

# Improving the Interventions Basket of National Standards

## From Possibility...

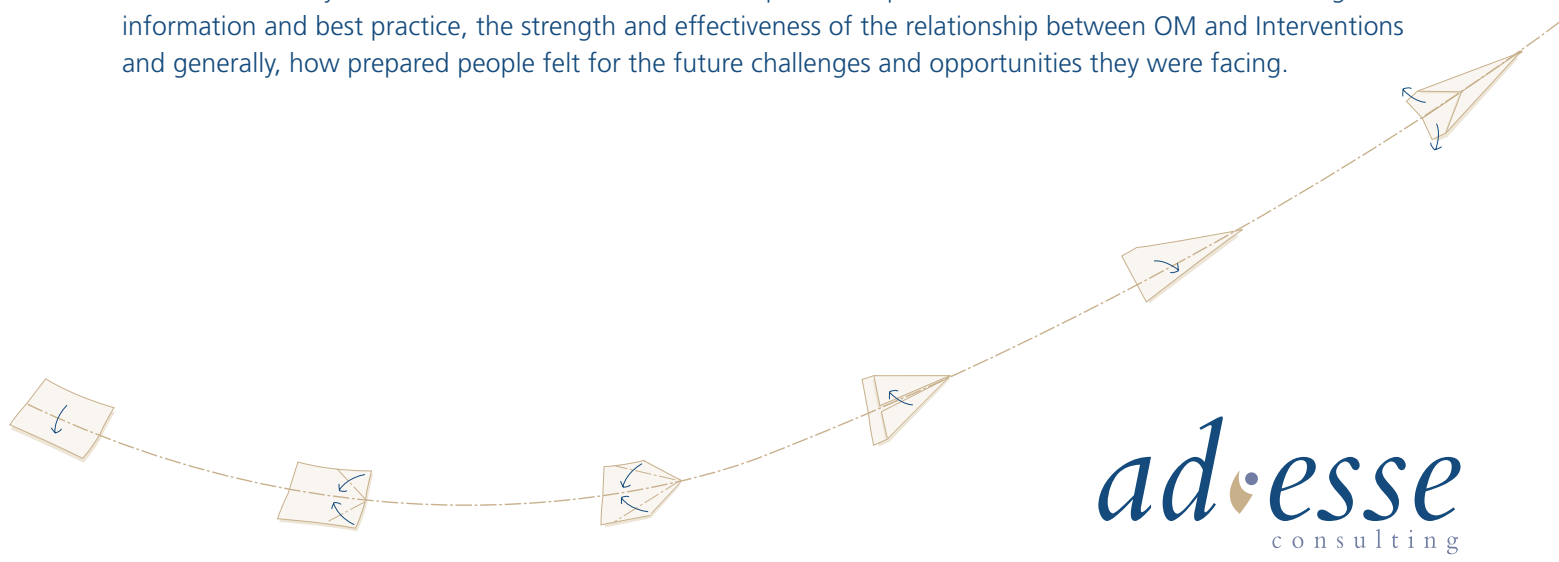
As strategic objectives change in response to customer or regulator demand, organisations may find themselves re-structuring to deliver a better service. Jobs change, people move and although every function within an organisation should be working together to achieve the collective goal, there may be a shift in emphasis in terms of supply and demand. This is when there is a need to establish sound, effective working relationships between teams. This is the situation that Hampshire Probation has found itself in.

The senior team within Hampshire Probation had identified the need to make a step change in performance across the County to ensure a better position in the Integrated Probation Performance Framework (IPPF) and to enable successful transition to Trust status. The IPPF is the tool used to measure the performance of Probation Areas across England and Wales. It assesses Offender Management (OM) (the process of managing offenders from pre-sentence through to completion of order and supervision) Interventions (the programmes and support given to offenders to enable completion) Public Protection and Operational capability, resource use and strategy. Hampshire Probation was achieving passable performance in each element and was looking to achieve good to outstanding across all four.

The senior team had some evidence to suggest that the focus of improvement needed to be in the middle manager teams at Senior Probation Officer (SPO) level as this is where the accountability for day to day team and individual practice management lies. There was also a perception amongst the senior team that management capability required further attention. They approached Ad Esse for help in understanding whether their concerns were substantiated, to identify where the focus on performance was needed and to enable improvements.

## OUR APPROACH

Our first step was to undertake a diagnostic exercise to establish the current state of play. We needed to find out how performance focused the management team was at all levels in Hampshire. We also wanted to know what people felt worked well in the Area and what was not effective. One of the priorities of the senior team was to ensure consistency across the four divisions that made up the Hampshire Area so we focused in on sharing of information and best practice, the strength and effectiveness of the relationship between OM and Interventions and generally, how prepared people felt for the future challenges and opportunities they were facing.



We interviewed managers across all levels and within the four divisions as well as undertaking a survey to ensure people had the opportunity to express their thoughts confidentially.

