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FIRST BIRTHDAY FOR OFFENDER COMMUNITY PAYBACK JACKETS IN WEST MERCIA

High-visibility orange jackets for offenders to wear on Community Payback sentences have reached their one year anniversary in West Mercia 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 introduction 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.

Helen Allen, Head of Interventions, West Mercia Probation Trust said:

“The introduction of the jackets has made Community Payback more visible. The public can see the work being done by offenders and they can see the results of the work and how their community will benefit from it. We have had some very positive experiences where members of the public have commented to work parties on how professional their work is”.

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.

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.

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