

# PROBATION Service Under THREAT

## YES TO A 'REHABILITATION REVOLUTION'

- NO TO PRIVATISATION
- NO TO REGIONALISATION



### WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSING?

In January 2013, the Government published 'Transforming Rehabilitation' setting out radical plans to reform the Probation Service in England and Wales. The Probation Trade Unions welcome the big idea behind the reform, which is to provide supervision and rehabilitation to those leaving prison after short sentences. But the Government is going about this in completely the wrong way. This briefing explains the flaws in the plans and sets out an alternative way to deliver the rehabilitation revolution we all want to see.

#### The Government wants to:

1. Privatise up to 70% of the work of the Probation Service: including offender management for all but the most dangerous offenders, programmes and community payback
2. Parcel up this work into big cross regional contracts and sell it off to whichever private sector company can do it most cheaply
3. Pay for the work via an untested 'payment by results' model
4. Force the 35 local Probation Trusts to merge to form 16 super-Trusts
5. Make these super-Trusts set up complicated arms-length bodies to bid against the private sector

### WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE PLANS?

GMB, Napo and UNISON represent workers in the 35 Probation Trusts in England and Wales. Our members work with offenders day-in day-out and they know what works. That is why we are campaigning to draw public and media attention to the flaws in these proposals. So what's wrong?

**Cost Before Quality:** The true motivation behind these plans is to drive down cost regardless of the impact on service quality. Staffing on the recently privatised London community payback contract has just been significantly reduced. Ministers promised to review the performance of this contract before pressing ahead with further privatisation, but now they are going ahead regardless. The fact is, privatisation has a poor track record in Probation and the Ministry of Justice an even poorer record in contract management.

**An End to Localism:** Probation is a local service; it gains its strength from local partnerships. But the Government's plans to parcel up probation work into 16 big regional contracts will destroy this. The current 35 local Probation Trusts are clearly under

threat, because under the Government's competition rules, they will be prevented from bidding for the new regional contracts on a level playing field with the private sector. The demise of Probation Trusts will see the best examples of local partnerships destroyed.

**Payment By Results (PBR): Untried and Untested:** The Government is touting PBR as key to driving the rehabilitation revolution, but it has no track record. The reality is: the big private sector outsourcing companies who want this work will lobby for as small a percentage of PBR as possible in the eventual contracts and the public sector and the voluntary sector will not be able to bear the financial risk that PBR demands when putting a bid together.

**Mutuals Won't Work:** Probation staff are being sold a lie, when Ministers suggest that employees could form mutuals or co-operative ventures to bid against the private sector. No-one seriously believes that little mutual organizations could bid against the big multi-nationals. The Government's promotion of a top-down mutual model misses the point that for mutualisation to succeed it must come from the workforce, not be forced upon it. Probation staff do not believe the hype.

**Ideology versus 'What Works':** While Ministers claim that the Probation Service is a failure because of high reoffending rates amongst short-term prisoners, it is a fact that despite constant pleading to Government, the Probation Service has no statutory responsibility for supervising anybody sentenced to 12 months custody or less. Reoffending rates for the individuals that Probation does supervise are much improved. Managed programmes have led to a 35% reduction in the re-offending rate. This is a success story that the Government should be building on by way of planned public investment that will ultimately reduce costs to the taxpayer, reduce reoffending and lead to safer communities.

So it is the view of the Probation unions that these plans are at best naïve and at worst born of political dogma. To make matters worse, the strategy is being rushed through without proper thought to the consequences. Key issues of democratic accountability have not been dealt with and the policy is completely opposite to the Government's often trumpeted pledge for localism. Instead, the Government is proposing that the Probation Service be reorganised in a way that will effectively decimate its operational scope and vital public safeguarding function.

## OUR ALTERNATIVE VISION

There is already a very successful organisation providing for the rehabilitation of offenders in England and Wales: it's called the Probation Service.

Employing less than 18,000 staff, the Probation Service has been quietly getting on with transforming offenders' lives and protecting communities from re-offending. In 2011/12, the Service met all of its targets and won the prestigious 'British Quality Foundation Gold Award for Excellence'. Reoffending rates for those individuals who are supervised by the Probation Service on managed programmes show a reduction in reoffending rates of 35%.

Everyone agrees that we need a rehabilitation revolution in England and Wales. For too long we have relied on ineffective prisons to keep our communities safe, when we all knew that they failed to reform those locked up at great public expense. As trade unions, we share the Justice Secretary's ambition that all offenders, including those released from short term prison sentences, should be helped to reform their lives. But the problem is - the Government's proposals add up to the wrong sort of revolution!

Probation is a local service which gains its strength from local partnerships; the Government's plans for regional delivery will destroy this. And if this was not bad enough, the plans for widespread privatisation of Probation is really all about a race to the bottom on quality, as Government cuts to justice funding begin to bite.

GMB, Napo and UNISON want to see the Government build on the success of Probation, rather than tearing apart a successful Service and replacing it with an untried and untested experimental model. So with our years of experience in Probation to build on, we are calling for an alternative revolution, which would protect the best of the existing system and add capacity via sustainable, local, public-public partnerships. We want:

- The 35 Probation Trusts protected to retain their valuable local knowledge and existing partnerships with local authorities and the police
- Proper financial flexibility for Trusts to compete on a level playing field with the private sector
- Independence for Trusts from the dead hand of Government regulation
- The introduction of genuine democratic accountability for Probation via a new model of governance
- The promotion of public-public partnerships to provide the additional capacity to supervise low risk offenders in the community, rather than the ideological push to privatise probation services

The Probation Service is the glue that sticks together so much of the criminal justice system to keep communities safe. If we allow the Government to break it apart in its pursuit of a privatised regional model of Probation we will never get this back. There is an alternative, and it is the job of GMB, Napo and UNISON to promote it.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO?

- Contact your MP to let them know that you oppose the Government's plans
- Ask your MP to sign the Parliamentary Early Day Motion:  
<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2012-13/622>
- Sign the e-petition on the Parliamentary web-site:  
<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/44403>

## CONTACT DETAILS

If you want to know more about our campaign:

[www.napo.org.uk](http://www.napo.org.uk)

[www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

[www.gmb.org.uk](http://www.gmb.org.uk)

