

LEARNING THE LESSONS

Quick time bulletin 2 July 2009

Recall to prison - URGENT

Key issue

The need to ensure the prompt recall to prison of offenders released on licence

Background

The IPCC has concluded an investigation into the police response to a recall to prison of Dano Sonnex, who was recently convicted of the murder of two French students. Dano Sonnex had been released on licence from prison on 8 February 2008. In April 2008 he was arrested and charged with handling stolen property and remanded in custody for court appearance but released on unconditional bail on 16 May. On 13 June the Ministry of Justice informed the relevant force (the Metropolitan Police Service) of a recall to prison for Dano Sonnex (wrongly classifying him as a level 1 - medium risk - offender), but the police did not visit his last known address until 29 June and he was not arrested until 10 July. Tragically, the murders were committed on 29 June.

These events prompted a statement to the House of Commons by the Secretary of State for Justice which detailed serious failings by prison and probation staff as well as errors by the Metropolitan Police (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090608/debtext/90608-0004.htm>). This bulletin focuses on the police role but also outlines action taken by other agencies involved.

Delay in recalling

It was Force policy to implement a recall to prison within 96 hours. The Force had standard operating procedures, known as Operation Jigsaw, for dealing with offenders subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). These included a warrants management system for dealing with notification of recall to prison. The Borough Command Unit policy specified that any warrants outstanding after 48 hours were to be brought to the attention of the daily management meeting.

A number of failings were identified:

- The Force had created an intelligence record for Dano Sonnex in January 2008 but, because of gaps in procedures, it was not updated to include the relevant MAPPA details and to direct that any officer coming into contact with him should contact the Jigsaw team and the Probation Service.
- When notified of the recall, the Force opened, on 13 June, a Computer Aided Despatch (CAD) message for tasking purposes. Intelligence that Dano Sonnex might have firearms complicated the discussion about how to progress the warrant and because of confusion in relation to responsibilities, misinterpretation and poor communication between officers, the CAD message was closed on 16 June. As a result no-one was tasked to deal with the recall until a new entry was created on 27 June.

Quick time learning

It is clear from this case that delay in recalling an offender released on licence can have horrific consequences. Police forces should check that they have robust policies and systems in place to ensure that all recalls are dealt with promptly. Police authorities should ensure their force has an appropriate recall to prison policy in place.

Action by the Metropolitan Police

The Force now has a unit in each borough dedicated to arresting wanted offenders. It has also put in place revised systems with other agencies to improve information sharing and ensure the identification and timely arrest of such offenders.

Other agencies involved

Failings on the part of other agencies played the major part in the events leading to the murders:

- Dano Sonnex was in custody for some three weeks after he was arrested in April 2008, which should have given the Probation Service enough time to process his recall to prison before he was released on bail.
- He should not have been released on unconditional bail in May 2008.
- The police were not informed that he was subject of a recall to prison until four weeks after his release on unconditional bail (some seven weeks after his initial arrest).

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS), together with other relevant agencies, is proposing to incorporate suitable requirements into the updated Recall Protocol. NOMS has also drafted a Recall - Best Practice Guide to be issued to all Local Criminal Justice Boards. This is intended to improve the performance of all the agencies involved in recall. NOMS is also planning to issue an instruction to all probation areas requiring them to provide an advanced warning to the police of their intention to seek recall, listing the information and intelligence that will be included on breach reports (for example: mobile phone numbers, names and addresses of associates etc), in order to assist the police in swiftly apprehending the offender.

For more information on the case read the IPCC report at www.ipcc.gov.uk/sonnex_report_english-3.pdf

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Learning the Lessons quick time bulletins are designed to disseminate learning identified in the course of conduct investigations that is too urgent to await the end of the investigation or lessons from an investigation that need to be disseminated urgently. Such investigations are carried out by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) or by police forces, the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) or Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

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- The Home Office
- Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)
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