Coupled with this, we analysed data to establish at what level, or in what function or process improvements to performance could be made to have the greatest impact on the IPPF as well as motivate and increase the capability of the management team.

The results of the diagnostic were very interesting. They bore out the senior team's initial concerns but also added other dimensions.

- It was clear that the managers were working hard but not necessarily on the right things. For example, data collection for the purposes of measuring performance was time intensive and was seen as a task removed from its purpose
- The nature of the work had become bureaucratic and management was reactionary as opposed to proactive
- Teams worked in silos and the relationship between OM and Interventions was provision rather than demand led
- Line management of administration lay outside the operation
- The management structure was not defined and although managers accepted responsibility for what they did there was a clear lack of accountability
- Direction from the senior team tended to be fixed on what to do and not enough on how to do it. Teams were, therefore, interpreting information and adapting processes to suit their own needs
- There was a sense of frustration that there had been a lack of learning and development interventions to develop skills to enable improved performance

It was very clear from the diagnostic what was not needed in Hampshire. A 'classroom' based management development programme isolated from reality would not address the real problems within the area and change performance results. What was needed was a fresh approach, an unblocking of the log jam and a high level of pragmatism. What was not in doubt was the overall commitment of the managers to the probation service; that commitment just needed to be harnessed.

The next step was in two stages.

- Development of the senior team to set the context for the subsequent improvement work, improve leadership and redress perceptions of HQ isolation.
- Undertake a performance improvement programme with all middle and area managers to develop skills in internal consultancy, improvement tools and techniques and leadership/management approaches and apply these to real problems that had been identified by the senior team as a priority in terms of impacting on the performance within the IPPF. The programme would be led by Ad Esse consultants with an in house facilitator from the Hampshire team.

## IMPROVING THE INTERVENTIONS BASKET OF NATIONAL STANDARDS – A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED

The Probation Service in England and Wales has a set of national standards by which it operates. Assessment against standards happens monthly when the SPOs monitor a sample of cases through the Nsmart IT system to ensure that, for each case, standards have been met. This data is then reported centrally and is summarised within the IPPF.

Although the interventions basket of national standards directly reflects the performance of the interventions team, the offender managers have a direct impact on performance as they identify the interventions that offenders require. They have to make timely referrals with correct and appropriate information to enable interventions targets to be met. Also, offender managers have to ensure that any other supervision requirements are managed in conjunction with interventions. Therefore, the working relationship between OM and Interventions is crucial in the successful completion of the probation order.

Hampshire was not meeting all the performance targets in relation to the interventions basket of national standards. Performance was at 58% across the whole basket, a shortfall of 32% against the target of 90%. The task of improving performance against this target was given to the North division OM SPOs and reflected the senior team's recognition that the relationship between OM and Interventions was crucial. It also reflected the results of the diagnostic in terms of the relationship being provision rather than demand led.

Our first step was to undertake a one day workshop on leadership skills. The team discussed the challenges of the role and the demands of improving performance in the IPPF as well as the opportunities that future trust status would bring. We looked at staff management strategies, how to manage expectations and also to make the transition to becoming a performance driven team.

We followed this with a two day workshop on the DMAIC problem solving process. This proven method to define, measure, analyse, improve and control performance improvement included a real probation problem within a case study to ensure the team were experiencing addressing performance improvement within a familiar issue and to see the benefit that could be gained.

When the team were comfortable with the process we embarked on addressing the interventions basket using the DMAIC process. It was crucial to involve members of the interventions team as part of the problem solving process. However, the North team decided that they would prefer to establish the root cause of the problem before involving Interventions. They wanted to be sure where the problems were arising. A case of 'getting your own house in order' first.

The interventions basket comprises eleven standards that have to be met across unpaid work, resettlement (offenders who are released on licence), programmes and drug rehabilitation requirements (DRR). These standards are individually weighted. The first challenge for the team was to establish where the focus of improvement should be to ensure the maximum impact on the IPPF. As part of the definition day we looked at several 'what if' scenarios based on the weighting and performance improvement. The most weighted questions were those on unpaid work. However, these scenarios established that improvements in only one of the four elements would not have a significant impact on the performance. Improvements across unpaid work, programmes and DRRs were required.

