

**A Guide to Thames Valley Probation**  
Less re-offending, fewer victims

The National Probation Service occupies a central role in the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

The vast majority of people convicted of offences in our courts serve their sentences in the community and it is the probation service that supervises them.

**That's around 200,000 people in any year.**

In doing so, the service makes a vital contribution to the safety of our communities, the protection of the people who live in them and in bringing levels of crime down.



## What does **Thames Valley** Probation do?

**In this booklet we describe what Thames Valley Probation does and why. We hope that it gives you a flavour of the work we do and the contribution it makes to our society.**

We also hope that it conveys some of the skill, commitment and hard work that make that contribution possible.

*The probation service in Thames Valley works with offenders*

*to cut crime, protect the public, ensure public safety and the proper punishment of offenders.*

That short statement sums up what Thames Valley Probation is all about.

The key phrase is **'protect the public'**. In everything we do, that is the ultimate aim to which all our efforts are directed.

**Thames Valley Probation** is one of the 42 areas that make up the National Probation Service in England and Wales. The stated aims of the service nationally are:

- **The protection of the public**
- **The reduction of re-offending**
- **The proper punishment of offenders**
- **Ensuring offender awareness of the effects of crime on the victims of crime and the public**
- **The rehabilitation of offenders**

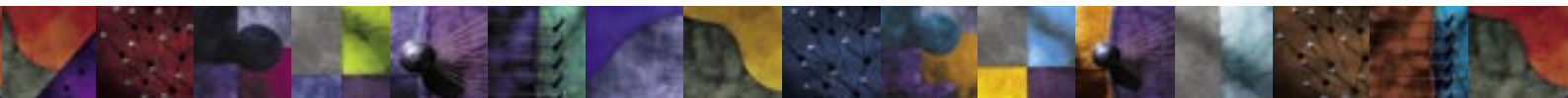
We do many things in pursuit of these aims, and the following pages describe these. Perhaps the other key phrase from the opening statement is **'works with'**. We work with a whole range of organisations and communities, sharing skills and experience. Together, we serve around 2.1 million people in an economically diverse region where manufacturing sits alongside service industries, tourism, sport and leisure.

The probation service itself has five divisions covering Oxfordshire, West Berkshire, East Berkshire, Buckinghamshire

and Milton Keynes. We have more than 700 staff based in more than 25 locations and we spend about £26 million each year to carry out our work. Among those locations are the thirteen Magistrates' and three Crown Courts. We prepare more than 8,000 reports every year to help the courts deliver their sentences.

While we're in the realm of figures, it's worth mentioning that in any year, we supervise around 8,500 offenders sentenced to complete their punishment in the community, along with more than 1,500 released from prison on licence.

So, we're part of the National Probation Service. We're answerable to the Ministry of Justice and we work with the police, the courts and the prison service to make sure that justice is delivered effectively and to the benefit of everybody. By doing that, we make a direct and positive contribution to protecting the public.







“It is important to dispel the myth that community sentences are a soft option. **They are a punishment.**”

# Reducing re-offending

**Bringing down the number of crimes committed is part and parcel of protecting the public and minimising risk. But we need to do more than prevent offenders committing further crimes to have an impact. We need those offenders to choose not to commit crimes.**

This is one of the most significant areas of the probation service's work and accounts for a great deal of our time and resources.

We run a whole range of offending behaviour programmes – courses that offenders must attend as a condition of their sentence or when they come out of prison.

These programmes deal with aspects of their behaviour or lives that lead to them committing crimes. They may deal with an offender's ability to make life decisions, knowing what is right and what is wrong and how their decisions affect other people. They may force an offender to confront, understand and control their behaviour, or they may deal with drink-driving.

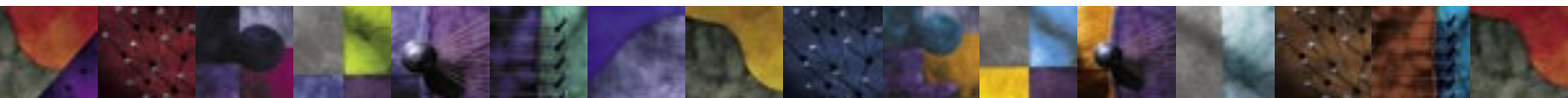
We may have to deal with drug dependency and we work with, for example, the health service or other drug

treatment specialists to deal with this. An offender might possess few employable skills, have very poor literacy and numeracy or have difficulty finding and keeping stable accommodation.

All of the programmes are tough and offenders must complete them (and the pre and post-programme they have to do with their probation officer). If they choose not to, they will be brought back before the courts to be re-sentenced. The possibility is there for them to go to prison instead.

It is important to note that all of our programmes are based on evidence that they do help reduce crime. The programmes we run need to demonstrate that they tackle particular issues and the Home Office examines them in detail to make sure that they do. Our Drink Impaired Drivers Programme, for example, has clearly shown that it is more effective than other sentences in bringing down the number of drink-driving offences.

