



Offender Desistance Policing:  
Operation Turning Point  
Experiment in Birmingham UK

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# Overview

- An outline of the experiment
- The staged process of implementation
- Some case studies from Stage 2
- The progress so far

# Context

- Massive pressure on criminal justice budgets
- Cost and delay of putting offenders through the criminal justice system
- Renewed emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation by the UK government

# Operation Turning Point – the underpinning theory

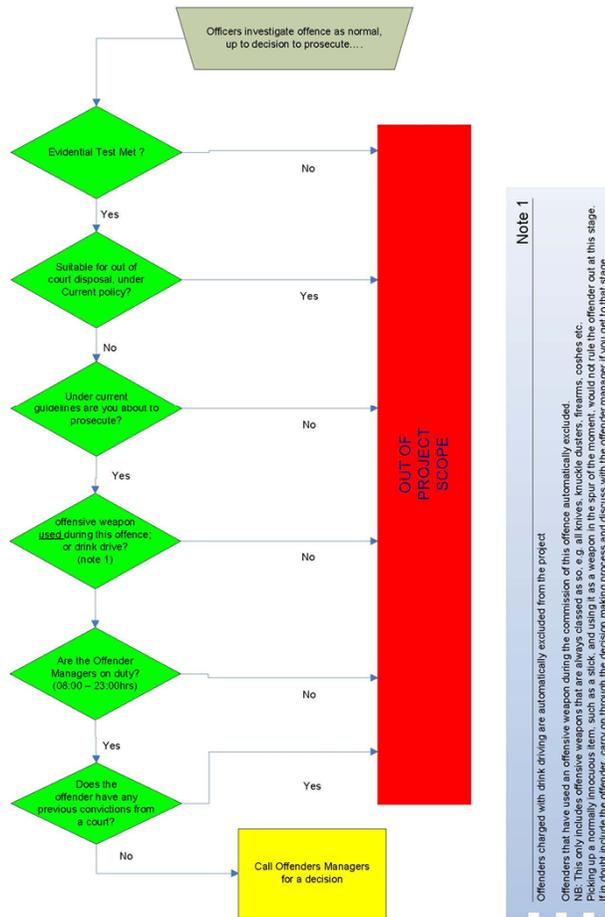
- A combined deterrence and desistance approach
- Deterrence approach theorises that celerity and certainty are critical
  - Quick process and deferred prosecution
  - With certainty in event of breach
- Desistance approach relies on voluntary engagement encouraged by contract with teeth

# Operation 'Turning Point'

- Taking a sample of offenders whom the police have decided to prosecute
- Low risk offenders
  - Who have no previous conviction (they may have previous cautions or other diversions)
  - or one prior conviction (more than 5 years ago if an adult and 2 years ago if juvenile).
  - And offence is not likely to result in instant prison sentence
- Randomly assigning them to prosecution or police offender management
- Developing a standard protocol of tactics for police offender management linked to "sword of Damocles" approach

## The Turning Point Project

Chart 1: Custody Officers Decision Making Diagram.



## Decision making Seven filters/factors:

- Sufficiency of evidence
- Public interest
- Sensitive case
- Previous convictions
- Likely sentence
- Safety check
- Victims' wishes

# The ' Cambridge Gateway'



**SOLVE Project: Serving Our Local Victims Effectively**

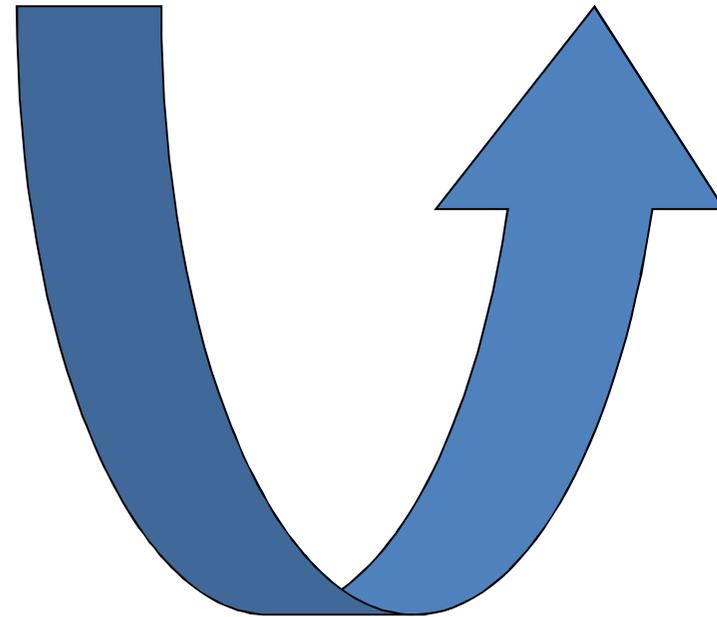
**LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR THE RAW (THE RANDOM ASSIGNMENT WEBPAGE)**

