

IOM IN WALES AFTER THE REFRESH:

PRACTITIONER VIEWS OF INTEGRATED OFFENDER MANAGEMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main aim of this study was to explore the views and experiences of probation and police officers working in Integrated Offender Management (IOM) in Wales at local level in 2023. The initial plan was to examine the effects of the ‘National Refresh’ of 2021, a set of reforms following a critical Joint Inspectorates’ report. These sought to strengthen IOM governance and create more consistency between areas, introducing tighter rules on the selection of participants, more accurate data recording, and a number of performance measures. However, as the study progressed it was expanded to include a wider range of topics related to local practice. It was based on interviews with 23 managers and frontline practitioners from across Wales. Although the sample covered a good range of ages and experience, it was relatively small and not randomised, so the results cannot be assumed to be representative of the total staff complement.

The following sections first summarise our findings regarding interviewees’ views about IOM in general, then their comments about specific aspects of IOM policy and operational practice, including changes introduced by the Refresh. This is followed by an overview of staff perceptions of participants’ responses to and engagement with IOM, and finally a summary of the key messages that seem to emerge from the research.

GENERAL VIEWS OF IOM AND THE REFRESH

Overall, the findings were very positive. The great majority of interviewees were enthusiastic about IOM in general, and broadly satisfied with the changes brought about by the Refresh.

The features of IOM most frequently highlighted as key to its effectiveness were close partnership working and timely sharing of information. These, it was said, enabled both police and probation to be more rapidly aware of, to better understand and to respond more effectively to emerging issues of concern, in many cases by acting jointly or in a co-ordinated fashion. Co-location of police and probation teams was said to be particularly valuable in enabling this.

Probation interviewees also emphasised that IOM gave them more time, space and opportunity than standard supervision to be flexible and creative in their work with service users, increasing the chances of getting them to ‘engage’.

The main advantage of the Refresh was said to be the greater clarity it had given to the aims and priorities of IOM, while the ‘Fixed, Flex, Free’ (FFF) system had brought more consistency between areas in the selection of participants and in basic expectations of how supervision should be structured at local level. It was also noted that the changes had been accompanied by increased interest in IOM from national politicians and civil servants, as well as important increases in funding. At the same time, a few probation practitioners expressed a concern that the heavy demands placed upon those in the Fixed category were particularly difficult for some groups and individuals to meet, and hence risked ‘setting them up to fail’.

OPERATIONAL PRACTICE

Local management

The local management arrangements in IOM whereby, even in fully co-located offices, police and probation staff working in the same team are line-managed separately (usually by a Sergeant and a Senior Probation Officer, respectively), were widely agreed to work well. This was said to be the case even when (as was quite common) one of the managers was based elsewhere, distant from the frontline staff. The general picture painted was that the two managers kept in close and frequent communication ('joined at the hip', as one put it) and that, although disagreements sometimes arose about what course of action to take, these were usually resolved quickly and amicably through discussion. It was said to be rare to escalate disagreements to higher level managers, although this option was available if needed.

At the same time, several interviewees agreed that it was fair to characterise some local teams as 'police dominated' and others as 'probation dominated': this could be partly due to where the team and the managers were located, which agency had more personnel and resources allocated to IOM, local working practices and cultures which had grown up over time, and/or the individual personalities of managers.

Co-location

As stated above, it was emphasised that a key facilitating factor for effective IOM work was some form of co-location, which helped police and probation staff get to know each other well and develop working relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Co-location was most commonly described by interviewees as taking a part-time (or 'hybrid') form, whereby, for example, members of one agency worked in the other's offices on an afternoon or two a week. (The IOM Programme Manager also estimated in early 2024 that about 40% of local teams were 'fully located' and 50% 'partly co-located'.) Most agreed that both forms of co-location were effective, although in a few cases it was pointed out that the attendance rate of the visiting team members was not always good.

While at least part-time co-location of police and probation staff was common, it was relatively unusual for staff from other agencies also to share the IOM offices. This was one of the developments that interviewees said they would most like to see, making the premises more like a multi-agency 'hub'.

Most areas had a Wales Integrated Serious and Dangerous Offender Management (WISDOM) team, in some cases based separately from the 'generic' IOM team, but more often sharing offices with them. In some areas, too, staff supervised both WISDOM and non-WISDOM cases. However, as offenders supervised under WISDOM were assessed as high risk of harm, they were generally dealt with by more experienced or specially trained police and probation practitioners, who tended to work particularly closely together. This sometimes led them to be regarded (and to see themselves) as a totally separate unit. Indeed, we found a degree of confusion among interviewees, some of whom did not know that WISDOM is part of IOM and that its cases are strictly speaking IOM cases in the 'Free' category.

Overall, then, co-location (whether full or partial) was regarded as one of the most effective elements of IOM – a judgement shared by the senior managers we interviewed, one of whom said that active efforts were currently being made to expand its use. At the same time, it was acknowledged that co-location was particularly difficult to set up in rural areas.

The Fixed, Flex, Free system

The Fixed, Flex Free (FFF) system, which was probably the most prominent change introduced under the Refresh, was broadly welcomed by our interviewees, although a small number raised concerns about aspects of it.

Its main advantage was said to be the relatively clear structure it gave to IOM work, following a period in which there had been major differences between local teams in the kinds of people selected for supervision and how the work was undertaken. Practitioners said that as a group they now had a better understanding of the aims of the partnership work, the kinds of people they should focus on, and how they should go about it.

At the same time, we were surprised to still find some misunderstanding of the FFF system. While most interviewees were clear about the criteria for inclusion in the Fixed cohort, several – including managers - admitted to some confusion around the Flex and the Free categories.

More importantly, some concerns were expressed about the inclusion (mainly in the Flex category) of people for whom the relatively onerous conditions of supervision under IOM could be counter-productive. In particular, it was asserted that the decision to place all ‘Y2A’ cases (people transitioning from the youth to adult systems) under IOM supervision for at least three months, although partly intended to ensure they get access to welfare services, was not necessary for those without a background of serious or persistent criminality and could result in ‘net widening’ due to sanctions for non-compliance.

Another concern raised by a small number of interviewees was that some people on IOM were also supervised or monitored under other specialist arrangements such as MAPPA or sex offender units – again with a risk of ‘overkill’ as well as unnecessary duplication.

Finally, the point was made by some local supervisory staff that, although the FFF system made good sense on paper, in practice the size and composition of the cohorts it produced did not always fit well with the available staff resources, skills and experience.

Contacts and visits

National operational guidelines state that it is good practice for the Fixed cohort to be offered three contacts per week. This is generally treated as a minimum requirement: appointments offered and kept are used as performance indicators, and sanctions applied for failure to keep them. It was said that at times when participants needed extra support or their behaviour was giving cause for concern, this number could be greatly exceeded. When they were thought not to need intensive work or numerous office appointments, efforts were often made to achieve the required number of contacts in a less demanding way, for example through home visits or meetings in public places, meetings with partner agencies, telephone or internet discussions, and so on. Such contacts – even many of those conducted by the police – were said to be ‘gentler’ or ‘lighter’ in intensity and less focused on offending behaviour than office meetings.

As one might expect, some individuals in the Free category, especially those supervised as WISDOM cases, received especially frequent and intensive contact due to concerns about risk. At the other end of the scale, care was taken not to ‘overburden’ some of the younger participants, with whom engagement was generally more difficult to achieve, and whose lifestyles did not fit easily with frequent office visits.

Finally, it was emphasised by interviewees from both agencies that although a strong focus of IOM police officers' attention was inevitably on whether participants were committing new offences, some were also often very active in terms of helping them to access services, make and keep appointments, and indeed to engage them in serious conversations about efforts to 'turn their lives around'. In some cases it was claimed, this had helped to counteract long-held hostile views about the police and led to more productive relationships

Provision of services

One of the original ideas behind IOM was that the participants would gain priority access to support, such as housing, substance misuse or mental health services, to meet their needs, thereby increasing their chances of rehabilitation as well as enhancing compliance and engagement with supervisors. However, this is not a statutory duty or normally written into contracts, and the extent to which it occurs appears to vary widely. In some areas, close relationships between IOM staff and local service providers (strengthened by part-time co-location or regular multi-agency meetings) were said to have persuaded providers that responding quickly to the needs of people on IOM could have major benefits. In others, however, it was reported that they were rarely treated any differently to other clients; this was mentioned most often in relation to mental health services.

As noted in the previous section, many examples were also given of police officers working in IOM going out of their way to assist or act as advocates for individuals to get quicker access to services.

Interventions

Although high risk and prolific offenders (such as the majority of those on IOM) are very much the target of accredited programmes, most interviewees reported that they rarely refer their supervisees to such intensive interventions. This is because they feel that there is a high risk of them re-offending or being breached either when waiting for the programme to begin or during its delivery. Instead, several expressed a preference for adapting existing programmes and shorter interventions to create their own versions for one-to-one delivery. Others argued that formal interventions were often not attractive to IOM participants, and that they responded better to fairly simple activities outside the office environment – for example, hill walks or fishing trips – during which it was easier to develop a trusting relationship and persuade them to engage in more intensive work at opportune times.

Compliance and breach

Perhaps the area of IOM work most likely to see significant disagreement between police and probation partners is that of how to respond to participants' failure to comply with conditions, or to concerns or evidence that they are committing new offences. The general picture painted by interviewees was that police officers tended to be more inclined to argue for strong action, including breach and prosecution, while probation OMs were more often prepared to be flexible and consider alternative approaches – as one put it, practitioners from the two organisations had essentially different 'mindsets'. However, it was also clear that this is too simplistic a picture. We were given examples of police officers going out of their way to persuade colleagues or courts to adopt a more lenient approach, on the grounds that breach or another short prison sentence would undo progress an individual had made and that avoiding recall was sometimes the better longer term strategy.

The above discussion also illustrates a more general point emerging from our research, that flexibility and willingness to consider non-standard approaches appear to have become distinguishing features of IOM work, to some extent encouraged and supported by managers from both services working in tandem.

DATA AND PERFORMANCE

Some interviewees commented about improvements post-Refresh in the quality of data about IOM in Wales, as well as the introduction of elements of performance measurement.

It was pointed out that the previous state of statistical information about IOM had been very poor, with many areas not even able to provide accurate data on the numbers of cases under active supervision, let alone the problems that people on IOM had presented with and how these had been met. Post-Refresh, wholesale ‘culls’ of records were undertaken to remove old cases and produce more consistent and complete records of active cases. A ‘Dashboard’ has also been developed allowing quick access to detailed information about the demography and needs of the IOM population in any selected area. Although these developments were widely praised, it was also pointed out that the two main sources of information about individuals – the police Niche system and Probation’s Delius – remain separate and cannot talk to each other, leading to some delays in data sharing between the services. It was argued by some that the long-term solution was a dedicated IOM system accessible to all relevant staff .

In addition, managers generally welcomed the advent of performance indicators for IOM, noting that they were not experienced either as oppressive or as time-consuming to collect data for. However, it was pointed out that some of the targets – particularly those on housing and employment – had been set unrealistically high, and furthermore that they were more a reflection of socio-economic conditions in each area rather than of actions undertaken by IOM.

SERVICE USER RESPONSES AND ENGAGEMENT

We did not interview people on IOM, so can only report what staff said about their responses to supervision. The general message from the interviews was that responses varied greatly, ranging from welcoming the extra attention that comes with IOM to sullen rejection and refusal to engage.