This combination of close supervision and action to address the root causes behind offending is at the heart of the probation service's work and perhaps our biggest contribution to making sure that, long-term, crime rates fall.





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## The **right** punishment

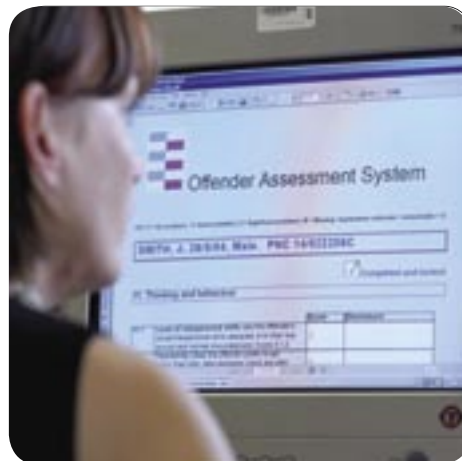
**How many times have you opened a newspaper to read that someone 'escaped prison' or was 'allowed to walk free' after receiving a community sentence?**

It is important to dispel the myth that community sentences are a soft option. They are a punishment, like all sentences handed down by our courts. They also contain constructive elements aimed at rehabilitating an offender, because that is the best way to reduce future crime. They are there for a reason and the courts use them when it is appropriate to do so.

They involve hard work for the offenders and make big demands on them. If they don't meet those demands, they go back to the courts and prison is an option instead.

The probation service's task is to match the offender to the right punishment, the sentence most likely to achieve the best results for society as a whole. Based on interviews and other information, our staff use their experience and skills to advise the courts on an appropriate sentencing option and a report is presented to the magistrate or judge. It is then for the court to deliver its sentence.

The community sentence is called the Community Order. Within that, there are 12 'Requirements'. Judges and magistrates choose a single Requirement or combination of Requirements depending on the seriousness of the offence and the potential risk of harm the offender poses.



## The 12 Requirements are:

### **Unpaid Work**

– between 40 and 300 hours, to be completed in 12 months. Each year probation staff in the Thames Valley supervise about 300,000 hours of Unpaid Work by offenders in local communities, projects include creating gardens, painting schools and removing graffiti. We call this work 'Community Payback'.

### **Specified Activities**

– this could consist of packages of work on Basic Skills, Employment, Training and Education or include activities leading to reparation, such as Restorative Justice. The aggregate number of days specified for the 'activity' can be up to 60.

### **Programmes**

– aimed at changing offending behaviour. These are Home Office accredited programmes designed to address the attitudes and patterns of behaviour that contribute to offending, such as programmes for sex offenders, domestic violence perpetrators or those who misuse drugs.

### **Prohibition from certain activities**

– the offender must refrain from participating in activities on a specified day or days or during a period set by the court.

### **Curfew**

(usually with electronic monitoring) – the offender must remain for certain periods at a specified place; the order may last for up to six months and may be for up to 12 hours a day.

**Exclusion** (usually with electronic monitoring) from certain areas – the offender may not enter a specified place for a period up to two years.

### **Residence Requirement**

– the offender must reside at a specified place.

### **Mental Health Treatment**

– the court must be satisfied that the mental condition of the offender is such that this kind of treatment is needed and that the offender is susceptible to it. This Requirement can only be given with the consent of the offender.

### **Drug Rehabilitation**

– the offender is required to have treatment to reduce or eliminate his/her dependency on or propensity to misuse drugs and provide samples for drug testing on a random basis. This Requirement can only be given with the consent of the offender.

### **Alcohol Treatment**

– the offender is required to attend treatment to reduce or eliminate dependency on alcohol. The Requirement can only be given with the consent of the offender.

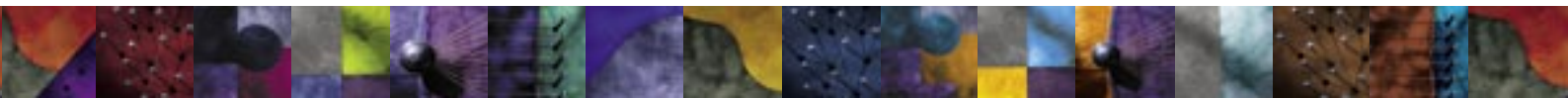
### **Supervision Requirement**

– requires the offender to attend additional appointments with the National Probation Service or another nominated responsible officer. The purpose of supervision is to support the work undertaken through other Requirements.

### **Attendance Centre Requirement**

(for under 25s) – the offender must attend at an attendance centre. (Not available in Thames Valley.)

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# The **victim's** perspective

## **The interests of victims of crime are of paramount importance to the probation service.**

The service has a victim liaison unit with the administration office based in Reading, and victim liaison officers work across the Thames Valley. Victim liaison unit staff work exclusively with victims and they are skilled and experienced in dealing with sensitive and confidential issues.

The Criminal Justice and Courts Services Act put victims' rights into legislation for the first time in the UK.

