



Speech

Dame Glenys Stacey, HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Inside Government, Offender Management 2018

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Outlining the Government's Vision for the Future of Offender Management

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak with you about offender management, and thrilled to be the first of the scheduled speakers today. My job is to kick off the day with a whistle-stop tour of developments, starting with the prison estate transformation programme.

The prison population has doubled since the mid-1990s and now stands at over 84,000. It is set to grow further in the next five years (by an estimated 1,600) as the numbers of offenders likely to serve longer in custody increases¹.

We have a larger proportion of violent, sexual and drug offenders in the prison population, a growth from 2 in 5 prisoners in 1993 to 3 in 5 in 2017. A large part of this increase is in sex offenders, now 17% of the prison population, up from 10% in 1993. Many have been convicted of historic sex offences and are in their 50s, 60s and 70s.

It is understandable then that government aims to create 10,000 new places in modernised prisons; close inefficient old prisons and generate longer term savings through new provision, and also to create five new community prisons for women. I will return to women who offend, later.

The government has laudable aims, for a modernised prison system focused upon rehabilitation and effective resettlement. No doubt funding for such a programme is not without its problems, given the economic climate, but in any event a civilised society wishes to use appropriately a broad range of interventions and sanctions for breaking the law, including community sentences in which the public and the judiciary have confidence.

Community sentences that can not only keep a vulnerable person the right side of the prison gate, but enable individuals to change their lives for the better and in doing so, change their attitudes to offending, they make such a great deal of sense.

You will know of the government's Transforming Rehabilitation initiative. Here again the government's ambitions were laudable - to encourage innovation in offender management

¹ In 1993 over half of the prison population were serving less than 4 years, now only one third are on such shorter sentences.

and rehabilitation, to provide resettlement services “through the prison gate” and to provide for the probation supervision of over 40,000 prisoners released each year after short sentences (less than 12 months).

Our skilled, experienced inspectors have been inspecting in NPS divisions and in CRCs since the implementation of Transforming Rehabilitation in 2014. In December last year we produced our first consolidated report, drawing themes from the thousands of cases we have inspected, and interviews we have conducted in that time.

We have found the NPS suitably focused on public protection, but sometimes at a cost to rehabilitative work. And we have found some hidden gems. So for example, as we reported last year, we found Approved Premises (probation hostels) to be generally well run and doing a very good job of protecting the public from those originally convicted of very serious crimes, while also doing good rehabilitative work. We also found CRC work in Cumbria, Kent and South Yorkshire to be of acceptable quality, overall.

But regrettably, things are not as they should be, overall. We have found CRC staff morale, training, workloads and line management to be highly variable, and they need to improve if probation is to improve. The third sector is much less engaged than government envisaged, held back in part by CRC funding uncertainties and constraints. The anticipated improvements in through the gate resettlement have not yet been delivered. And too often, we find offender management wanting, with not enough purposeful activity.

It is heartening however to see more solid progress elsewhere, in prison officer recruitment. Some 10% of frontline staff left the prison service this year and last year. This loss of prison craft is regrettable, but nevertheless there are now almost 20,000 prison officers working in the custodial estate, a net increase of 11% in twelve months.

These additional officers are vital for safety in prisons. We have all been appalled by the increases in self-harm and suicides, which have thankfully fallen in the last year. A sense of chronic and intractable difficulty still surrounds prisons however, with the rise in the use of new psychoactive substances and assaults on staff, and the spate of recent disturbances in several establishments.

Whilst we need well-trained and highly motivated prison officers to provide that initial impetus for change amongst prisoners through everyday pro-social modelling, practical help and advice and everything else that they do so well - it is probation services inside and out that are charged with resettlement and reducing reoffending in the community.

Our two thematic inspections of Through the Gate services² have found a great disparity between the TR vision and the reality, and a general lack of substance on the ground - so much so, that I concluded last year that if Through the Gate services were removed, it would make precious little difference. This year, for the first time, we will be inspecting Through the Gate services each time we inspect each CRC, and I am eager to see what we find.

I noted in my Annual Report in December that CRC contracts do not incentivise good quality provision sufficiently well. Indeed, it is enormously difficult in my view to contractualise good quality probation services, given the local and specialist nature of probation value chain (I

² *An Inspection of Through the Gate Resettlement Services for Prisoners Serving 12 Months or More*, HMI Probation, June 2017

An Inspection of Through the Gate Resettlement Services for Short-Term Prisoners, HMI Probation, October 2016

will come back to that shortly) and as probation providers are so often dealing with complex social problems, locally.