Broadly speaking, older people were said to be more likely than younger people to respond positively. Indeed, examples were given of persistent offenders who had been on probation many times without seriously engaging, but who developed close and trusting relationships with both probation and police OMs as a result of the frequent contact and variety of activities that IOM entailed.

On the other hand, many supervisees, especially younger ones, were said to find the extra obligations burdensome and responded negatively. Indeed, certain groups – including homeless people, those with serious substance misuse problems, and young people with gang connections – were mentioned as likely to prove particularly difficult to engage. Moreover, it was recognised that people who have had frequent contact with the criminal justice system, whatever their age or offending history, are unlikely to react positively to the news that they will be partly supervised by a police officer.

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Interviewees mentioned a number of strategies used to try to overcome these challenges. First, as noted above, efforts were made to keep standard probation office appointments to a minimum, with contacts and visits being conducted by a variety of professionals in a variety of ways outside the office. Regarding specific ‘hard to engage’ groups, it was said for example that IOM links with drugs workers and services could be used to ‘lure’ substance misusers into attending, and that some areas were piloting the use of a specially trained group of OMs to work with young people with gang connections. More generally, IOM staff were encouraged to respond to people as individuals, getting to know more about their ordinary lives and interests, and meeting other family members. Once again, flexibility seems to emerge as a key element of their approach.

Finally, the problem of hostility to the notion of supervision by the police was said to be ameliorated partly by efforts on the part of the officers to get to know people on IOM as individuals, as well as by demonstrating that they were prepared to go out of their way to offer practical help. Examples were given of people whose views had been modified by simple acts of kindness such as being given a lift home or helped with access to some form of welfare.

CONCLUSIONS

The ‘headline’ messages that emerge from our research can be summarised as:

1. The great majority of local managers and staff interviewed had very positive views of IOM in general, and were broadly satisfied with the changes brought about by the Refresh.
2. The features of IOM most often highlighted as key to its effectiveness were close partnership working and timely sharing of information, leading to quicker and more effective responses to emerging problems or concerns. Co-location (whether full-time or part-time) was seen as particularly valuable in this regard.
3. IOM gave probation practitioners more time and opportunity than generic work to adopt a flexible, individualised approach to supervision, allowing them to be more creative and innovative in efforts to engage service users and in the design of interventions and activities. This was said to increase the chances of developing positive relationships with the many people on IOM who had a history of poor engagement with authority. Police officers, too, often found creative ways of overcoming initial hostility.
4. It was also reported that more flexibility tended to be applied in response to failures to comply with conditions. Often, both probation and police managers took part in discussions as to what action to take, and although the latter generally took a ‘harder’ line, examples were also given of police officers advocating against breaching or prosecuting particular participants (even, on occasion, when minor offences were involved) in order to avoid undermining progress that individuals had made.
5. The FFF system of cohort selection and supervision was largely welcomed. It was seen as striking a reasonable central-local balance, producing greater consistency between areas while still allowing discretion to reflect local priorities. However, some confusion remained about the rules governing the Flex and Free systems.

6. Some service users – particularly younger people in Fixed cohorts - found the demands of IOM supervision very difficult to meet, placing them at risk of return to custody even if they were not offending. Although staff often reduced the risk by exercising discretion or finding less demanding ways of achieving required contact levels, some interviewees felt that the resulting breach rates remained too high.
7. In some areas, close relationships (strengthened by regular communication at multi-agency meetings) between IOM teams and welfare agencies result in IOM participants receiving accelerated access to services. This can act as a strong ‘carrot’ for them to engage constructively with supervisors. Elsewhere however, despite the efforts of IOM staff, they are not given any form of priority by other agencies, meaning that potentially key benefits of the IOM system may be lost.
8. Rural areas experience a number of significant challenges, including travel problems for both staff and service users, which are increased by the additional contact requirements associated with IOM. They also tend to have different crime patterns - and hence different priorities - from urban areas, leading some teams to feel that the FFF system is not best suited to their local circumstances.
9. Interviewees, especially managers, welcomed improvements in the completeness and accuracy of IOM data recording that had accompanied the Refresh. This included the introduction of performance indicators, which were not generally regarded as burdensome or intimidating. However, some questioned the value of comparing measures of employment and housing between areas, as they were more likely to reflect local socio-economic conditions than the results of activity by IOM teams.
10. Based on staff perceptions (we did not interview participants), the overall picture that emerges of service users’ responses to IOM is very mixed, ranging from hostility to strong engagement. It was reported that younger people, the homeless, and those with substance misuse problems were often the most resistant or difficult to engage, while older people (including some with a history of hostility to authority) tended to respond more favourably to the extra attention and assistance. However, attitudes were also said to be dynamic, with positive changes over time quite common as participants got to know their supervisors (both probation and police) better ‘as people’.

Overall, we conclude that IOM is in a much healthier state than it was pre-Refresh, particularly in terms of funding and staff resources, clarity of purpose and expected ways of working, and quality of information about its activities and outcomes.

We also conclude that, given the value attached by interviewees to co-location, its expansion deserves to be treated as a priority. This might include inviting more agencies to join police and probation in co-located offices, which was also seen as very beneficial. At the same time, we recognise that co-location of any kind can be particularly challenging in rural areas.

Finally, more thought could be given to the concern that some participants find it difficult to cope with the heavy demands of IOM and face enhanced risk of breach for non-compliance. It may be that, rather than requiring three contacts per week from all in the Fixed cohort, local teams should be advised to review cases at intervals to decide whether three contacts remains the optimum requirement for particular individuals, taking into account risk, needs, responses to supervision, progress towards rehabilitation, and difficulties in attending appointments.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents a summary of the main findings of a small study carried out in 2023 by a group of researchers from three Welsh universities. The initial aim was to gather views from operational managers and frontline practitioners as to how well the 2021 ‘National Refresh’ of Integrated Offender Management (IOM) was bedding down at local level in Wales.

IOM was first piloted in 2009 as an updated version of the Persistent and Priority Offender scheme and expanded across England and Wales after the concept received support in the Coalition government’s Green Paper ‘Breaking the Cycle (2010)’. Its initial purpose was to target recidivist offenders known to be responsible for a high proportion of volume crime, using a multi-agency approach built around a core of intensive joint supervision by probation and police staff working in partnership at local level. However, in 2020 a critical report by the Joint Inspectorates of Police, Probation and Fire Service concluded that IOM had ‘lost its way’. Among the main areas of concern identified were lack of central leadership and weaknesses in governance; excessively wide differences in practice between local areas; and poor data recording and performance monitoring. The Refresh, launched first in Wales in July 2021, and later across England, comprised a set of reforms implemented in response to this report (see HMPPS/NPCC, 2020). The most important of these were the introduction of strengthened senior management structures at central and regional levels, new guidelines for the selection of participants (the ‘Fixed, Flex, Free’ system), and new data collection requirements and performance indicators.

Although the practitioners we interviewed had comments to make about these specific changes, which are discussed in the report, they also expressed views about a range of other important issues which arose from their experience of working in IOM but were not directly related to the Refresh. As a result, we decided to expand the scope of the report to include some of the latter topics, so it may now be better described as an account of staff views about IOM policy and practice at local level in 2023, rather than solely about changes introduced by the Refresh.

The research was unfunded, so is inevitably limited in scope. The findings are based on a relatively small number of interviews with managers and staff from IOM teams around Wales, carried out remotely via Teams or Zoom. The report therefore reflects only probation and police perspectives and lacks direct evidence of the views of other partner agencies or of people who experience IOM.

The structure of the report is as follows. It first briefly introduces the background to the Refresh and some of the key changes this brought about in terms of governance and practice. In doing so it draws attention to some key features of IOM in Wales leading up to these changes. It then describes the methodology of the study and provides an overview of the characteristics and previous experience of the interviewees and how and why they became involved with IOM. The findings are reported in four main sections. The first summarises interviewees’ general views about IOM and the Refresh. The second explores their views about a variety of operational issues, including local management, co-location, the ‘Fixed, Flex, Free’ (FFF) system, contacts and visits, provision of services, interventions, and compliance and breach. The third discusses interviewees’ opinions of the changes made to IOM data systems and the introduction of performance indicators. The fourth presents staff accounts of the reactions by people on IOM to the intensive joint police/probation supervision they receive. This is followed by a summary of our findings and conclusions.

The interviews covered a range of other topics in addition to those described above, but there is not space to cover them adequately in a short report. However, we intend to include them in one or more academic papers to be produced in the coming months.

Background to the Refresh

The Inspectorates' criticisms in 2020 did not come as a surprise to many of those involved in the governance or management of IOM. In both England and Wales, concerns had increasingly been expressed about confusion around its aims and priorities, inconsistencies in practice, and lack of systematic data about activities and outcomes. In Wales, the situation was complicated by the implementation of the *Framework to Support Positive Change for those at Risk of Offending in Wales 2018-2023* (All-Wales Criminal Justice Board, 2017), building on the previous *Wales Reducing Reoffending Strategy 2014-2016*. The Framework identified six priority groups (in addition to people assessed as 'high risk of harm' or 'high risk of reoffending') for relevant criminal justice, welfare and support organisations and partnerships to focus their work upon. These were:

- Women in the Criminal Justice System
- Ex-Armed Service Personnel
- Offenders' Families
- Young People and Care Leavers
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups
- Domestic Abuse Perpetrators

IOM became a key vehicle for the delivery of the Framework, its regional boards and local teams being encouraged by the IOM Cymru Board (see below) to contribute to the supervision and/or support of these groups. While producing some innovative and effective work, this also fostered a sense in some areas that IOM was losing its focus, as well as further increasing the differences between local teams in terms of the kinds of cohorts being selected and the kinds of work being undertaken.

In the years leading up to the Refresh, IOM in Wales also differed from most areas of England in two other important respects, which subsequently proved helpful in the implementation of change. First, it had an active central body, the abovementioned IOMC Board. This Board, which reports to the All-Wales Criminal Justice Board, played – and continues to play – an important part in the governance of IOM, providing much of the 'glue' which holds the partners together. It is jointly chaired by police and probation, and includes senior representatives from a variety of stakeholder bodies including Welsh Government, the PCCs, prisons, public sector service agencies, the Third Sector and academia. It has traditionally performed a broad oversight rather than overtly directive role, as well as helping to resolve problems and encourage greater participation and resource contributions from partners. However, the seniority of its membership has also given it a strong influence over the general shape of IOM policy and practice.

The second important factor was the appointment, some years before the Refresh, of a Band 6 probation manager as IOM Programme Manager for Wales. Working on behalf of the IOMC Board, her role included ensuring that regional governance structures across Wales were operating properly, as well as producing regular reports for the Board. Perhaps most important, however, was the task that the Board set her in 2018 to conduct a 'deep dive' review of IOM arrangements in Wales. This preceded the Inspectorates' visits, and when they began their work, she was asked to use her knowledge and experience to help them compile their report - over which she had considerable influence.

In a sense, then, Wales was ‘ahead of the game’ in identifying the kinds of weaknesses and inconsistencies in IOM arrangements that were to be highlighted by the Inspectorates, as well as in its readiness to introduce reforms to address them. The IOMC Board was able to use its influence to bring about significant changes quite quickly (including facilitating the transfer of responsibility for the *Framework* workstreams elsewhere) while the good relationships and channels of communication that the IOM Programme Manager had built up with local managers made it easier to get them ‘on board’ with the coming changes. The Refresh was implemented in Wales in early July 2021, before any of the English regions.

