



# Press Release

Embargo until 14 January 2011

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## **MP Owen Paterson visits Probation Community Payback project**

Owen Paterson, MP for North Shropshire, was in his constituency today visiting offenders who were sprucing up Brownlow Community Centre in Whitchurch.

A group of offenders were carrying out Community Payback work to pay back for the crimes they have committed. They were busy painting and decorating the hall making it a more pleasant environment for the local community to use.

Offenders have been working at the hall since October last year and have completed over 900 hours of Community Payback work. Work parties attend most Thursdays and Saturdays and consist of between 7 to 13 offenders and supervisors.

Jeff Still, Secretary to Whitchurch Community Centre Trust is grateful for the work the offenders have carried out and thinks the centre has benefited in a number of ways, he said:

*“The centre users have commented on how much better the place is looking. Also, in the long term we are hoping that the offenders’ contribution to improving the building will help us to attract more users so that we can keep the place running. Until we improve certain aspects of the building we cannot promote it to potential users.*

*We couldn’t have done what has been done so far without the input of the offenders, so we are very grateful for that”.*

Owen Paterson said, *“This is an excellent and constructive initiative. Offenders are doing worthwhile work to help their local communities and I have great admiration for the work of the Probation Service and Shropshire Council in this area.”*

Whitchurch Community Centre has managed to raise money through grants and funding to buy the paint and decorating materials and the offenders carry out the work. The Centre is keen to continue to work with West Mercia Probation Trust and already has a list of future projects to include decorating the main hall and gym areas and giving the outside a face lift.

Michele Hatfield, West Mercia Probation Trust, Head of Service for Shropshire, said:-  
*“This type of project is at the heart of the community. It is a good example of where offenders are able to make a visible difference to their own community whilst fulfilling the sentence of the court at the same time”.*

Brownlow Community Centre is well used by local residents for dance groups and play groups; the town band practices there and it houses the local gym.

If you have a project in your area that you think probation may be able to help with please call our Community Payback team 01743 231525 or fill in a form on-line to nominate a project [www.westmerciaprobation.org.uk](http://www.westmerciaprobation.org.uk) Projects must benefit the community and must be work that can be done safely and not take paid work from others.

## **ENDS**

### **For further details please contact:-**

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### **Editors Notes**

- Community Payback is a punishment which requires offenders, sentenced by the courts to unpaid work, to repay the community for their crimes. Offenders must carry out between 40 – 300 hours of work.
- If offenders are in full-time work or education they must give up one day at weekends. Unemployed offenders may have to work for three days a week.
- The sorts of projects we work on include:- street clean-ups, ground clearance and landscaping, footpath clearance, churchyard maintenance, painting and decorating and maintenance work to community centres and parish halls,

improvements to parks and other community facilities and work for local charities.

- We work in partnership with local Councils helping out with street maintenance and at countryside sites.