There has been a lively debate in recent years about the possibility of devolving the commissioning of probation services to the new “metro mayors”. The Institute for Public Policy Research has called for commissioning of probation for low and medium risk cases to be transferred to mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners, to facilitate better integration with other local services.

Some argue that devolution in this way would offer a chance to reboot probation services, enabling them to reconnect locally – in particular with the police, with whom they once ran so many successful intensive offender management projects. Personally, I argue for a more considered evaluation. After all, not all areas have metro mayors, and not all CRCs are failing to deliver well enough, so far as we know.

Whatever the model for probation services in future, it stands the best chance of success in my view if it nurtures, protects and enshrines the key tenets of probation, those three things at the centre of the probation value chain: strong local strategic partnerships, the timely provision of a good range of specialist services(interventions) to meet the diverse needs of those under probation supervision, and the central relationship between a skilled probation worker and the individual under probation supervision.

Professional standards also matter, and should be given a central role. We at HMI Probation are now introducing new inspection standards that will help commissioners and others to see in enough detail what good quality probation services look like, without being too prescriptive. Our standards have been developed consensually with probation providers and others, and they are rooted in the best available research and evidence on what constitutes effective service delivery in probation.

This year, our inspections will be underpinned by those standards. And we will rate providers as we inspect, using a ratings system similar to that used by Ofsted – because we know that ratings drive improvement, where it is needed. I am looking forward to reporting in new ways, in the year ahead.

Let me move on quickly now to touch on the Lammy Review, albeit I don't have a lot to say. Lammy notes that probation providers are not obliged to make available any specialist local services focused on BAME issues. In our inspections we have not found specialist provision in this way, but equally we have not found evidence of racial disparity in the quality of supervision to BAME offenders. We will continue to analyse our aggregated data, of course, to be on the look-out for systemic problems, or problems in any NPS division or CRC, and should we find any we will say so.

Meanwhile, the Government has accepted the 35 recommendations of the Lammy Review and HMPPS is finalising a delivery plan for the 13 recommendations applicable to prisons and probation services.

I will finish now by returning to women who offend.

The 2007 Corston Report identified three categories of vulnerabilities for women: domestic circumstances and problems such as domestic violence, childcare issues, being a single parent; personal circumstances such as mental illness, low self-esteem, eating disorders, substance misuse; and social circumstances such as poverty, isolation and employment.

Having reported on women in the community back in 2011, and again in 2016, we are now undertaking a third relevant thematic inspection, focused on those who domestically abuse.

This is so relevant of course to that first category of women's vulnerabilities identified by Baroness Corston. We will be looking specifically at the work undertaken by CRCs to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse, and to protect victims.

The recommendations made by Baroness Jean Corston still set the agenda for working with women who offend. They included making community disposals the norm, developing a wider network of 'one-stop-shop' community provision for women (Women's Centres), and improving high-level governance and cross-departmental working for women who offend.

Following Corston, dedicated time-limited funding streams for working with women were created, including for women's centres, and NOMS (as it then was) continued with dedicated funding streams to Probation Trusts for women-specific work.

Our latest inspection in 2016 found that funding for women-specific work was dwindling away, and there was a lack of strategic focus on work with women. Yet we know that good Women's Centres in particular are vital resources for vulnerable women, putting them in touch with family support, mental health, benefits advice and the other building blocks towards a crime-free life.

We now expect a fresh Women's Strategy, later this year. Yes, it will include improving the women's custodial estate because improvement is so much needed, but I am hopeful that it will also cover better early intervention, improving the quality and consistency of robust gender-specific sentencing options in the community and improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system who are at particular risk of self-harm and suicide. As with so many endeavours in our field, success will require cross-government leadership and multi-agency collaboration at local level, bringing together the whole system effectively.

It is clear that there is the potential for great social benefits – and large savings – if low to medium risk women were sentenced to community penalties rather than prison. Given the non-violent nature of most women's offending, community alternatives to custody are a comparatively safe course of action for many, and are more likely to reduce reoffending, keep families intact and stabilise these women's lives for the benefit of all. Yet further benefits would be achieved if more women were diverted into health and social interventions after initial police contact. As I say, we hope to see a new, integrated strategy for women before too much longer.

Thankyou.

ENDS