As a result of the Refresh and additional central funding which accompanied, the English probation regions and Wales now have better funded and staffed central offices with clearer responsibilities – in partnership with the police forces in their region - for the implementation and oversight of the revised ways of working (as set out in the *National IOM Operational Guidance*¹) and for the collection of standardised data on caseloads, activities and performance. In Wales, this work is now led by the IOM Refresh Programme Manager (a Band 6 HMPPS employee), assisted by a Band 5 SPO (the Integration Partnership Lead) and a Band 3 Senior Administrative Officer. The Programme Manager and her staff keep in close and regular touch with IOM units across Wales, including the six regional IOM boards and the managers of the 16 local teams. They are further responsible for developing and maintaining links with partner agencies across Wales; for commissioning services; and for monitoring the provision of statistics and performance data by local IOM teams. Beyond Wales, the Programme Manager regularly shares information and good practice with her counterparts from the 11 English probation regions at meetings of IRLIG², the operational group which reports to the national Strategic IOM Group, as well as engaging in periodic discussions with Strategic Leads in both HMPPS and the police service.

THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Our research was based principally on semi-structured interviews with a range of IOM staff from across Wales, carried out mainly in the first half of 2023. The interview sample was self-selecting, in that a letter was circulated on our behalf from the Refresh Programme Manager’s office to all local IOM teams in Wales, inviting anyone willing to take part in the research to email us. The initial response was fairly slow, partly we suspect because of poor timing (the letter was sent out quite close to Christmas). Subsequent reminders were sent in early 2023 and later in the year. In the end 20 interviews were completed with local police and probation staff, in addition to 3 with senior managers from HMPPS Wales, making a total of 23 interviewees in all. These comprised:

- 3 Senior Probation Officers managing probation staff in local IOM teams
- 10 probation offender managers or PSOs in local IOM teams
- 4 police sergeants, managing constables in local IOM teams
- 2 police constables acting as police offender managers in local IOM teams
- 1 local senior administrator
- 3 senior managers from HMPPS Wales with past or present responsibilities *re* IOM,

¹ This is an internal document, first produced in 2021 and revised and updated regularly, which provides all operational staff with comprehensive guidance and best practice advice on a wide range of operational matters, focusing particularly on the Fixed cohort.

² IOM Regional Leads Implementation Group

As there are over 100 police and probation staff working in local IOM teams across Wales, this relatively small and self-selecting sample is unlikely to be representative of all staff (we also interviewed twice as many probation as police officers). However, the interviewees included staff from all 6 Probation Delivery Units, all 4 police forces, and the majority of the 16 local IOM teams in Wales, who between them had experience of a good range of the various organisational arrangements and working practices found in IOM around Wales.

About half of the respondents from local teams had been in IOM for several years, so were able to make direct comparisons between pre- and post-Refresh practice. Most of the remainder had joined IOM shortly before or after the Refresh so had some direct or indirect knowledge of previous practice, but three had joined only recently and had relatively little knowledge about the past. Overall, then, our interviews reflect a reasonably wide range of local IOM environments and personal and professional experience.

The interviewees had joined IOM teams for a variety of reasons and in different circumstances, ranging from several who had actively requested to do so, to a small number who had been posted into the role (for example, on promotion to Sergeant). Most of the police officers who had actively applied to join said that they had had an interest in the rehabilitation of offenders (as one put it, 'I quite like working with offenders'), while some of the probation staff had been attracted by the challenge of working with the complex cases typical of IOM, and others by the prospect of regular multi-agency work. One probation manager commented that one needs to be 'a certain type of officer to work in IOM' – one who is able to 'deal with chaos', open to multi-agency working, and proactive in problem solving.

We did not ask all interviewees explicitly about any training they had received, but those who did discuss it helped to confirm findings from a previous survey of IOM training in Wales (Aqil and Maguire, 2022) indicating that many – especially those who joined IOM pre-Refresh - had received little or none. However, it was mentioned that efforts had been made to remedy this situation, and induction training packages were now becoming available for new staff.

GENERAL VIEWS OF IOM AND THE REFRESH

IOM: Perceived aims, benefits and challenges

Before going into detail about their experiences, interviewees were asked to express any broad views they had about the main aims, benefits and challenges of IOM and the direction it had taken following the Refresh.

Most interviewees expressed a belief that IOM 'adds value' to standard means of dealing with offenders, giving the agencies more effective tools to manage or reduce the risk of re-offending - its main advantages lying in the close partnership working and timely sharing of data. Typical comments from both police and probation staff members referred to the benefits of 'Working together to break cycles of continuous offending' and 'Facilitating good communication and information sharing between all relevant partners.'

For probation OMs, access to fresh police intelligence was seen as helpful to their risk management responsibilities, as it often made them aware earlier than usual of ‘danger signs’, thereby enabling them to take timely action including helping supervisees to tackle specific problems affecting their behaviour, issuing warnings and, where felt appropriate, instigating breach proceedings. Police officers – especially those working with people designated as high risk – also said that a major benefit for them was being able to combine information from both police and probation sources to identify emerging issues of concern, as well as to plan and implement joint responses using the powers and resources of both agencies.

It was further emphasised that face-to-face meetings and discussions – especially in areas where police and probation staff were co-located and saw each other regularly - were often more effective than simply sharing information from IT systems. This was partly because inter-agency access to records systems could be problematic and take time, but mainly because both formal and informal discussions of cases could often produce a clearer and more up-to-date picture of the situation, thereby making it easier to react swiftly and to coordinate a joint response. As one police respondent put it:

‘It’s about having those conversations quite quickly in, in terms of investigation. Someone’s compliance is wavering, and I go to see them on my own. That individual then is second guessing with probation. Next time you see them about enforcement, whereas if we have that two-pronged [probation and police] approach there and then, that conversation is done and dusted, you know, we know where we’re going with it... Then when the offenders come in for their planned appointments or if they’re in a bit of a crisis, it’s a bit of a two-pronged approach rather than an individual police or probation.’

(Police manager)

More generally, it was felt that IOM gave frontline staff more time, freedom and flexibility in how to go about the basic task of supervision. One probation manager expressed this as follows:

‘It’s about being much more mobile with your intervention. It’s a bit more being more creative. It’s about getting into that hard-to-reach cohort.’ (Probation manager)

Overall, very few negative views were expressed about either the broad concept of IOM or the general ways in which the work was set up and organised. Indeed, most interviewees seemed enthusiastic about being part of IOM, enjoying the greater flexibility, the partnership working and the increased and more varied contact with people under supervision. Where concerns were mentioned, they related mainly to specific local issues, including gaps in resources. However, as will be discussed later, a small number of probation staff expressed a general worry that the conditions set for people on IOM could be very demanding and some could thereby be ‘set up to fail’. For example, one practitioner commented:

‘I’ve literally got people who come out one or two days, then they’ll be back in prison straight away because they won’t comply... By imposing such, you know very onerous conditions, often with strict curfew, strict signing time, yeah tagging. And a multitude of non-contact license conditions etcetera where these people are really quite chaotic and not able to comply with that. But because the risk emphasis is there, that’s seems to be the way we go. But I think personally it is a bit of a shame that it’s gone so much down that road, but I understand the rationale why it has.’ (Probation OM)

General views on the Refresh

The great majority of the interviewees who had enough experience or knowledge to make comparisons with the past had a broadly favourable view of the Refresh, with wide agreement that the increased central guidance and the greater consistency it had produced between areas had been needed. Some said that it had produced a clearer shared vision of how their work should be focussed and structured, fostering a belief that IOM had become more efficient and productive. One probation OM summed this feeling up as follows:

‘I think that to date the Refresh has made a big difference because it's tightening everything up and you know it's making people more aware and thinking we'll be going forward while we're planning. How long do we plan to have this case on IOM and what's the exit strategy - I think it's making us focus on stuff like that.’ (Probation OM)

Another commented that the Inspectorates report and the Refresh had helped to bring both more government attention and more funding to IOM, fuelling a sense that it was developing a higher profile and become more firmly established.

Interviewees were also generally happy with the increased guidance and oversight they now receive from the Programme Manager's office following its expanded role post-Refresh. Local probation managers emphasised that they had not experienced the new arrangements as a rigid ‘top down’ form of governance, and some explicitly welcomed the extent to which they were encouraged to express their views and ideas at regular online meetings run by the Programme Manager, which all IOM staff in Wales can attend and at which news is shared, presentations are given and questions answered.

Finally, most interviewees welcomed the introduction of the ‘Fixed/Flex/Free’ (FFF) system and the greater structure it had brought to the selection and classification of IOM participants. At the same time, however, we were surprised to find a higher level of confusion and misunderstanding among staff than we had expected about the details of the FFF system. In addition, a few doubts were raised about its capacity to ensure that most of ‘the right people’ were placed under IOM supervision (because the rules were felt to be too prescriptive and unsuited to every area, or because they were being applied too rigidly). For example:

‘I don't know if we are, may be targeting, I don't want to say the right people because they are the right people because they meet their scoring, but it just feels we could be doing more. I just don't think the model sometimes like works. No, not works, that's wrong. I don't think it's always suited to every area.’ (Probation manager)

We shall explore the above views in more detail in the section on the FFF system below.

OPERATIONAL PRACTICE

We now look in more detail at interviewees' views about a variety of issues around operational practice, looking in turn at local management arrangements, co-location, the FFF system, supervision of people on IOM, and compliance and breach,

Local management

Management arrangements at a local level were found to vary considerably between areas. Teams have both a probation and a police manager (usually an SPO and a sergeant), who each line manage the staff from their own organisation. However, particularly in rural areas, by no means all managers are based together with their staff or work in IOM full-time. For example, in Dyfed-Powys probation staff carry mixed IOM and generic caseloads, and police sergeants line manage IOM staff as well as officers in cognate multi-agency teams such as MOSOVO (Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders) and Domestic Abuse.

Despite such complications, the probation and police managers we interviewed all stated that they worked in close collaboration with each other, and that decisions affecting the whole team were made jointly.

‘I manage the police and the SPO manages the probation staff and we're.... joined at the hip When we're going into MACC meetings and discussions like, we would have had discussions before to ensure that we are on the same page and any issues that we had, we have those discussions prior to any joint meeting.’ (Police manager)

This close collaboration and joint decision-making was said to be present even where they were based miles apart, as they communicated frequently by telephone or internet.

We were given examples of occasions when disagreements arose, particularly about courses of action to take with people on IOM, but these were said to be almost always resolved amicably by discussion between the two managers. If agreement cannot be reached, it is possible for disputes to be escalated to higher ranks in both services, but this was said to be rare.

At the same time, it was recognised that in areas where either the police or the probation manager was more often present and more involved in the day-to-day work of the team, that person was likely to have a stronger influence on its culture and working practices. More generally, several interviewees agreed with the suggestion that, for this or other reasons (including where team members were based, the history of IOM locally, and which agency had invested more staff or resources into it), some areas are more ‘police dominated’ and some more ‘probation dominated’ in their approach to working with people on IOM.

Another effect of line managers being based apart from their staff members and/or being involved only ‘part-time’ in IOM, was that they could find it difficult and time-consuming to develop a full understanding of how it worked or to keep up with changes. One for instance claimed to have been appointed to manage a local team (alongside other responsibilities) without any previous experience of IOM and with only rudimentary briefing about the Refresh, and admitted having struggled for some time to come to grips with procedures such as participant selection and categorisation.