Please choose one of the following options

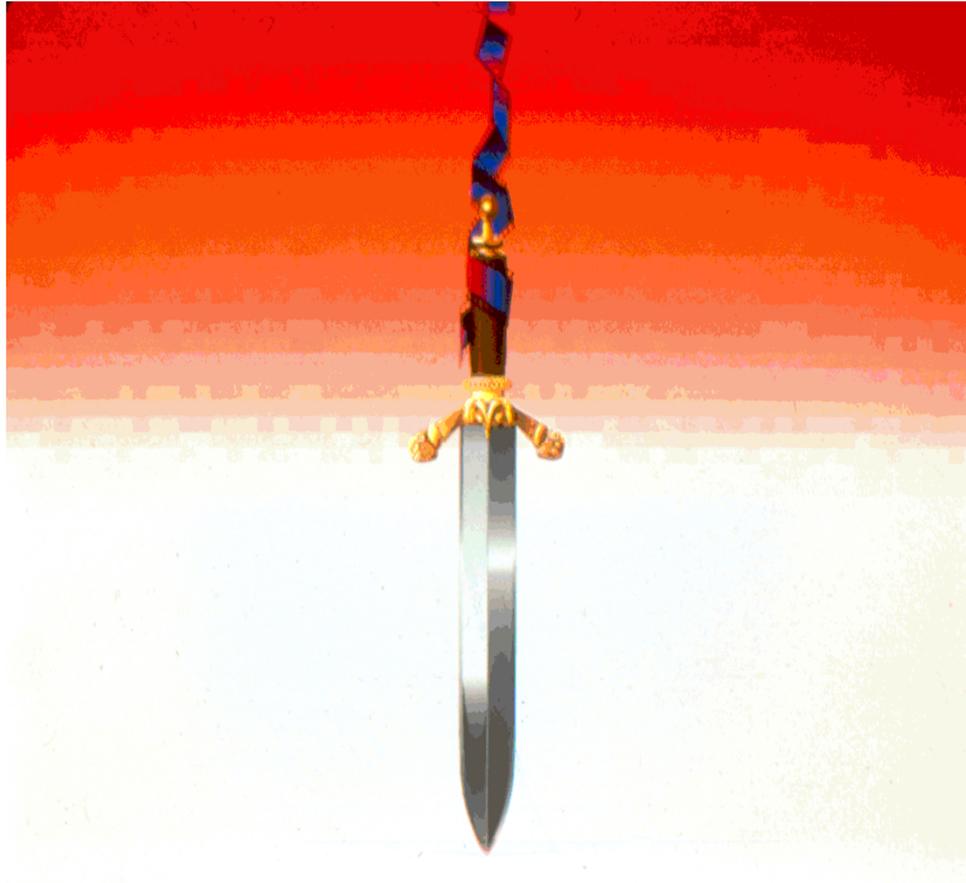
**Questions**

1. Case number:
2. Field Test Unit (FTU) Team Officer:
3. Date:
4. Log reference number:
5. Name of Victim (if different from caller):
6. Phone Number of Caller:
7. Was the victim in this incident the victim of ASB or similar incident in the past 12 months?:  Yes  No
8. Is the victim in this ASB incident deemed vulnerable by relevant authorities?:  Yes  No

# The 'Turning-Point Plan'



# Two Essentials: First



**' The Sword  
of Damocles' -**

i.e. threat of  
prosecution

# Two Essentials: Second



**The conversation and  
the contract**

Impact

Consequences

Opportunity

Responsibility

# What's Involved?



- Voluntary participation
  - Agreed 'Turning-Point Plan'
  - Compliance = no prosecution
  - Non-compliance
    - Failure to keep to plan
    - Reoffending
- ↓
- Breach
- ↓
- Prosecution

