 49 per cent in November last year to 74 per cent in April were the result of:

November 2008 Survey:

- Results based on a nationally representative sample of 1,996 people.

April 2009 Survey:

- Results based on 2682 interviews.

All Data has been weighted to be representative of the general population of England and Wales.

4. The rate of reoffending by offenders following a short custodial sentences is 59.9%. These short sentences can lead to problems with employment, housing and family relations and there is insufficient time to tackle the causes of the offender's behaviour. The reoffending rate following a community sentences is 36.1%. That is why we want to see greater use made of the best community sentences which for some offenders could be more effective at reducing reoffending than short custodial sentences.
5. If media require more information please contact **Clare Hooper, Communications Officer, Thames Valley Probation** on **01869 255300** or the Ministry of Justice Press Office on 020 33 34 35 36.