



# Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation

## **Comprehensive Spending Review representation**

HM Inspectorate of Probation submitted this representation to HM Treasury on 18 September 2020:

This representation relates to two priorities for the Comprehensive Spending Review:

- improving outcomes in public services, including taking steps to cut crime
- improving the management and delivery of government commitments, to ensure that all departments have the appropriate structures and processes in place to deliver their outcomes and commitments on time and within budget.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services in England and Wales. HM Chief Inspector of Probation Justin Russell heads up the Inspectorate.

Probation services play a vital role in the rehabilitation of nearly a quarter of a million offenders and in protecting the public from risks of serious harm. The government has announced its intention to unify probation services from June 2021. This will mark a new chapter for the sector and will see nearly 130,000 cases transfer from 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) to the publicly-funded National Probation Service (NPS). Probation services must be funded properly to cope with this transition and to ensure high-quality services in the future.

Probation services have been underfunded for years. The National Audit Office's *Transforming Rehabilitation* progress review (March 2019) found that CRCs were forecast to lose £294 million if the contracts continued as planned, compared with £269 million forecasted profit at the bid stage. The scope of probation budgets has changed over the past two decades, so it is difficult to make direct year-on-year comparisons. However, we estimate that real-term spending per person under probation supervision has fallen almost 40 per cent from around £5,900 in 2003-2004 to around £3,550 in 2018-2019 (figures adjusted for inflation using 2020 real terms base) and spending on CRC cases is significantly less than this. Our inspections in 2019-2020 have shown that a number of CRC providers have had to cut their budgets still further, with damaging effects on the quality of supervision that they deliver.

## **Staff and training**

The impact of underfunding is clear to see. Our summary report of 2018-2019 inspections (October 2019) found probation services under severe strain. Probation staff are struggling to manage high numbers of offenders – 86 per cent of staff in CRCs and 33 per cent in NPS divisions are responsible for more than 40 cases. In our opinion, it is difficult for even experienced practitioners to deal with 60, 70, 80 or more cases properly. Financial pressures have also led to some CRC providers replacing qualified probation officers with less experienced staff who are still training towards a qualification.

Unsurprisingly, the combination of high caseloads and more inexperienced staff has had a negative impact on the quality of work. This was particularly stark in CRCs – in nearly half (45 per cent) of inspected cases, probation staff did not assess risks sufficiently. Not enough home visits or domestic abuse checks are being conducted. We also found frequent lapses in information-sharing with other agencies such as the police and children's social services.

The unification of probation services presents a unique opportunity to raise the standard of risk management and information-sharing between agencies, which should lead to better protection of the public. Funding is needed to tackle gaps in staffing and bring caseloads down to manageable levels. Stubborn and high vacancies need to be filled, particularly in London and the South East. Extra resources are needed to provide robust and ongoing training for new and existing probation practitioners.

Probation services must also be funded to cope with the impact of wider government initiatives. For example, the campaign to recruit 20,000 more police officers will lead to many more people coming before our courts. This will, in turn, increase pressure on the NPS to provide information and advice to courts to support sentencing, and to supervise individuals serving community sentences and on release from prison.

### **Reducing reoffending**

More funding is needed to support (ex)offenders in the community. The Ministry of Justice's own figures show 11,435 people were released from prison into homelessness in 2018-2019, including more than 3,700 higher-risk individuals. Our inspection of the accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison (July 2020) noted the lack of a cross-government approach to tackling homelessness. Approved premises, which support the resettlement of higher-risk offenders on release from prison, are unable to meet demand and more places are needed. Our review of the case of Joseph McCann (June 2020) found probation staff were unable to find beds for him on two occasions, despite his status as a higher-risk and dangerous criminal. McCann ended up in unsuitable housing that did not allow close monitoring and management by probation services. The Ministry of Justice recently announced 200 more beds in Approved Premises – while this is positive, it fails to meet demand for places. There is also a pressing need for more funding to speed up repairs/maintenance in Approved Premises, as beds are frequently and frustratingly lost because of damage/poor upkeep.

Many (ex)offenders have complex needs and these can contribute towards offending behaviour. Our inspections in 2018-2019 found that probation services delivered sufficient services in just 41 per cent of cases involving alcohol misuse and 45 per cent of cases involving substance misuse. The rise in levels of Class A drug use is a driver for crime and cannot be ignored. Dame Carol Black's independent review of drugs for the Department for Health and Social Care and the Home Office (2019-2020) found that while drug-related deaths are now at record levels, funding for treatment has reduced – by up to 40 per cent in some local authorities. There needs to be adequate and sustained funding for alcohol and substance misuse treatment in the community; it is impossible to address other aspects of offending behaviour without getting this right.

### **Conclusion**

According to the Ministry of Justice's figures (2019), the estimated economic and social cost of reoffending was £18.1 billion over a 12-month period.

The unification of probation services in June 2021 presents a unique opportunity for the government to "re-set" the service and ensure it is funded properly to fulfil its statutory role. We urge HM Treasury not to miss this chance.

If probation services continue to be underfunded, this will lead to poorer outcomes for society – more people at risk, more victims, and more communities blighted by crime. Prioritising funding for probation services and associated services in the community will help to cut the cycle of reoffending and support individuals to move towards crime-free lives.