

**MULTI-AGENCY GOVERNANCE:  
Dorset Threshold Dialogue Governance Board  
By Jane Ball and Peter Garrett**

**Context**

From 2006 to 2010 Prison Dialogue developed a multi-agency systemic through the gate initiative to work with offenders from the Dorset Area to reduce reoffending<sup>1</sup>. It began as Bournemouth Threshold Dialogue based in HMP Dorchester and Boscombe, an area of Bournemouth. Prison Dialogue saw the need and opportunity to extend the network to include other prisons and community sites and recognised that the decision and management of that growth should be led and managed locally. In 2008 Prison Dialogue partnered with Dorset Police to gather relevant agencies, and proposed setting up a local governance structure to provide strategic direction, operation and management of Threshold Dialogue across the system. As Threshold Dialogue extended from Bournemouth across the County of Dorset, the initiative became known as Dorset Threshold Dialogue.

**Aims and Objectives**

The aim of the Governance Board was to reduce recidivism and increase the rate of successful resettlement in the area through developing and maintaining a Dorset Threshold Dialogue network in the prisons and community. An Operations Group was also established to ensure the necessary operational decision-making and resource allocation.

**Method: Activity, Participants and Duration**

The Governance Board met from January 2008 to 2010. Membership was established with the relevant statutory agencies: Dorset Police represented by the Superintendent responsible for Community Policing; Dorset Probation represented by the Head of Adult Services; HMP Dorchester, HMP Guys Marsh and HMYOI Portland each represented by their Governor; Bournemouth Borough Council represented by the Safer and Stronger Communities Manager; along with Prison Dialogue.

The Governance Board met quarterly for the first 18 months, during which time ownership and responsibility for Threshold Dialogue was gradually

handed over to local hands. The Chair of the Board, Superintendent Stuart Katon provided strong leadership and sponsorship for this, which proved crucial. The early work of the Board included: establishing an inter-agency Facilitation Team<sup>2</sup> of staff from local criminal justice agencies; supporting applications to the Bournemouth Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to fund facilitation training; agreeing criteria for the prisoners to be targeted by Threshold Dialogue; and setting evaluation measures.

In 2010 the terms of reference were reviewed and formalised to include the following objectives:

1. Make whatever strategic decisions are necessary , and secure adequate resourcing for Dorset Threshold Dialogue to develop and meet its potential within the Line of Sight vision<sup>3</sup>
2. Effect policy changes where these benefit the individual partner agencies and their ability to provide an integrated support and challenge system for offenders and ex-offenders
3. Ensure there is an adequately staffed Operations Group and act as a reporting line for that group in strategic and policy matters
4. Ensure an adequate reserve of Facilitators are trained and supervised to run the Dialogue groups in the prisons and the community
5. Ensure adequate evaluation of Dorset Threshold Dialogue to measure the success of the partnership, and the reduction of recidivism and increase in resettlement as return on the investment made by the participating agencies
6. Report progress on an annual basis to a) Dorset Criminal Justice Board<sup>4</sup>  
b) Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships<sup>5</sup> that cover communities where Dorset Threshold Dialogue is operating

The Governance Board co-sponsored the Line of Sight Workshop<sup>6</sup> with the Dorset Reducing Re-offending Strategy Board to complete the handover of the Threshold Dialogue to the local agencies.

## **Outcomes**

The Dorset Threshold Dialogue network, with a multi-agency team of facilitators, an Operations Group and a 'doing the day job better' evaluation framework was developed effectively for local ownership from 2008-2010. As Prison Dialogue stepped back the Governance Board was integrated into the

Dorset Reducing Re-offending Strategy Board, a sub-group of the Dorset Criminal Justice Board. Changes in senior personnel affected most of the Governance Board members and at times threatened the effectiveness of the group.

## Learning

No single agency owns the whole system that affects an offender's journey from prison to resettlement. There are many agencies functioning as if they were independent. There are real challenges to getting them into an effective system that is aligned with a common purpose, especially without a single point of leadership. It requires collective governance at a strategic level and visible leadership to hold the collective together. Where strong leadership is provided across organisational boundaries, such as the Police provided when the Governance Board was first established, other agencies will follow that leadership. Collective leadership is threatened by management personnel changes, which can be destabilising where it happens too quickly, too often and with little transition management.

A large and complex open system can integrate effectively through partnership at the level of practice (facilitation team and the Dialogues themselves), management (Operations Group) and strategy (Governance Board).

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<sup>1</sup>See Case Study *Through the Gate Partnership: Bournemouth and Dorset Threshold Dialogue*

<sup>2</sup> See Case Study *Facilitation Training for Criminal Justice Staff: Creating a local facilitation team for Dorset Threshold Dialogue*

<sup>3</sup> The Line of Sight of Sight concept was developed by Prison Dialogue during the 5 year Threshold Dialogue programme. The vision is for all offenders to have a clear Line of Sight along their whole resettlement journey from prison cell to independent housing and employment in the community. The image is the line of sight as you are driving down a road - your journey is more likely to be safe, successful and enjoyable if you know where you are going, know where you have to take a turn, can see junctions clearly ahead and have time to anticipate what to do.

<sup>4</sup> There are 42 local Criminal Justice Boards across England and Wales. They bring together Chief Officers of the Criminal Justice System agencies to co-ordinate activity and share responsibility for delivering criminal justice in their areas.

<sup>5</sup> The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships are partnerships between the emergency services, local authorities, and public, private and voluntary sector agencies that work together to reduce crime, disorder and substance misuse. They were formed as a result of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

<sup>6</sup> See Case Study *Spatialised Offender Resettlement Journey: Line of Sight Workshop*