The Act provides rights for victims of sexual or violent offences where the offender has been sentenced to 12 months or more in prison. It allows for them to:

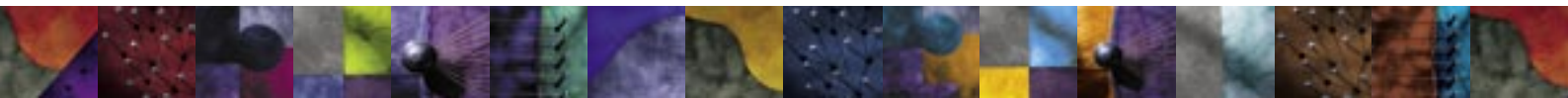
- Receive information about the custodial process.
- Express any concerns they may have about the release of an offender and which they want taken into account in considering the conditions of release.

The process typically begins with the police asking the victim, after sentence, if they want their details to be given to the victims' unit. If they agree, the victim liaison officer will write and offer a visit, at which a friend or relative can be present.

During the meeting, the victim will have the opportunity to talk about their experience or simply obtain information. The victim liaison officer then prepares a report providing information and recommendations about conditions when parole or licence is being considered, subject to the victim agreeing the contents.

If the victim wants help or advice, the victim liaison officer can refer them on or advise where best to get help.

Victims often say they appreciate receiving information and having a chance to put forward their views.





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## Rejoining the **community**

**Among the probation service's aims is to ensure the 'proper punishment of offenders'. But another is the rehabilitation of offenders – helping them to become positive members of our communities.**

By doing this, we can begin to make a lasting impact on the levels of crime we suffer and fulfil our primary aim to protect the public.

We have already seen that a whole host of factors can be behind people's crimes. These can include drugs and alcohol dependency, lack of skills, including literacy and numeracy, unstable backgrounds, an inability to deal with the life situations and decisions most of us take for granted. Their views of right and wrong may be distorted by their backgrounds and experiences.

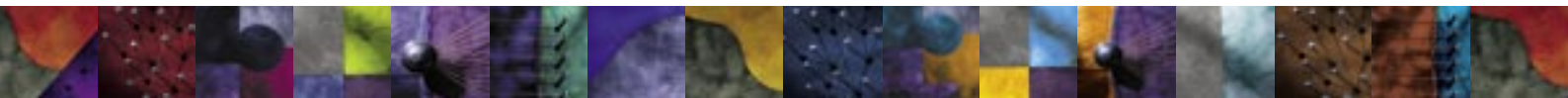
Whatever the underlying causes, it is important to tackle them if the offender is to change behaviour and move away from crime. Our supervision of offenders and our various programmes are designed to do just that.

We also work closely with the prison service, within NOMS, to prepare offenders for resettlement into the community upon their release.

The probation service makes use of the specialist expertise of staff and other organisations, both in the voluntary and statutory sectors, and we contract out work when we believe it is necessary.

Specialist areas covered include drug and alcohol services, employment, training and education, domestic violence, sex offenders, welfare rights and debt counselling, basic skills and housing.

We also work with, for example, local businesses and business organisations to develop offenders' potential for employment.





“The probation service is realistic enough to know that not every offender will respond positively, **but many do**. Some secure jobs, some start their own businesses, some go on to college.”

## Working for the **service**

Most people, when thinking of probation service staff, will automatically think of probation officers and of course they provide a significant portion of our employees.

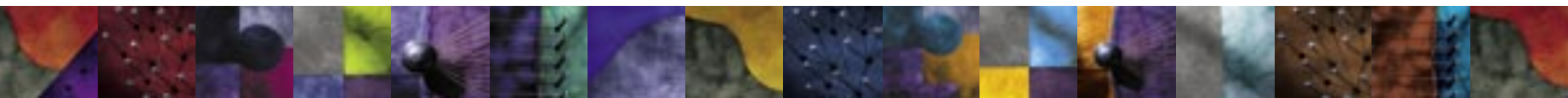
We have, however, well over 700 employees in the Thames Valley and as with any large organisation, they work in all kinds of jobs, without which the service could not function.

Many staff are involved in administrative work, including secretarial, office management and reception duties. Others work in human resources, finance, information technology, research, training and development, public relations and communications.

They work in a variety of locations, including our head office in Bicester and our main offices in Abingdon, Aylesbury, Banbury, Bracknell, High Wycombe, Maidenhead, Milton Keynes, Newbury, Oxford, Reading and Slough, the courts, approved premises and other buildings where front line work with offenders takes place.

Many of our employees have come from different careers and bring a range of skills to the probation service. We run a comprehensive set of training programmes to help them play their role to the full in working towards our aims.

We also employ trainee probation officers taking their two-year Diploma in Probation Studies award during which, working with the University of Portsmouth, they gain the Community Justice Degree and Community Justice NVQ.





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## Further information

We hope that this short guide to Thames Valley Probation  
has helped you to understand better what we do,  
how we do it and why.

If you want to know more, you can contact us in a number of  
ways and we will be delighted to help.

Below are our contact details:

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And you can visit our website at

**[www.thamesvalleyprobation.gov.uk](http://www.thamesvalleyprobation.gov.uk)**