# Operation “Turning Point” – a Randomised trial

- Formulating the question
- Ethical issues
- The lessons of police experiments
- Social Foundations of the Experiment
- The Crimport protocol –Setting up and implementing in phases
- The Randomiser and randomisation
- Managing the experiment
- Evaluating outcomes

# Ethical issues

- Randomisation of the prosecution decision
  - Only after decision to prosecute has been made – a non-worsening principle
  - With access to legal advice
- Treatment confined to 'low risk offenders'
  - By randomiser questions
  - And concentrating on first/second convictions
- Victim views

# Lessons of Police Experiments

- Importance of the relationship between the researchers and the organisation
- Balance between maintaining 'normal policing' and conducting an experiment
  - Dilemma of using specialist teams

# Social Foundations

- The importance of the test site
  - Committed management
  - Fit between the experiment and the organisations strategy and culture
- Importance of a network
  - Of funders
  - Stakeholders
  - Academic support

# Crimport -

- [http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/research/experiments/rex-post/operation\\_turning\\_point.pdf](http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/research/experiments/rex-post/operation_turning_point.pdf)
- Published before the experiment started
- Detailing the approach to study and evaluation

# Learning by stages

- Experiments are a process of learning and change management
- Taking the process by stages ensures that each element is tested and treatment has developed enough to compare

# Randomisation

- The use of the Cambridge Gateway (Ariel, Sherman and Vila (2011))
  - Provides randomisation
  - And ability to 'batch' randomise
  - Together with a data gathering tool
- Experience in RCTs has shown that a non-human ('computer says no') approach is perceived as fairer by the offender

# Measuring outcomes

- Measures (in TPP) focus on comparison between treatment and control of
  - Crime frequency and harm rather than just prevalence
  - Cost benefit
    - RCTs allow researchers to compare costs between two treatments

# Story so far

- Stage 1: November 2011 – all eligible cases were sent for prosecution (ie all to control) to ensure all custody staff had used the Gateway – 10 cases were deemed eligible and sent for prosecution
- Stage 2: December –March 2012 – all eligible cases to go to Turning Point so that Offender Managers can have enough cases to build practice – 45 cases were deemed eligible
- Stage 3: from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2012: cases randomised through the Gateway to Treatment (50%) and Control (50%) and expansion to all Birmingham

# Case Study 1

- Offender is a woman in her 30's who is involved in a drunken brawl. Woman Police Officer resolves the brawl and decides to take the offender home to get her out of harms way. On arrival at home, the offender assaults the police officer. Assault sufficient for S 39.
- No prior convictions
- Custody Officer decides suitable for Turning Point and asks police officer for her consent
- Police Officer agrees with Offender Manager to an RJ conference which went well + referral to an alcohol treatment programme.
- Offender describes process as "a turning point in her life"
- She completes the 4 month programme successfully

# Case study 2

- Offender has several prior cautions for drug possession. Is arrested for cultivating cannabis having lost his job because of drug use.
- Custody decides to refer to Turning Point
- Offender manager draws up plan, which includes drug advice service, employment meeting and health support.
- Offender is now drug free and in employment

# Case Study 3

- Offender is drunk and goes to counter of a drive in MacDonalds to try to get served. Attendant refuses him service. Offender racially abuses and threatens the Attendant (a young Asian male).
- Offender had no prior conviction
- Hate Crime is currently excluded from the pilot
- Offender was charged and went to court and received a £65 fine....there was no apology to victim and no compensation...

# Case Study 4 – Turning Point case

C was placed on a 7 point plan that was agreed between police and the offender, all points were to address her trigger offence of Robbery: 7pm-6am daily curfew; to obtain 100% attendance at school; a good behaviour contract with parents and school.; not to contact victim or other offenders; not to go to the offence location; a letter of apology to the victim

C has completed the plan in early April 2012 and is therefore now free of the constraints, with no criminal record.

# Case Study 4 – Prosecution cases

The case against the other 4 defendants was finalised on the 11th April. They were bailed without conditions.

One pleaded not guilty to the theft and the assault and was dismissed for both. FR, GR and LB all pleaded guilty to the assault. All 3 were given a 6 month referral order and were ordered to pay £100 in costs and £100 in compensation.