Co-location

Multi-agency co-location was an important part of the original concept of IOM, the ideal set-up seeing staff from several organisations sharing offices in the police or probation estate (Ministry of Justice, 2010). It was envisaged that typical core teams would include representatives from police, probation, prisons and Criminal Justice Intervention Teams

(mainly drug and alcohol workers). However, in reality, most co-location has involved only police and probation, and in many areas even that declined prior to the Refresh, due mainly to the split in probation services under Transforming Rehabilitation and shrinking resources in both agencies (Millings et al., 2023).

Information from the IOM Programme Manager for Wales indicates that, post-Refresh, this trend has been reversed and most areas in Wales now operate some form of co-location. She estimated in early 2024 that about 40 per cent of local teams (the majority of these being in South Wales) were fully co-located – i.e. police and probation worked together full-time in the same office. More common was what might be called ‘part-time’ or ‘hybrid’ co-location (estimated to be in operation in around 50% of local areas), whereby for example the main IOM office is located on probation premises but police officers (who have their own bases elsewhere) work there for a day or two a week, or simply drop in frequently to discuss issues or cases. Similarly, staff from other agencies, such as health or mental health workers, housing officers or DWP staff, might occupy a desk for an afternoon or two a week, or come in regularly to attend meetings or see particular people on IOM. Our interviewees described a variety of such arrangements, of which the following statements give a flavour:

‘So, I’m in the probation office, but within our office, we’ve got a substance misuse agency. So, they’re in house, that’s been a fairly recent thing, which is absolutely amazing. And also, several days a week we have police officers come in who are the dedicated IOM police who literally are sat in another room and that’s brilliant for partnership working.’ (Probation OM)

‘No, we’re not co-located with probation. We do have an area to work out of the probation office, so a space in their office. That’s something that’s just been brought in since I’ve started because I obviously think the co-location is really important. So, I do go into the probation office most days. Obviously, some days if I’m out doing visits all day or I’m caught up in other things, I don’t get the chance. But I like to be a regular customer there because obviously that’s what it’s all about, the relationship, isn’t it?’ (Police OM)

‘We do have a drug agency, they work here one day a week, and we do have the Department for Work and Pensions join us as well.’ (Probation manager)

It was also pointed out by several interviewees that even where co-location was absent, staff from a variety of agencies attended regular Multi Agency Case Conference (MACC) meetings on the IOM premises or online:

‘We’ve got representation and then from local authority housing, and drugs and alcohol services, local accommodation providers as well. And a homelessness charity.’
(Probation manager)

Virtually all interviewees regarded co-location – at least of police and probation - as the best arrangement. While full co-location was regarded as optimal, part-time versions were also seen as highly beneficial. Several benefits were identified. Perhaps the most often mentioned was that it facilitates real-time information-sharing and thus speed and efficiency in dealing with issues as they arise (one of the original rationales for IOM). This includes both assisting people on IOM with immediate welfare problems and responding rapidly to risky situations, including enabling swift enforcement action to be taken when felt necessary. The frequent face-to-face

contact also helped people from different agencies to get to know each other well, fostering trust and making it quicker and easier to come to agreement on courses of action.

‘Because of the sharing of information between other practitioners from the police or others, because we're always talking about them. So, if, say, police have news about a case that did something last night, I hear straight away, whereas with generic cases it might take a little bit longer for me to get that info. So yeah, it's a very good way of working.’ (Probation OM)

‘Then at 9:30... we have a tasking meeting with the IOM probation manager. ...Those daily meetings are good. And then I will call into the probation office. Because otherwise I feel if everything's just through emails or phone calls or text, I think things get missed really because I know when I call into the probation offices, it's very, very rare that I won't get a probation practitioner saying to me, I'm glad you're here. I needed to mention this to you, whereas if it was by e-mail or a meeting, that wouldn't necessarily happen. So that relationship is important.’ (Police OM)

A police manager also strongly emphasised the value and importance of close and timely contact – best of all, some degree of co-location – with other agencies providing specialised services:

‘Having worked in offender management, I'm acutely aware that one agency really doesn't have an AI fix or solution. The key lies in the communication between us and our partners. And you know, particularly post COVID it's really important that we re-establish those links. There are lots of pressures in terms of staffing levels with our partners. We are working towards more co-location with, you know housing for example. So we've got our drug and alcohol service. We've got probation. We've got police. If we could have housing there, you know that would be great because that's one of the critical crucial problems that we have with every single nominal, it is housing. So, it's about making those connections with the right people at the right time rather than let things dwindle and delay - time is of the essence with our nominals. You know, when they come out, things are critical... I think the key is really multi agency communications. Get the right partners at the right time and establishing those links for those people... re-establishing them into the community and giving them normality to, you know, those general things that we take for granted, and a roof over their head, money in their pocket, food in their bellies. It becomes as basic as that really.’ (Police manager)

In short, interviewees were virtually unanimous that the ideal IOM set-up was a co-located team, many also arguing that the offices should be shared by more than just police and probation staff. As one Probation OM summed it up:

‘It would be good to have a multi-agency maybe hub where ... you know, say one staff member from social services, one staff member from housing, one staff member from the drug and alcohol agency would all be able to come into one office. I mean, don't get me wrong, they do come in on different days or you can just pick up the phone and ring them, but I do think that would be beneficial.’ (Probation OM)

One factor which can complicate the picture of co-location in Wales is the presence in some areas of ‘Wales Integrated Serious and Dangerous Offender Management’ (WISDOM) teams. These were introduced some years ago in many areas of Wales as part of IOM, in order to apply

its partnership approach to improve the management and supervision of people assessed as posing a high risk of harm, especially those with a history of sexual or violent offending. Once again, we found a variety of local arrangements. In some areas, individual IOM staff managed a mixed caseload of WISDOM and other types of case, but in others, they managed only one or the other. For the most part, it was only experienced probation staff and MOSOVO trained police officers who were considered to have the skills for this kind of supervision, which sometimes resulted in those working with WISDOM cases regarding themselves and/or being treated by local managers and staff as a separate unit, even if based in the same or adjacent offices. Indeed, we found some confusion among our interviewees about the relationship between WISDOM and IOM, some not being aware that WISDOM cases were part of the IOM 'Free' cohort and others even being unsure whether WISDOM was actually part of IOM. One attempt by a Probation manager to explain the situation also left us a little confused:

'So I hold all the Tag cases in this area unless they are the serious ones, especially serious domestic violence perpetrators, they go in WISDOM because they meet the WISDOM criteria, but the ones for the lower level come to general IOM. But WISDOM is IOM but separate in our area.' (Probation manager)

Generally speaking, police and probation staff in WISDOM teams appeared to work particularly closely together, with frequent face-to-face interactions. One Probation member of such a team contrasted their situation with that of the 'generic' IOM team in the same area:

'A huge difference between generic IOM and WISDOM is the co-location of us being joined by the police, we can deal with things on the day, I think that another benefit of the WISDOM team is that we all tend to get to know each other's cases.' (Probation OM)

Finally, while very few negative comments were made in relation to co-location, a small number of respondents expressed concern about the limited extent to which some partners actually used their (partly) co-located 'base'. For example:

'We are meant to be co-located with police too, but they pop in and out of the office and will stay for a few hours and then go out so we may not see them for a few days.'
(Probation OM)

To sum up, the overwhelming view among interviewees was that co-location – even of the 'part-time' variety described earlier – was of great benefit to IOM. Indeed, in those localities which had either no or very limited co-location, some managers were actively seeking to develop or expand it. Efforts were also being made at PDU and force level to facilitate this.

The Fixed, Flex, Free system

Many interviewees welcomed the greater structure and consistency that the Refresh had brought to the selection and deselection of people for IOM supervision. A key aspect of this reform was the introduction of the Fixed, Flex, Free (FFF) system. Generally speaking, the creation of strong central guidance on the selection and classification of participants was viewed favourably by interviewees. For example, a police manager commented:

'In general things were working really well, but I love the new strategy and the way that it's just clear everybody's doing exactly the same thing and so you can evidence and it helps learning as well because there's no grey areas of sorts because you can have

discussions with each agency and you know what nominals are sitting for you, know what sits in Flex, and you know what goes in Flex. So, I think that clarity and a clear structure is definitely a benefit.’ (Police manager)

However, despite such comments, we were also surprised to find that there was still a fair degree of confusion and misunderstanding at local level around elements of the FFF system. This was largely on the part of front-line staff rather than managers, but even some of the latter group admitted to gaps in their understanding.

Most interviewees had a reasonably clear understanding of the Fixed criteria, the confusion mainly occurring in relation to Flex and Free. This is illustrated in the following comments from a police and a probation offender manager, respectively:

‘To be honest with you there's a bit of confusion around the criteria in the new framework. I think we all fully understand the Fixed criteria and I understand that the vast majority of our cases should be on that, but it doesn't seem to be happening for some reason. And then I think, from speaking to other people, there's a bit of confusion between the Flex and the Free cohorts from reading the criteria in the IOM manuals and stuff. I've understood that the Flex criteria is sort of our priority, other offenders and the Free can be kept for lower cases but then other people have told me that basically the Flex criteria is slightly lower level. Just acquisitive crime, maybe they don't quite hit the numbers, but I've done some of the matrix scoring myself and things like that and sort of try and understand that a little bit better. But I do think there's been a little bit of confusion around the Flex and Free cohorts.’ (Police OM)

‘People do not understand Fixed, Flex and Free. There's a lot of cases that should be on IOM that aren't because people do not understand the groups. Before it was just IOM and WISDOM and was quite straightforward - if they were high risk they went to WISDOM, anything else was just IOM.’ (Probation OM)

In addition to difficulties in fully understanding the FFF system, the research revealed concerns – albeit expressed only by small numbers of interviewees - about some of the IOM cohorts that were being produced with its use. It was felt that that they were not always the ‘right people’ in terms of a need for multi-agency supervision, or in some cases that they did not fit well with local priorities. The Probation OM quoted above added:

‘We seem to have cases on IOM that shouldn't be there and others that should be there and aren't... Many people don't know who is in which cohorts... I tried to refer one in and it wasn't allowed and so I don't think it has been clearly set out. And every area is different because we've spoken to our counterparts in [***] and they're doing things differently and it's confusing.’ (Probation OM)

Particular questions were raised in large rural areas about the appropriateness of the FFF system as currently constituted, it being pointed out that the figures for ‘neighbourhood crime’ were relatively low and it was not regarded as a major priority. Consequently, the numbers of people placed into the Fixed category were very small, but meeting the more demanding contact requirements for this group could take up a disproportionate amount of IOM staff time (exacerbated by the greater distances to cover in rural areas).