Once the problem was defined, we supported the North team in measuring the current situation by analysing available performance data. Measurement was undertaken in the following areas:

- Analysis of the unpaid work and DRR protocols to establish evidence of the supplier/commissioner relationship
- Analysis of a sample of commencements to establish whether standards had been met. Particularly whether there had been a delay at a particular part of the process
- A survey of colleagues across county to establish the understanding and operation of Nsmart monitoring, meeting of standards within the unpaid work process, meeting of standards within drugs testing within DRRs and general understanding of targets and roles. Particularly focusing on the fact that OM have a significant impact on a target that they may not regard as their own
- Management of the contract with external drugs treatment suppliers and how performance against the contract is assessed
- Benchmarking Surrey Probation Area's unpaid work process, Nsmart monitoring and compliance
- Enquiries as to whether there was any on going work being undertaken by Interventions specifically on Programmes

This is what the team found:

- Some recording of information on the CRAMS system (personal data and contacts for each offender) was inaccurate and this was having a direct impact on how cases were monitored through Nsmart within both unpaid work and DRRs
- The process for commencement on unpaid work was disjointed as some parts of the process were undertaken by OM and some by Interventions
- There was often a delay in getting an offender to an unpaid work pre meeting which was having a direct impact on the need for the first work session to take place within 10 working days
- Contact between the offender manager and the unpaid work supervisor was crucial in terms of successful completion
- There was confusion about the definition of some of the terms on Nsmart monitoring. Some SPOs were recording a failure to meet the standard unnecessarily
- There was a lack of consistency in terms of arranging the first appointment with the drug treatment provider which had a direct impact on whether the appointment was attended within two working days of the sentence being made
- The contract for drug treatment suppliers is managed through a local committee of which Hampshire is a member. Further information about the requirements of suppliers to meet standards was needed
- In general, a lack of knowledge of the interventions basket and a lack of understanding of roles within processes and in meeting targets

When undertaking any DMAIC problem solving there will inevitably be a number of causes of a problem. The North team were no exception in that they identified several. They identified the root causes to be: Knowledge and understanding of the target, inaccurate recording of data, unclear processes in unpaid work and DRRs, the operation of Nsmart monitoring and drug treatment supplier management. In terms of programmes, the team established that a review of programme provision was being considered in order to make significant improvements. They decided that as offender managers they would concentrate on the other root causes to improve their team's contribution.

## To Actuality...

It was at this stage that the team decided to involve their colleagues in Interventions. It was clear that OM needed to make improvements and those improvements had to meet the Interventions requirements to ensure a sound working relationship. Two members of the Interventions team joined the group for the improve stage to look at solutions.

A number of solutions were identified:

- Redefine the unpaid work process and protocol to ensure a lean, less bureaucratic process
- Convene an Nsmart working group to ensure consistent monitoring, clear definition of terms and improved training in the performance process
- Redefine the CRAMS codes to ensure accuracy of data inputting
- Redefine the DRR process and protocol to ensure effective management of suppliers

At the same time colleagues in the Central division had been addressing problems within the offender management basket of national standards. They had also identified that Nsmart monitoring was not consistent and this was having an impact on performance data. The North team were able to work with the Central team in ensuring that the interventions basket of standards was included in resulting solutions. These solutions included:

- Production of a guide sheet to be referred to by OM to ensure all standards are met within the cases that are anticipated to be part of Nsmart monitoring
- Production of a definitive guide to Nsmart to ensure consistency of monitoring

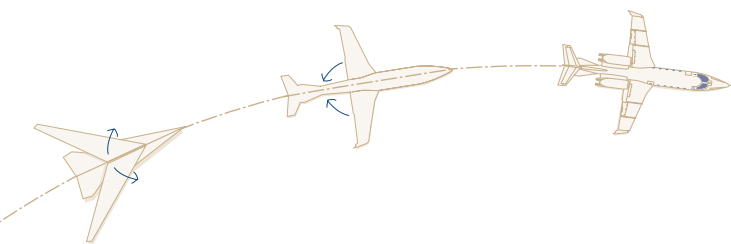
The next step was implementation. The North team were very clear that joint working with Interventions was crucial and the good relationships established at the improve stage had given them the start they needed. The implementation plans ensured key stakeholders were briefed in the early stages; working groups were cross county to ensure the needs of city and rural areas were taken into consideration, new processes would be trialled and have robust measures to ensure success and briefings were timely and across functions and grades. Above all, instead of accepting the current way of working the North team were now actively and confidently making decisions about the best and most effective way to manage this aspect of the business in conjunction with their colleagues in Interventions.

## THE BENEFITS

When you are in a highly regulated organisation being scrutinised by the Government and the General Public and continually striving to meet targets it is sometimes difficult to challenge the way you work and the relationships you have with other functions. Acceptance of the status quo becomes more common place. Working with the North team in Hampshire Probation has enabled them to be confident in making decisions to improve ways of working.

We left Hampshire Probation with the following:

- A clearly defined implementation plan to improve the interventions basket of national standards
- An understanding by all involved in the process of their responsibility and accountability in achieving the target across functions
- SPOs who are now monitoring performance through Nsmart consistently and more positively
- A cross functional understanding of the interventions basket
- A sound cross functional working relationship in problem solving between OM and Interventions
- Experienced managers who are able to use the DMAIC process to improve performance in other areas of the organisation and are able to plan the 'how' as well as the 'what'
- Experienced and skilled in house facilitators who are able to work with teams to address performance issues.
- A team that is confident and empowered to make decisions and implement improved ways of working



## FURTHER INFORMATION

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