

Reasons for a Reunited Probation Service

Reason 2 - Marketisation has failed for clients, staff, public and CRCs themselves as none of them have made any profit.

It has been widely reported recently that the Transforming Rehabilitation project has not been successful financially for all parties. It is estimated that £500 million has been spent in bailouts and ending the contracts early. Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Probation (HMIP) reports have evidenced that the service delivered does not warrant the money spent. As such Napo believes that now is the time to return probation back into public ownership and to reunify it so that it can work effectively.

CRC financial stability

Napo has been concerned for some time about the stability of the CRCs in terms of finance. They have already received a cash bail out by the government as they reported a significant drop in income and business. From its inception, many were critical of the payment mechanism that seemed to focus on just two types of probation work, unpaid work and programmes, and was designed, badly, to create a false market. Payment by results has all but gone by the wayside as CRCs have struggled to reach any level of targets in relation to reducing reoffending. Fines imposed for poor performance have also been abandoned to allow CRCs to stay afloat. With the primary focus for privately run CRCs is costs and how to make profit, all of the providers have made redundancies over the last four years, in some cases they have cut staffing to the bone.

Early this year Working Links, owner of three CRCs including Wales went into administration and a rescue package had to be put together by another provider (Seetec) to stabilise the operation until the end of the contracts. It left staff in a state of limbo, unsure of job security and we now have a complicated negotiating agenda as the three former CRCs are amalgamated into Kent, Surrey, Sussex CRC. This ongoing disruption has left cracks in the system where service users have fallen through and will ultimately impact on public safety and the quality of service delivered.

Following this, Interserve also went into administration and is now being run by the banks until the business as a whole can be assessed. Whilst it is currently expected that the remaining CRCs will make it to the end of the contracts now that they have been terminated early, none of them have reported any profits. Many have stated that their best results have been to break even.

Poor Quality Service

A focus on cost cutting, and in turn a significant number of job cuts, has led to CRCs delivering a poorer service than the previous 35 Trusts. HMIP has repeatedly rated CRCs as requiring improvement. Staff are under extreme pressure to meet targets whilst carrying unmanageable workloads as a result of less staff and this has a direct impact on public safety.

Dangerous operating models have been introduced by CRCs such as the remote supervision of clients. It should be noted that these were part of their bids and therefore approved by the MoJ despite concerns from stakeholders such as Napo. They have since been further criticised by HMIP for both staff shortages and flawed operating models.

The NPS has also been massively under resourced. They have benefited in their performance by the CRCs doing so badly, so that they are rated better in comparison but there have been a significant increase in Serious Further Offences, the majority of which have come from the NPS. It has also suffered severe staff shortages resulting in staff being on up to 200% on the workload management tool.

Questions you may wish to ask

- What was the overall annual costs of 35 probation trusts in comparison to the split services?
- What measures has or is the MOJ taking to ensure that CRC's do not cut staff beyond a critical point and how does it monitor this?
- Why has the MOJ suspended fining the CRCs where they have failed to deliver and what is the total so far of that lost revenue?
- What costings have been carried in relation to the new proposed model in Wales to bring back Offender Management into the public sector compared to the current CRC costs?