Another issue raised was the inclusion (mainly in the Flex category) of significant numbers of young people transitioning from the youth to adult system. It is current policy for all in this category to be supervised under IOM for a minimum of three months, As the following comments suggest, the worry was that where the young person is not a prolific offender, the benefits derived from ensuring that they get access to support may be undermined by the ‘overkill’, and potential ‘net-widening’ effect, of intensive IOM supervision (albeit not usually as intensive as that designed for offenders in the Fixed category):

‘And another frustration that I found in IOM is that the Y2A, the youth to adult cases, all come to us. And the issue with that is that they don't really fit the IOM criteria at all... So we get all of the transitional ones, regardless of their offending patterns. We're having ones with sort of possession of cannabis or any sort of minor offences that are coming on to IOM. That doesn't really fit the criteria, does it? It's not Flex, Fixed or Free so the criteria are being manipulated so they can all come in. And they are actually low-level offending and it is rather overkill isn't it, to have a police officer sitting there going 'I'll come and visit you every week'.... This is something I struggled to get my head around really when I first joined IOM.’ (Probation OM)

A further point raised by some concerned overlaps between IOM and other kinds of multi-agency partnerships. It was pointed out that some sex offenders and domestic abuse perpetrators were being placed on IOM (mainly in the Free category) but were also involved in other initiatives aimed at the prevention of sexual or physical abuse. This, it was said, could lead to confusion and duplication of work between units. For example:

‘So, no, we don't have a domestic violence cohort at the moment. If they have committed acquisitive offences, then we are allocated them and if domestic violence is, you know part of that parcel of what they do, we have got a few who fit that. But it does tend to come hand in hand with the acquisitive crime and the same for, you know, we do work with some sex offenders if they have acquisitive crime as well. We'll share that with our sex offender unit and work with them with the perpetrator. But this is only if you know we've got burglars and things like that who are also sex offenders. ... So that's where they'd come into it. We have a sex offender unit and a perpetrator unit and IOM... we've got three units in the area, looking after the same people.’ (Probation OM)

Finally, one police interviewee pointed out that the cohorts produced did not always fit with the resources available to supervise them, in terms of either the numbers or the skills and experience of the staff in the team:

‘Your Free will always be your highest cohort, pretty much followed by Flex and then Fixed is our lowest. And we've reduced their figures. We need more resources - we've only got two IOM officers... Ideally, we need one on Fixed and Flex and two on Free. There are a lot of complaints about the FFF system - they need more CID expertise for high-risk Free people.’ (Police manager)

Supervision and management of people on IOM

In this section we look at issues identified by interviewees in relation to the multi-agency supervision of people on IOM, discussing in turn contacts and visits, interventions and services, and compliance and breach.

Contacts and visits

A core feature of IOM work is greater than usual frequency of staff contact with people under supervision. This is facilitated by the fact that Probation caseloads in IOM tend to be lower than in generic work: numbers differ between areas, but most seemed to be in the region of 25, including participants still in custody. It was, however, pointed out that it was important to see the latter too, in order to prepare them for supervision under IOM:

‘The community are a priority, but we should also be working on those that are in prison so that cohort of 22 to 25 is made up of people in the community but also in prison. That's not 22 people that have got to be seen every week. That's maybe 10 in the community and 10 in prison or 10 in the community in 15 in prison.’ (Police manager)

In practice, ‘contact’ can take many forms, including people on IOM attending appointments at Probation offices or those of partner agencies, visits by police and probation staff to their homes, or meetings arranged at other locations in the community. It can also involve speaking by telephone or internet.

National operational guidance states that it is good practice for members of the Fixed cohort to be offered three contacts a week. Although occasional exceptions were made, this generally seemed to be treated by managers at national and local level as a requirement. Numbers of appointments ‘offered’ and ‘kept’ are used as performance indicators for local teams and failures by participants to keep any of them can result in warnings and ultimately breach proceedings.

It was argued by a number of Probation interviewees that there are some types of participants who are unlikely to benefit from as many as three weekly contacts and for whom insisting on frequent appointments can be counterproductive. This was mentioned particularly in relation to young adults (including those transitioning from the youth justice into the adult system, as mentioned in the previous section):

‘If you've got somebody who's extremely needy and they need those three contacts a week to be able to remain stable, then it's beneficial and effective. But I'll go back to my example of working with the younger offenders, they are so busy with their lifestyle they're not interested in their contact with probation right now ... They're not motivated to change. They're not at that stage yet.’ (Probation OM)

‘Sometimes the obligation for more visits gets in the way. I think a lot of them get overwhelmed, especially the youngsters or ones that have kind of got learning difficulties and stuff like that. They they're like “Oh, why do I need to come in so much? It's stressing me out like all these appointments. I don't feel like I get any time to myself.”. And it's like you've got one appointment three times a week, which for them is really stressful... So, I think it depends on the individual as well.’ (Probation OM)

At the same time, it was said that some people on IOM – especially in the Fixed and Free cohorts - receive and benefit from considerably more than three contacts a week. For example:

‘But these cases, especially on the WISDOM cohort, they're very, very intense, and needy and it's, you know, most of my caseload. I have contact with some every day.’
(Probation OM)

‘And the minimum we offer is three appointments a week, but [for those with high needs] we'd actually average about nine ... Multiple appointments for the drug agency, so see the doctor there going in for drug tests. Having those one-to-one sessions. You know, we capture an engagement with housing providers.’ (Probation OM)

When they involve probation staff, face-to-face meetings are most often in the office, but efforts are also made to reduce the burden of office attendance on participants by also undertaking home visits or meeting them elsewhere. In some areas this was a fluid set of arrangements depending on circumstances, but in others regular variation of types of visit seemed to be built into standard practice, particularly for the ‘Fixed’ cohort:

‘It depends what I've sort of got on. It could either be a mix of joint visits with seeing people coming into the office or doing home visits. It could be going to the prison, doing visits or video links into, you know, cases that I have in prison.’ (Probation OM)

‘I think three contacts it's, you know, an office visit, a telephone call, and a joint visit. ... And we've got to strive to hit the required targets each week, but making sure all those contacts are also meaningful.’ (Probation OM)

The high number of visits expected for the Fixed cohort could cause a particular problem in rural areas where people on IOM could face large distances to travel with limited public transport available (especially in Gwynedd and Dyfed-Powys, but also in some post-industrial hilly areas such as parts of Gwent). For example:

‘I've currently got one that's in Ammanford, which there's four trains a day to and from Ammanford. So if he misses one train home, he can't get a train until 8 o'clock at night just to come and see me and the drug workers... we can't do much work with him because he's literally in an office for 20 minutes and he's homeless so we can't go and see him anywhere... and he gets really frustrated cause he's got to come down like three times a week to have his script and to see the drug workers and me. He's engaged multiple times and I've had to send him back to custody because it gets too much and he's not engaged. It's been too much and he can't get to and from [meetings]. So I think the rurality of where we are and that fact that we've not got an office in each main area is really, really difficult, especially when the POP is homeless cause we've got nowhere to see them. ... Also we don't have frequent bus travel warrants so attending is difficult.’
(Probation OM)

‘They’ve got the challenges of a train not turning up or a bus being full and driving past and the next one is not for an hour or an hour and a half. And in addition to that, our POPs have got other challenges like anxiety ... sometimes major issues and they may not be able to travel For me putting people in those situations and the impact on compliance is a problem. Obviously we need to expect people to travel into central areas... but also understand issues.’ (Probation manager)

‘... We hear this quite a lot where people say well, just pay for their travel, just do this or do that, pay for a taxi. A taxi return is in excess of £150 to get from [rural area] down to [town]. You know, what should you do? Squeeze four or five people into a taxi? All of particularly high probability of offending and offending with particular risks, just to facilitate them to come into [town]. I'm not sure we should, so it's raw

reality, it's provision of public services, it's provision of transport. It's road networks.'
(Probation Manager)

In some cases, too, practitioners helped to reduce this burden on service users by themselves making long car journeys to meet them in their homes or in the offices of other agencies:

'So we travel up ... and there's offices there... and we are looking to try and get more community locations where we can go and do interactions and meetings'
(Probation manager)

The nature and quality of visits was said to differ between those taking place in the participant's home or in a probation office. Home visits were viewed as 'gentler', fact-finding missions, where information could be checked and intelligence gathered (including from the surroundings). Office meetings, on the other hand, were more often probing, and intended to get participants to consider risk factors and issues of concern:

'So, we have different roles in the office, but when we're going to home visits, this is a general chat really, just so we can sort of see what the surroundings are, see if anybody else there. But we keep the conversation light. The purpose of the home visit is sort of to check what they're telling us when they come to the office, tell us about their life, to make sure it is true.' (Probation OM)

The office meetings were mainly undertaken by the probation offender managers, while home visits could be made either by individual police or probation staff, or jointly. This raises questions about the specific roles of police and probation staff within IOM. The general view was that their roles were different, but at times necessarily overlapped, meaning that a certain amount of 'blurring' was taking place. Most interviewees were comfortable with this, at least within limits. Police officers felt that that they could make a useful contribution to rehabilitative efforts by adopting a relatively empathetic response towards people on IOM. For example:

'We do have to be more flexible. We do have to be slightly more accommodating. We do have to understand that what we're asking of these individuals is to change lifelong patterns of behaviour, entrenched behaviour. some of the nominals, you know, they are more receptive to us.' (Police OM)

Provision of services

One of the original ideas behind the development of IOM was that the participants would receive quicker access to a range of services to meet their needs than is normally experienced by people on probation. This would not only enhance their chances of rehabilitation, but would act as a 'carrot' to offset the 'stick' of closer surveillance and more demanding requirements, thereby encouraging better compliance and engagement. However, this is not a statutory duty or normally written into contracts, and we found a number of contrasting views and experiences regarding the extent to which people on IOM were given priority access to services in practice.

Some interviewees, particularly those whose team was co-located with relevant providers, felt that access to services was often more timely and effective than in generic probation practice. This was generally put down to close relationships that had grown up between IOM staff and providers (some of whom regularly attended MACC meetings), whereby the latter were made more aware of the benefits that could arise from meeting the needs of people on IOM quickly.

For example, asked whether IOM participants got an enhanced substance misuse service, one police manager replied:

‘I think so. I think we have a bigger voice. And I think that really does help. Because the drug service know that they are IOM offenders. But it's only because we've had in information that says they may be going off the rails, and if we can nip it in the bud, we might be able to resolve it before it becomes a crime.’ (Police manager)

Likewise, a Probation OM contrasted the following rapid response by a housing authority to an IOM participant who was sleeping rough, with previous experience in a non-IOM case:

‘In generic cases, I've had someone on the street for a month, sleeping in a doorway and was a serious domestic abuse perpetrator that didn't meet IOM and he was on the streets for over a month. There was a similar one that was high risk with DV, but who was IOM and they were housed. Yes, they were homeless for a period of time, but they were housed quickly. They've also given him like support workers who can provide 10 hours of support, but I can't get that for my generic cases. Things run so much smoother when I mention IOM. And also the housing officer, the manager, attends IOM meetings so that if we are having problems we mention them at the IOM meetings and that person gets housed quickly, they get the next bed available.’

