

Hastings Identified Prolific and other Priority Offenders (HIPPO) Group

On the 1st April 2004 the Home Office announced the new POPO (Prolific and Other Priority Offender) initiative to manage the most prolific, persistent and anti-social offenders in local areas. These are the offenders who are responsible for the disproportional amount of crime and anti-social behaviour, causing harm and distress to local communities. The first of the three new strands to be announced, 'Catch and Convict', was to be driven by local Crime and Disorder Partnerships. A tight timescale (of September 2004) was required for CDRP's to make arrangements for the multi-agency management of Prolific Offenders in their localities. In view of the fact that Hastings has over the years, fostered an effective multi-agency approach to many social and crime initiatives, The Safer Hastings Partnership (CDRP) swiftly convened it's first meeting of the HIPPO group in early May 2004.

The HIPPO group is headed by Sussex Police (Senlac Division), Sussex Probation Area (Hastings & Rother office) and East Sussex Youth Offending Team (for Hastings and Rother). The three local managers for these agencies agreed to co-chair the group on a 4 monthly rotating basis. The chair reports back to the Safer Hastings Partnership every quarter. Other key members of the group include the local ASBO co-ordinator and his team, a representative from the CPS, Police representatives from the Divisional Intelligence Unit and British Transport Police, Education Welfare Service, Department for Work and Pensions (fraud unit), Under 19's substance misuse service, Social Services, and information exchange with the Divisional Legal Manager for the local Magistrates Court.

The aim of each meeting, that takes place monthly, is to review and discuss the key 15 – 25 adults and young people who are regarded by all key agencies as causing the most harm to the local community through their persistent and prolific offending and anti-social behaviour. Each person adopted onto the HIPPO list is reviewed in detail at each meeting to ensure all relevant agencies are up-to-date and that actions are decided upon to ensure that these cases are prioritised by all involved. Within the Criminal Justice System this could include the local Police ensuring any new crime is given the status of a 'gold investigation', whereby an experienced case worker is allocated to the case to bring about a robust and swift charge before the Court, the ASBO team considering the appropriateness of applying for a post-conviction ASBO, and the Probation Service and local YOT target these offenders for an intensive supervision and monitoring scheme as an alternative to custody or as a condition upon a post custody supervision Licence. Despite only 6 months of operation the group has witnessed some key successes and has enjoyed the benefits of this multi-agency approach to tackling this high profile group of offenders who cause most harm to the Hastings area.

The HIPPO group was one of the first such groups to be convened nationally and was recently identified by the Government Office South East as an example of 'good practice' for the region, and the chairs were invited to GOSE to give a presentation on its model to colleagues from around the South East region.