



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

Media statement

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Monday 29 June 2020

Under embargo until Tuesday 30 June 2020 00.01

Independent review of issues arising in the case of Joseph McCann

Background

Joseph McCann committed multiple violent and sexual offences in April and May 2019. At the time of the crimes, he was under the supervision of the National Probation Service after being released from prison on licence. He was given 33 life sentences in December 2019.

The Lord Chancellor the Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP asked HM Chief Inspector of Probation Justin Russell to conduct an independent review into this case. The first part of the review will be published on 30 June 2020 and focuses on the circumstances leading up to the offences.

Statement

HM Chief Inspector of Probation Justin Russell has made this statement:

“There were major failings in the supervision of Joseph McCann. In total, the probation service missed eight opportunities to recall McCann as an Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) prisoner. If the right actions had been taken by them, he would have been kept in prison until the Parole Board determined he was safe to release.

“When McCann left prison in February 2019, securing accommodation was a key element of release planning. As a high-risk offender, McCann should have been prioritised for a bed in approved premises. This would have ensured a greater level of monitoring and management, and would have tested his compliance in a community setting.

“Probation officers tried, and failed, to secure him a space on two separate occasions. Instead, McCann was allowed to live with family members, where he could not be monitored and managed closely. I recommend HM Prison and Probation Service increases the number of spaces at approved premises to meet demand.

“Ten probation staff supervised McCann over an 11-year period, and three different probation officers were responsible for his case in the three months prior to his release in February 2019. McCann was managed by an unstable team, lacking experienced and skilled practitioners. They suffered from poor management oversight, high workloads, poor performance and high staff turnover.

“Those managing McCann did not have a clear picture of who they were dealing with. McCann has a long history of serious offending and complied poorly with court orders and in

prison. There were signs that he posed an increasing risk to the public. There was evidence of his potential for sexual offending.

“This information was available, but it was spread across several criminal justice recording systems. Information was not easily accessible and was lost in handovers between staff. Most worryingly, prison staff did not share information about the risk posed by McCann proactively with NPS staff responsible for his management. Probation staff were, therefore, making decisions and taking action based on inadequate and incomplete assessments. The risk management plan in place at the time of his release was insufficient to manage the risk of serious harm he posed.

“Improvements are needed to staff development and information systems. Probation staff must have the right skills, knowledge and experience to support rehabilitation and protect the public. They must be able to interview offenders effectively, seek out and analyse intelligence from different sources, and see beyond superficial compliance. Managers must be trained to provide sufficient oversight and support.

“The decisions not to recall McCann were made in the context of a national policy that emphasised alternatives to recall should be used whenever it was safe to do so. This policy was driven by the rapidly-growing prison population in 2017. McCann had also previously been given an IPP sentence, and there were concerns about the recall of these prisoners and the numbers still in custody after the expiration of their tariffs.

“At the moment, the NPS does not quality assure recall decisions. I recommend the NPS sets up a system to capture and review these decisions, in particular the decisions not to recall individuals to prison and the reasons why. Such a system would make it easier to see how regional offices interpret the recall policy and would highlight cases where multiple decisions have been made not to recall an individual.

“I will be looking in more detail at recall policy and process in the second part of my independent review.”

ENDS

Notes to editor

1. The report is available on the [HM Inspectorate of Probation website](#) on 30 June 2020 00.01.
2. HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services across England and Wales.
3. The Inspectorate does not typically conduct reviews when people under probation supervision commit serious further offences. Very occasionally – as in this case – the Lord Chancellor makes a direct request for an independent review. The Inspectorate retains complete control over [terms of reference](#), methodology and contents of these reviews.
4. The first part of the review has been submitted to the Lord Chancellor. The Inspectorate has also notified victims in this case, and offered copies of the review and discussions.
5. The second part of the review will examine the culture and practice of recalling offenders to prison when they have breached their licence conditions. This report will be published in autumn.
6. In paragraph 1, we mention Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP). This sentence came into effect in April 2005 and was abolished in 2012. McCann was given an IPP

sentence in 2008 with a 30-month tariff. Prisoners must serve their tariff in prison and can only be released when the Parole Board is satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public that the prisoner should be confined.

7. In paragraph 2, we mention approved premises. These were formerly known as probation or bail hostels. They are used as short-term residence for offenders considered a high risk of serious harm, who require close monitoring and supervision to begin to integrate back into the community.
8. The Lord Chancellor's request and a redacted version of the Serious Further Offence review is available on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).
9. For media enquiries, please contact Head of Communications Catherine Chan on 07889 405930 or media@hmiprobation.gov.uk