(Probation OM)

Others, however, stated that IOM participants were not treated as special cases. Indeed, some agencies were criticized for adopting what appeared to be a negative attitude towards them. For example:

‘Mental health refusing to take IOM people until they stop their substance misuse does feel a little like they are trying to find a way of reducing the demand on their service without sounding unreasonable. Yeah, unfortunately, that is how it feels. Yeah, and when you think about it, a way not to prioritize our cohort over anybody else in the community. But when you think about the impact of that, if we leave these people undiagnosed or untreated from a mental health perspective, then they do go on to commit further offences so there's more victims in the community, they're going back into prison at a cost of whatever is it 50 grand a year? So there's a cost to mental health refusing to provide a service.’ (Probation OM)

‘Another problem we're finding is that our mental health services just don't want to work with any of our cases because any time we refer into them when we know it's mental health issues, they say it's a drug issue, or that there's nothing wrong with them. So I would say they are the two main barriers we have in this area are housing and mental health.’ (Probation OM)

The interviews also revealed significant differences in levels and quality of provision between areas. In rural areas, especially, it was stated that there is often very patchy provision. Indeed, even within one IOM area, what is available in a town may not be available in the more rural parts of their ‘patch’:

‘[Town] has all the services under the world.... so it becomes very easy to be able to say ‘There's a GP that will take some difficult cases, there's a substance misuse treatment service which will deliver this, here everything is available.’ Trying to

duplicate that once you get outside of the town boundary it becomes sparse and it becomes minimal, and I think the local authority provision of service and opportunity gets smaller as you get to a smaller local authority... So then you're really having to search... We've done quite a lot of work internally. ...So what can we control internally and then how do we influence external? I think those are the biggest challenges. You can't duplicate services in rural areas and then you'll just get in a drop off of POPs engaging.' (Probation manager)

Nevertheless, whatever the response of other agencies, it seemed to be generally agreed that the efforts that IOM offender managers made to secure assistance for participants often demonstrated a degree of commitment and persistence that went well beyond what is usually evident in generic cases. For example, a Probation manager said of her staff:

'I think what I will say is there's more of an impact on probation practitioners [from working in IOM] because they step in and do the additional work that other agencies are not there to do... So our staff will be sitting there filling forms in with people for housing etc. They will be talking to the POP, managing anxiety, ringing GPs, taking people to doctors and housing and substance misuse. So it puts a burden on the workload of the practitioners and those officers to make sure the POP is not disadvantaged. But they should be a priority for other services.' (Probation manager)

This did not apply only to Probation OMs. Some police officers were also said by probation staff to play an important practical role in rehabilitative work, especially by helping people to access welfare services. For example:

'Probation is there to do the intervention work and stuff like that with the POPs as well as manage their risk. But a lot of the time the police have chased other agencies. Things like the need for benefits or an update with housing. So, our roles do merge a little bit.'
(Probation OM)

Indeed, one of the police OMs argued strongly that such work was very much a part of their role, emphasising its value as a key element in engaging people on IOM and changing negative attitudes to the police, as well as potentially reducing re-offending:

'We work for a reduction in their offending by any means possible within our remit, obviously, but I found some of the cases that I've worked with, it's been a case of I've been visiting them once a week, I've not really been getting much out of them and I know them from my previous days when I worked as a general police officer. I know the demand that they would cause and how anti police they were, but just by having that one visit a week where it's just a chat of how you doing, you OK, is there anything much going on this week? They're engaged really well and I've noted massive reduction in their offending just by that... And then there's the cases that there's a lot of work that goes into it and they're willing to engage regularly, there's a case at the moment who I have taken on numerous house viewings. I take him to his mental health appointments and he wants me to sit in them with him and they're sort of every fortnight at the moment and if somebody is willing to receive support we have to help. I will do whatever possible for them really.' (Police OM)

Interventions

A number of structured interventions such as (both accredited and non-accredited) offending behaviour or anger management programmes are available, to which people on IOM, like others under probation supervision, can be referred. However, probation interviewees said that they were not often utilised. This was partly because they were thought suitable for relatively few participants, but another important hindrance was that there were often significant delays in accessing them. It was pointed out that in a population with high re-offending rates, many were back in prison before they had attended their first session.

‘We only have a few intervention programmes running. It's taken about a year and a half to get them on to their programmes and by that time they've gone back into custody, so they never end up doing it.’ (Probation manager)

In rural areas particularly, it was said, it often takes months to build up enough people to run a group intervention, by which time the need for it may have reduced significantly – although, as one Probation OM pointed out, if it was ordered by the court, they still have to attend:

‘If they have to wait a long time for an intervention programme to run, it is a problem. If it is a year or 18 months after they were convicted they may have made the relevant changes and might say that they are not that person any more, not the person they were when they committed the offence so it's actually more damaging for them to complete that programme now but it might be court ordered. ... It is a rural problem.’
(Probation OM)

Some offender managers preferred to deliver interventions themselves on a one-to-one basis, which not only solved the problem of delayed access, but allowed them to adapt interventions to fit individual service users’ needs and learning styles:

‘So, we've got a like a portal through IOM. I can't remember what it's called and there's an anger management sort of like through that. What we can do if we can't get enough for a full intervention is a one-to-one with them. So, I do that with them for this 'thinking skills' one about cannabis and alcohol and I've used them before and I do think that they are really good because they seem to work. Other programmes I've had to do with workbooks I've had to adapt and kind of come up with my own way because you have so many different learning styles, some can do them, some need colours and things we use for the youngsters. Others have autism and need to be doodling for the intervention to work.’ (Probation OM)

A related message that emerged from answers by both probation and police staff to our questions about interventions was that even quite simple activities out of the office environment could be helpful in engaging participants. For example:

‘I've also suggested possible activities with our nominals, if they'd do it. I don't see any reason why we can't be doing that joint with probation to save resources. Whether it's an organised walk with them. If they want to come on things like that just to get them out of that office environment and just an appointment either out of their home address and out of an office... So that's in the process of being discussed’. (Police OM)

‘Um, how to develop IOM? I think look more looking more activities in the community. So like we've got a few people that would like to try fishing, so maybe putting funding

into things like that and giving them stuff with positive use of time... For the people we've got, the gym is a massive protective factor for them, but they haven't got the funds to go to a gym and we can't fund that. But we've got people without phones and without bus passes, so put funding into the things that are actually beneficial for them because it is important, and maybe a few activities like fishing because they need to have activities other than interventions. Other activities that might divert them from crime.'

(Probation OM)

'Anything like, go walk. Walk up Pen-y-Fan, right? Because it's something to do. When you go up, you're talking to them. That increases the contact time. We might be talking about other things in their lives. That gives us insight into how... Because the more time you spend around them, but to know somebody, you don't have to speak about things.'

(Probation OM)

There is also evidence in the literature that using a strengths-based approach and getting people who offend involved in practical activities increases engagement with the desistance process (Maruna and Lebel, 2003). One interviewee endorsed this view in a discussion about the past use and value of 4B centres.

'When I worked at a 4B centre, you would do activities all day. They were not accredited programme stuff, but you had stuff that developed an individual forward. You had things to do, things to occupy you. I was hoping for lots of money for activities, there has been a bit more money, but that's for the police, I think.'

(Probation OM)

More generally, several Probation OM's felt that one of the main strengths of IOM – and one of the attractions of working in an IOM team - was the opportunities it allowed them to adopt flexible or creative approaches to supervision. In many cases, they said, this had led to greater engagement from participants, even among some of those who started with strongly negative attitudes to authority. It is worth noting in this context that senior probation management in Wales has recently demonstrated support for the above kinds of approach by using resources from the government's discretionary IOM Regional Outcome and Innovation Fund to enable more experimentation with activities such as dog walking, drama, and mind counselling.

Compliance and breach

The greater flexibility in practice that seemed to exist in IOM as compared to standard offender management, also appeared to extend in some areas to responses to failures to comply, including decisions to take breach action. Among probation OM's, this seemed to be driven to some extent by an understanding that the contact requirements for people on IOM (especially in the Fixed cohort) can be very demanding for people whose lives are chaotic, and it would be harsh to expect them to appear for every appointment on time. For instance:

'I'm very flexible. If people miss two appointments a week but they attend four... I'm fine with that. I've not got a problem with that. ... because you can't be too regimented.'

(Probation OM)

'I'm not so worried about times ... I'm in the office ... and I see them if they come, if I get an appointment at eleven, they turn up at three. I don't care. I'm in the office. I'll see him. ... I'm not trying to make them Saints overnight.'

(Probation OM)

Although this kind of flexibility was advocated more frequently by probation than police staff, some police officers were also prepared to support avoidance of enforcement action if there were good reasons for doing so. This is illustrated in the following comments from a police sergeant:

‘I think that [police and probation] have both got a common aim. We want to reduce offending and reoffending. Not one agency can deal with on their own. I think over the last maybe 5-10 years that we've now come to agree across the board that not one agency can solve society's problems. If we don't work as a partnership, we're not going to solve anything. But I do believe that our objective is to integrate those offenders back into the community. It was a steep learning curve for me because I think when I started, let's recall them, let's send them back. I learned very quickly that we do have to have the offenders in the Community, therefore we can manage them with licence conditions, with restrictions so that we can help to integrate them back into society and therefore protect the local community, and I don't think that we can do it individually. Police will be more looking to go out and sort of tackle issues and bring a person to justice. In the IOM field, you know we're not looking to go out to tackle people. We're actually looking to manage those people in the community.’ (Police manager)

Another police manager gave a concrete example of discussions that took place between IOM police and probation colleagues and non-IOM police officers concerning whether punitive action, including breach and prosecution, should be taken against a person on IOM who had been caught in a relative minor episode of shoplifting. This led to an agreement to oppose sanctions on the grounds that this would produce a greater chance of positive outcomes:

‘We have, or we did have, a prolific shoplifter on a cohort. Says all the right things in terms of not going to do it anymore. However, quite clearly got to a point over the weekend... that person had gone out and shoplifted. Came into work on the Monday morning. She was remanded for court on the Monday. Colleagues from uniform ringing me, saying right, she's in the cells. We've obviously remanded to her for court. We're looking for a recall.

Up until that point, this person's compliance was doing really well. She had stable accommodation. She was engaging with the drug agencies, and we were able to fight off the argument for a recall very quickly. Within half an hour, because we were told in no uncertain terms that if she went to prison then she would lose her accommodation. That's huge for IOM offenders, so if we could sort of deal with her compliance issues outside of a recall environment then then she would keep her property. Within the space of half an hour, phone calls happened, discussions happened, and we were able to get information across the court to say look, you know yes, we're annoyed that she's done X, Y and Z. However, we're not going to recall.’ (Police manager)

A Probation manager also noted that police attitudes in her team had altered in recent years:

‘I remember... real battles with the police because they just wanted to catch him, protect everyone by getting him back in prison, off the streets. And it is just lovely now because that has changed. And now ... if we've got people who were missing an appointment, the police and probation officer, they've walked the streets looking for them, they're going to all the known addresses they can think of. They're looking at the regular haunts

and instead of just sending out an enforcement letter, there's a real over and above to try and secure work compliance in a very different way.' (Probation manager)

At the same time – and echoing findings from previous empirical research on IOM (Cram 2018, 2023) - police officers clearly saw risk management as a central element of their role, and most interviewees agreed that as a general rule they tended to be less tolerant than their probation colleagues of breaches of conditions. The following comment from a police sergeant focuses on the speed and efficiency with which partnership work can be used to activate sanctions:

'So, say for example an IOM nominal ... has got a licence condition not to be at an address ... or they're meant to disclose any new relationships ... So then once you share that information with precision, we've got that recall going in or positive action warning letter and things. It's just having that effective risk management and being quite robust in our processes. So yeah, so I see that as a real benefit.' (Police manager)

Perhaps the situation was most neatly summed up by a probation OM who, although fully acknowledging that many of their police counterparts did try to forge relationships with people on IOM and genuinely tried to assist their rehabilitation, also made the point that ultimately police and probation officers have different roles and a different 'mindset' – acceptance of which may be healthier for partnership working than each group trying to turn the other totally into a version of themselves:

'The police are different because they've got different aims. Their aims are slightly different, although we should be the same. It's our culture, I think probation is to help people, assist them, assist and about relationships. Now the police want a relationship, but they're quite happy to lock him up.' (Probation OM)

DATA AND PERFORMANCE

Three specific recommendations from the Joint Inspectorates' report (2020) were that the police and probation services should 'improve the quality and accuracy of recording in IOM cases', 'provide information on service user profiles, characteristics and needs... to support the development of IOM and commissioning of services', and 'ensure that there is one performance framework that can help measure the impact of IOM on the cost of crime and the rehabilitation of service users.'

