



West Mercia
Probation Trust



Ministry of
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News Release

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Rehabilitation versus Punishment – Judge for Yourself

Public log-on to judge what makes an effective sentence

An innovative on-line programme in which members of the public can decide what they think is the most suitable sentence for virtual offenders was launched by Justice Minister David Hanson MP today as a new poll shows the public think reforming offenders to cut re-offending is equally as important as punishment.

The survey, which analyses the public's understanding of community sentencing and their views around crime and punishment, showed that 84% of people in West Mercia thought rehabilitation was as important, or more important, than punishment when sentencing offenders.

Launching the online tool at a school today David Hanson said:

“This tool will allow the public to have a better understanding of how sentences work and see the benefits of different sentences for individual offenders. We already know that strong community sentences are both an effective punishment and a means of reform and this tool can show the public what actually happened in these real life cases and the outcomes after the sentence.

“Prison is necessary to punish and reform offenders and protect the public from the most serious, dangerous and persistent offenders. The Government will always ensure there are places available for those offenders. But it is not necessarily the best route for less serious offenders who may lose their job, their accommodation and their family ties after a short period of imprisonment. Putting offenders through tough community sentences can often be more effective in reducing re-offending than a short spell in prison and the research published today shows the British public want rehabilitation of offenders at the heart of our justice system, and they want what works to cut crime.

“The poll also shows 48 people in West Mercia are aware of some elements of community sentences but often not that it can include intensive rehabilitation and behaviour programmes, as well as unpaid work which are key to stopping criminals committing further offences. We need to change that and make sentences more visible and understood so by letting people literally judge for

themselves, we hope we can help increase understanding and confidence in non-custodial sentencing.”

The survey polled over 3,000 people across England and Wales and revealed only 27% of people in West Mercia understood what makes up a community sentence, typically a combination of rehabilitation and punishment.

“*Judge for Yourself*” will help tackle these misunderstandings. Its interactive design will help educate people about Community Sentencing and the National Probation Service and the tool can be accessed by the general public and will be available to schools from September.

The ICM study reveals:

- 84% of people in West Mercia thought rehabilitation was as important, or more important than punishment as a criterion when sentencing criminals
- Only 27% of people in West Mercia understood what makes up a community sentence
- However, 73% of people in West Mercia knew community sentencing involved unpaid work

David Chantler, Chief Executive of West Mercia Probation Trust said,

“ We welcome the launch of *Judge for Yourself*. It is a useful method of giving the public a clearer understanding of community sentences and what they involve”.

“We know that short prison sentences don’t work and putting an offender on a tough community sentence can be far more effective. Hopefully this will help increase understanding and give people more confidence in community sentences.”

Judge for Yourself allows people to go on-line and experience the work of probation first hand. Based on examples of real cases, people can ask for more information on each offender, get advice from the probation officer involved and select the sentence they think is appropriate. If this is a community sentence, you can choose from the 12 requirements available to create a package for the offenders to rehabilitate as well as punish.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. *The research was conducted between 17-28 March 2008, by ICM Research and polled 3043 adults across England and Wales, 70 interviews were carried out with the public in West Mercia.

2. Although primarily aimed at the general public, *Judge for Yourself* will be offered as a teaching resource to help young people explore issue of punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing alongside the revised Citizenship education curriculum. This will be after further consideration of how it might best fit with the Citizenship curriculum. Early

use by teachers has been very promising but further work is necessary to ensure that teachers can fully exploit its potential in the classroom.

3. To access Judge For Yourself go to: <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/index.htm>

4. The latest figures show that frequency of re-offending for community sentences have fallen sharply by 13%. The re-offending rate following a short custodial sentences is 59.7%. The re-offending rate following a community sentences is 37.9%.

5. A Community Sentence can be made up of one or more of the following 12 options: compulsory unpaid work, specific activity - such as a community drug centre, supervision - daily or weekly meetings with a probation officer, an accredited programme to tackle issues such as anger management, prohibited activity, curfew, exclusion from a place, activity at an attendance centre, residence with an automatic curfew, mental health treatment, drug rehabilitation and alcohol treatment. Sentences are constructed to ensure the public's safety is paramount, the offender is duly punished, but they are also given the opportunity to rehabilitate and get help for the some of the root causes behind their offending.