The resultant changes introduced as part of the Refresh included improvements to the accuracy and comprehensiveness of recording, collection and analysis of information about the people on IOM, and the creation of a set of standard indicators with which to compare performance across different areas of England and Wales (HMPPS/NPCC, 2020). We asked interviewees to comment on these changes.

Improvements to information systems

Interviewees pointed out that prior to the Refresh, the then Programme Manager had collected some basic statistical information from local areas, but inconsistency and unreliability in IOM records, together with the variety of cohorts and activities being undertaken made it difficult to produce regular or standardised data on operational outputs or performance, or to make

meaningful comparisons between areas. For example, in some areas significant numbers of participants had completed their supervision but their IOM flags had not been removed from computer systems: as a result, it was difficult to state with confidence how many people were still actually under supervision.

On the implementation of the Refresh reforms in Wales, careful reviews were undertaken of data held in both police and probation systems in order to ‘weed out’ errors and remove names of people no longer under IOM supervision. The reviews also considered whether some of the people currently under supervision were still appropriate participants in IOM, and if not, arrangements were made to deselect them. Some of these were considered to have been on IOM for too long (a possibly apocryphal story about this that several interviewees had heard was that one person was found to have been on IOM for ten years!). Others were felt not to fit well with the new criteria in the FFF system. As a result, the total numbers recorded as IOM supervisees decreased significantly over a period of a few months (deselection being handled sensitively rather than involving immediate ejection). Importantly, too, managers at national level could now be confident in the accuracy of the figures.

The data reviews and subsequent ‘culls’ of the IOM population were unanimously agreed to have been long overdue. The Programme Manager now has an accurate and up-to-date picture of the numbers of participants in each of the FFF categories in each PDU. A ‘dashboard’ has also been developed by analysts to maintain an easily searchable record of their demographic profiles and assessed criminogenic needs. Originally developed in Wales, this has now been adopted and modified for use across the whole of England and Wales. It not only assists the commissioning of interventions, but has the potential to provide some ‘soft’ measures of effectiveness based on changes in levels of need, as well as indications of whether IOM has had any impact on the costs of crime committed by participants (although these figures can be misleading and have to be treated with caution).

On the other hand, perhaps the most important data issue that remains problematic is that, as several interviewees pointed out, the police and probation IT systems for recording information about people on IOM – principally, Niche and NDelius – remain separate. This inevitably causes delays in information-sharing. As noted earlier, the problems are greatly ameliorated in areas with co-located staff (who share information through conversations and meetings as well as electronically) but can be sizeable in areas where personal contact is more sporadic. One police interviewee reported that a partial solution had been created by making local adaptations to the Niche system, explaining these as follows:

- ‘So I came in and right okay, so how do I find out who are my IOM nominals? How do I find out what's going on with them without contacting probation? We couldn't do it ourselves and then obviously we'd have to troll through Delius with them, which isn't ideal. So since then I've discussed it with my Sergeant and he completely agreed, he's bought in that we've created non crime occurrences on our system for each of our individuals... each of my nominals have their own occurrence created for them where I can log every contact. I'll put the terms of their licence on there. And, say, if I was to leave the role or go off on long term sick someone else would know exactly where I was with each case. Without it, it would be really difficult for people to find out who is on the cohort, what is going on with them, whereas now, if anybody wants to find out, they can go on to my workload. They can find the individual and they can see all the work that's going on with that person. When the last visit was, what was said at

the last visit, the licence conditions, the matrix score and all that goes on there. So that's been a real positive I find from a police point of view.' (Police OM)

While this may work very well in one area, the long-term goal favoured by several was for a dedicated IOM database that can be used across the country.

Performance indicators

The Refresh brought with it a set of performance indicators which allow comparisons between areas across England and Wales. These include 'service level measures' of the percentages of people in employment and settled accommodation on release from prison and at 3 and 6 months afterwards, as well as the average numbers of Fixed category appointments offered and met.

Regarding the employment and housing indicators, performance across Wales has generally emerged at well below the target percentages set. Managers argued that these had been set unrealistically high for this type of population and moreover that performance depended to a large extent on the general socio-economic conditions in the different areas. Other concerns mentioned were that it could be time-consuming to obtain accurate data, that missing data was common, and that some successful cases were excluded from the figures because people had been deselected from IOM (for positive reasons) before the 3 or 6-month point.

On the other hand, appointments figures were said to be relatively close to targets and had been increasing over time. Most interviewees were comfortable with three appointments a week as a target, although as noted earlier, some felt that particular categories of IOM participant – notably young people – did not all need such frequent contacts every week and had concerns that being 'driven by statistics' could lead to placing excessive demands on them as well as increasing the risk of breach action for non-compliance. Performance is scrutinised at national (England and Wales) level as well as at English regional/Wales level, and senior management concerns about it are passed down to managers at PDU and local level. At present, we were told by a senior manager, pressure is not being applied to areas with poor figures, but some interviewees were aware of the danger that this could change.

At the same time, some concerns were expressed about ways in which contacts could fail to be counted in official performance figures. This was a particular problem when Probation was reliant on other agencies for information about attendance:

'I think the pressure is with the three appointments 'cause we get scrutinised as Probation for not having the three appointments when it's not our fault. If other agencies don't tell us when they have appointments, we have a problem. So I think the pressure is fulfilling those appointments, because sometimes police don't inform us that they've seen them. So with data protection it's quite difficult and we can't update our systems if we're not getting that information. We're not meeting the criteria of the target and then we're failing on the statistics just because there's no stand-alone IOM system, no IT shared between probation and police.' (Probation manager)

Finally, we were told by senior managers that some efforts are being made in Wales to delve deeper into available data to provide a richer and potentially more reliable picture of what is being done by IOM teams and its impact on those under supervision. This is more akin to research than to the production of standard performance figures. For example, the IOM national analyst produces regular 'spotlight' reports on particular issues, one such being an analysis of

what data the records contain in relation to ‘lifestyle and associates’ and responses to needs in this category. At the moment, most data for this sort of exercise comes from the Probation IT system, NDelius, but efforts are being made to combine it more effectively with data from systems in other organisations, especially police and prisons.

SERVICE USER RESPONSES AND ENGAGEMENT

As we did not interview people subject to IOM, we can only rely on accounts from managers and staff to gain a sense of how participants were responding to the multi-agency supervision they received. Overall, our interviewees described a very mixed picture of reactions, ranging from enthusiastic engagement to sullen resentment. They also asserted that quite large numbers who started with negative views of IOM later displayed much more positive attitudes towards it.

In elaborating on their answers, several of the probation interviewees emphasised that the nature of the population on IOM presents supervisors with exceptionally strong challenges from the outset. It includes many with prolific crime records who have served significant periods in prison, have long-held negative views about ‘authority figures’ and/or have major social and psychological problems, making them as a group more difficult to engage than people typically encountered in generic probation caseloads. As two Probation OMs explained, some were simply not ready to change:

‘For some people all you can do is just manage their risk. They're not at the point where they want to make changes, and you're trying everything possible, but they just don't want to make those changes. You can give them the skills and that's all, they may still enter custody, unfortunately.’ (Probation OM)

‘We can only do so much. We can do as much as possible, we can try. We can give them the skills, we can put housing in place, but it's they that need to make those changes, so their assets and their motivation is a big thing.’ (Probation OM)

At the other end of the scale, some were said to greatly prefer IOM to standard probation supervision. To explore this further, we asked interviewees about the reactions of participants to specific elements of IOM that distinguish it from ‘normal’ probation supervision – most importantly, that it involves much more frequent contact (including home visits) with supervisors and others in authority, and that the latter include police officers.

Regarding frequent contact, IOM staff reported that different individuals - and to some extent different demographic groups - reacted very differently, some greatly welcoming it but others resenting it, finding it a burden, or not understanding why it was necessary.

Most older adults, it was said, tended to accept the increased contact without complaint:

‘From my experience, they [the older offenders] do tend to be a little more invested in their supervision. That's probably because they've gotten to know the staff so well and the police officers over the years that this is now part of their life, and they've accepted that they need to do this to move forward, even if they do come back.’

(Probation OM)

Some, indeed, positively welcomed the extra attention and support they were offered. The following is an example of someone who much preferred IOM to his previous experience of probation supervision, particularly valuing the continuity of supervisor it had given him, and the extra time it had allowed them to talk together and build a trusting relationship:

‘I've worked with one bloke who has had 12 offender managers in his offending career and he feels he has no hope. He has never opened up to the offender managers because he thought “They're not going to be around for that long because I've had so many”. He says IOM is the best he has ever done because we've spent time together and we've talked and he feels like he can open up because he's been under my supervision for so long. So, I think that makes a massive difference as well, continuity of officer not just passing POPS from one person to another.’ (Probation OM)

By contrast, it was said that certain groups were likely to feel particularly negative or apathetic towards frequent contact, especially office appointments, and especially those involving meetings with the police (cf. Sleath and Brown, 2019; Cram, 2023). Young people – including, as intimated earlier, those transitioning from the youth justice to adult system - were the most often mentioned in this respect. Indeed, there was some sympathy among staff for their feelings. For example:

‘I suppose it's so uncool for them to be involved with coming to probation three times each week or having a meeting with the police, so they don't tend to involve themselves in their supervision as much as we'd like them to. A lot of that's based on maturity.’
(Probation OM)

‘You spend so much time dedicated each week to seeing them and they want nothing to do with you, they'll sort of fold their arms and just shrug their shoulders as stropky teenagers. And I just find that we're not getting much out of them. Some of them do work well, and I understand that in the transition from youth justice into the adult world they do need as much support as possible. But I found some of the cases, because they have to come on to IOM. that it's a bit of a frustration really when they don't want to engage with us... Some of them do like it and take to me at once. But I do find the majority find it quite scary really, because although it's intended to have the opposite effect that they have all this support, they're sort of passed on from youth justice who I know do a lot of work with them and they do build good relationships, then sat in a room with a probation officer, a police officer and told, right, you're on this now we're going to see you once a week.’ (Probation OM)

It should, however, be noted that a Probation manager reported that this was no longer an issue their area because the number of Y2A transition cases referred to them had fallen markedly. Instead, the Youth Justice Service was ‘holding on to’ most of them until their sentence was completed.

Other groups mentioned as challenging to supervise included people who were homeless, those with major substance misuse problems, and people involved with gangs. It is well established that homelessness and addiction are barriers to accessing services (Ee and Zhang, 2022; Williams *et al*, 2012; Martinelli *et al*, 2020) and our findings are consistent with previous research. Interviewees told us that service users who present issues with addiction usually attend their appointments, both with probation and with substance misuse workers, but often do not engage seriously enough to make progress in addressing their needs:

‘I'd like to say our cases do engage with us pretty well because we have got good relationships with them, even those with substance misuse issues still manage to come into appointments, but on some days they don't even know what day it is. They still attend, but they are not aware or mentally present during it, therefore are not engaging to the extent needed.’ (Probation OM)

‘I feel like we're really limited as to what we can encourage them to get engaged in. The odd one or two when they're level-headed might mention that they want to go to the gym, but then they might not ever be level-headed enough to be able to commit to. Even just simple community activities where I've tried to engage one of my cases in an allotment group where he can go in the daytime. But actually, his sense of self-esteem was so low that he didn't want to do that because he sees himself as different to everybody else in the community.’ (Probation OM)

Practitioners’ strategies to improve engagement

IOM staff described a number of steps they took in response to those participants who found the numbers of required contacts burdensome and/or were particularly difficult to engage. This applied particularly to people in the Fixed cohort, where the standard minimum number of contacts is three per week. As described earlier, many OMs tried to keep the number of routine office appointments fairly low, making up the total through home visits, referrals to welfare service, and/or telephone calls. This also provided more variety in the people seen by the participants, as visits and phone calls could be undertaken by police officers or workers from partner agencies as well as probation staff. In addition to the greater variety of experience this produced, it was argued by some that meeting in less formal circumstances outside the office could make a valuable contribution to improving engagement:

‘As I think Peter Raynor would say, it's all about the relationship, and how you build a relationship is not sitting down face to face. I mean, that's just more difficult. You need to *do* things with people.’ (Probation OM)

Engaging people with serious substance misuse problems was seen as, if anything, a more difficult task, but it was felt that IOM had the advantage of working closely with partner agencies which could provide them with services they badly needed; this could at least be used to ‘lure’ them into attending:

‘With people who are difficult to persuade to work with us, one lure is the drugs worker especially when they want to go on a script because they've got to work with our drug agencies to be able to go on one or to go to rehab.’ (Probation OM)

‘So, for some people just having that interventions tab and being able to provide that support to have that constant feedback from police and other agencies at regular meetings is really beneficial and we can make those risk management decisions as well as provide the best support for certain people.’ (Police OM)

Regarding involvement with gangs, we were told that there is now a specialised provision being piloted within IOM that manages young people and is building knowledge and expertise on how to best work with those with gang connections – a development welcomed by the interviewees who mentioned it:

‘It’s a cohort that was neglected before. They would have just been managed by the standard IOM team. But in xxxxx, we’re seeing a lot of gang-related things. Serious organised crime from very, very young men. So, pulling that team together has been great.’ (Probation OM)

More generally, the key message seemed to be that IOM work provides greater opportunities for staff to get to know the people under their supervision well, and to use a degree of flexibility and creativity to respond to their individual wishes and concerns, thereby increasing the chances of ‘getting through’ to them and earning their trust. One example was given of such a response:

‘When we’ve done home visits we have met children. I worked with someone for quite a while and he had a baby and even brought the baby into the probation office even though you’re not allowed to bring children to probation offices. He wanted me to meet his little baby so you do, and I think that’s really good to have that relationship because they want to show you what’s going on in their life and they feel like they can trust you. And then they are more likely to open up to say look. I’m really really struggling at the moment. Can you please put some support in place? Because if they don’t trust you or don’t want to engage with you, you’re not going to know what’s going on, and you have been able to prevent that.’ (Probation OM)

Regarding negative attitudes or hostility towards the police, the police officers we interviewed were well aware of the obstacles they had to overcome if (as most claimed) they were to play a useful part in the rehabilitation, rather than just the surveillance, of people on IOM. However, they reported that they were able to develop friendly and to some extent trusting relationships with a fair number of the latter. For example:

‘I think they realise that we are actually there to help them. From a policing perspective, they know we’re police officers. They understand we’ve got a job to do. But I think they understand we’re not there to catch them out. We don’t want to catch them out’.
(Police manager)

‘That should be a key criterion to being offered a role in IOM - can they actually speak to people? Because if you haven’t got that relationship with partner agencies or your nominals, you’re not going to get anything productive done. The foundation of IOM is building those relationships’. (Police OM)

The ‘lure’ of better access to services was also said to be attractive to some participants and could outweigh doubts about engaging with police officers. For example, one Probation OM stated:

‘I think that if we gave them the choice, they would choose IOM because more often than not they are accepting of it, when I explain it to them they want it. I don’t have to persuade them. It is not very often that a POP says Oh no, I don’t want to work with you and the police and oh no, I don’t want these extra appointments. They recognise that they need that extra support.’ (Probation OM)

Importantly, too, as noted earlier, it was said by both police and probation interviewees that quite a few of those who started IOM with a strong dislike of the police eventually came round to regarding them in a much more positive light:

‘When the police and probation visit people pre-release, they will often say I don't want to work with you because I can't, you know, I hate the police, I hate probation ... then later they say I can't believe I'm telling this to a police officer. I can't believe I'm working with a police officer.’ (Police OM)

‘Engagement is about the right individual. It is individual, I think a big thing is getting the right person in the role and whether that's the probation officer or the police officer. I found most people once they sort of have two or three appointments with me, they will warm to me and they will carry on that engagement. ... Initially a lot of people who haven't had good experience with police before ... if they know I am a police officer they might say I'm not working with that, not a chance. But once they get to know me it's OK. It's about the individual in the role. License conditions requiring them to engage with us can help at the start, can help to push them to engage. A lot of people do actually look forward to our appointments, which is a good thing. So yeah, yeah, I think the individual connections are a massive thing and if you've got the right personality type and the right approach to speaking to people, then you're halfway there.’ (Police OM)

One example was given of sudden change of mind happening on the first day of a person's release from prison, apparently triggered by the fact that police officers took the trouble of picking him up by car and offering him help in a manner he responded to:

‘I had a case allocated and prior to him being released he was absolutely dead against working with the police. He's had a massive hatred towards them for many years, violent towards them, lots of convictions against the police was absolutely adamant that he wasn't going to work with them. They picked him up on the day and he actually got in the car, engaged, and now he's, you know, he's a really successful story. He's engaged in every single appointment to the point I met him last week. And he said, you know, I actually enjoy them coming and doing a home visit. They don't stay long enough.’
(Probation OM)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The following short summaries outline our main findings. We reiterate that the research was limited in scale and although it covered a fairly wide range of areas and IOM staff, care should be taken not to assume that these results fully represent staff views and practice across Wales.

1. The great majority of local managers and staff interviewed had very positive views of IOM in general, and were broadly satisfied with the changes brought about by the Refresh.
2. The features of IOM most frequently highlighted as key to its effectiveness were close partnership working and timely (and often face to face) sharing of information. These, it was said, enabled both police and probation to be more rapidly aware of, to better understand and to respond more effectively to emerging issues of concern (e.g. by providing support, issuing warnings, or using powers to breach), in many cases acting jointly or in co-ordination. It was also emphasised that co-location of police and probation teams – even if only part-time - was particularly valuable in enabling this.

3. The lower than usual caseloads, combined with opportunities to see people on IOM more often and in a variety of formal and informal settings, were said to make it easier for Probation OMs to develop closer and more trusting relationships with them than with people subject to probation supervision under the normal routine of scheduled office appointments. This was in spite of the fact that a high proportion of people on IOM have a history of failure to engage well with Probation. Additionally, despite it being common for participants to express hostility towards the police, interviewees gave examples of police OMs overcoming initial hostility and eventually developing good relationships. This was achieved mainly through good communication skills and demonstrating by actions such as helping people with access to welfare services, that they genuinely wanted to help them change their lives. More generally, interviewees reported that they were encouraged to be flexible in the way they responded to people on IOM, treating them as individuals and finding creative ways of engaging them. Some also said they had found simple activities conducted outside offices, such as group walks or fishing, to be more productive settings for getting people to engage and discuss their problems honestly, than formal interventions delivered on Probation premises.
4. Similarly, Probation interviewees generally agreed that IOM gave them more space and opportunity than standard supervision to use flexibility and discretion in response to failures to comply with conditions. Often, both probation and police managers took part in discussions as to what action to take, and although the latter generally took a 'harder' line, examples were given of police officers advocating against breaching or prosecuting particular participants in order to avoid undermining the progress they had made.
5. Regarding the Refresh, there was widespread agreement among local practitioners that IOM practice had previously become too inconsistent, and the great majority welcomed – in principle at least - the introduction of the centrally defined 'Fixed' category of offenders as the core focus of their work. At the same time, most were keen to retain some flexibility to respond effectively to local differences in crime patterns and offender populations and, to this end, also welcomed the inclusion of the 'Flex' and 'Free' categories to allow them to set and address other priorities of their own.
6. Despite the general support for the FFF system, concerns about it were raised by some interviewees. Perhaps most importantly, it was argued that for some participants, particularly younger people in the Fixed category, IOM supervision could be onerous in its intensity, creating a higher risk of failure to meet the requirements and thereby to end up in breach proceedings and a return to custody. It was further argued that the practice of including all 'Y2A' people transitioning from the youth to adult system (albeit usually for a short period and in the less onerous 'Flex' system) risked net-widening for those who had relatively little criminality in their background.
7. In some areas, close relationships (strengthened by regular communication at multi-agency meetings) between IOM teams and welfare agencies result in IOM participants receiving accelerated access to services. This can act as a strong 'carrot' for them to engage constructively with supervisors. Elsewhere however, despite the efforts of IOM staff, they are not given any form of priority by other agencies, meaning that potentially key benefits of the IOM system may be lost.

8. Rural areas experience a number of significant challenges, including travel problems for both staff and service users which are increased by the additional contact requirements associated with IOM. They also tend to have different crime patterns - and hence different priorities - from urban areas, leading some teams to feel that the FFF system is not best suited to their local circumstances.
9. Both managers and staff were happy that the Refresh had led to the regular production of reliable information about the size, composition and needs of IOM cohorts across Wales, as well as data on their teams' 'performance' at local level. The latter was not seen as creating unwelcome pressure. However, it was pointed out that some of the performance figures may be explained by the socio-economic situation of the area, rather than reflecting strengths and weaknesses of the work of the local IOM team.
10. Based on staff perceptions (we did not interview participants), the picture that emerges of service users' responses to IOM is very mixed, ranging from hostility to strong engagement. It was reported that younger people, the homeless, and those with substance misuse problems were often the most resistant or difficult to engage, while older people (including some with a history of hostility to authority) tended to respond more favourably to the extra attention and assistance. However, attitudes were also said to be dynamic, with positive changes over time quite common as participants got to know their supervisors (both probation and police) better 'as people'.

The main conclusions we draw from these findings are, first, that IOM in Wales is in a much healthier state than it was prior to the Refresh. The Refresh has brought with it a considerable injection of central government funding into IOM which has been used in Wales, among other things, to increase the staff in the central Programme Office, create new posts locally (including senior administrators and intensity workers) and provide a number of innovative interventions. An important consequence has been the regular production and collation of detailed and accurate information about cohorts, activities and performance. This has been of great value to the IOM Cymru board, senior managers and individual areas, and has silenced long-standing complaints about the lack of reliable data about IOM. It has also led to increased communication (mainly via online meetings) between the centre and local teams, creating valuable opportunities for practitioners to share information and discuss the learning from issues and experiences as they arise. The key question, of course, is whether a sufficient level of funding will be maintained into the future to consolidate these gains.

Secondly, co-location in some form – whether full-time or part-time - was almost universally seen as a valuable component of IOM work, and we conclude that finding ways to introduce it in areas that have no police-probation co-location deserves to be treated as a priority. We might add that many interviewees felt that inviting more external agencies (including from the Third Sector) to share co-located offices would also be beneficial.

Finally, more thought could be given to the concern that some (particularly younger) IOM participants find it very difficult to cope with the rigorous demands of the scheme and hence face an enhanced risk of breach for non-compliance. It may be that, rather than being encouraged to adopt a 'one size fits all' approach to minimum contact levels in the Fixed cohort, local teams should be advised to review cases at intervals to decide whether three contacts remains the optimum requirement for particular individuals, taking into account the risks they pose, their needs, their responses to supervision, their progress towards rehabilitation, what practical difficulties they face in attending appointments, and so on.

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