

## **Reasons for a Reunited Probation Service**

### ***Briefing 6: Staff burnout in the NPS due to working solely with high risk and complex cases are having a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing***

Prior to TR, practitioners had a mixed caseload with Probation Officers holding cases from drink drivers to very high risk of harm sexual or violent offences. This enabled practitioners to maintain a wide variety of skills, use different interventions and the lower risk cases provided some respite from the complex intensive work needed for higher risk. Since TR however, the NPS only deals (in the main but not exclusively) with high and very high risk of harm. This is having a detrimental impact on staff as outlined below.

- Working solely with these complex cases can have a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing not least due to the nature of the material such as CPS papers, the offence details, and the individual's behaviour. Witness statement etc. are difficult to read day in day out for serious violent and sexual offences. As such unions successfully campaigned for clinical supervision for staff to ensure that they were supported in their work. This has taken a number of years to materialise however, and Napo understands that the quality of provision is patchy. Some members have reported that the supervision has actually had a negative impact on them rather than being positive.
- The work required for these types of cases is extremely intensive with various reports, risk assessments and multi-agency working being carried out throughout the length of the sentence. With caseloads of around 40-50 this high level of work and pressure impacts on wellbeing. Staff report having unrealistic timeframes to complete the work or that they feel they have no choice but to cut corners due to demands placed upon them (many staff are working at 150%+ on the workload management tool).
- As a result of the above a culture of fear has developed with staff scared of what might go wrong if they have missed something. After all, in probation the "what's the worst that can happen" scenario is that someone loses their life and that level of stress is wearing on staff day in day out. This is further exacerbated by the NPS approach to Serious Further Offences and a real scapegoat attitude to staff. Many staff feel they have already been "hung out to dry" by the NPS and being used as cannon fodder rather than the organisation taking responsibility for its failings.
- The above is evidenced by a lack of support for staff when cases go to an inquest. In the previous probation trusts, the Chief Officer would usually attend the inquest on behalf of the trust, as ultimately it was their responsibility. Since the creation of the NPS this accountability has been lost and staff are expected to take the full force of the inquest, press and consequences alone.

Staff, some of whom are highly experienced, have lost their jobs or been demoted despite clear evidence that they have been over worked and not supported by management. Napo is now having to fund legal representation for staff at inquests as the NPS refuses to do so if that staff member is also challenging disciplinary action.

- Newly qualified officers are finding work in the NPS particularly challenging and many are leaving as a result. Members tell us that despite completing the training course (which has been significantly reduced in terms of length and content) they do not feel qualified to carry the work expected of them. They cite very little management oversight of cases, a lack of experience for the cases they are allocated and generally feeling under supported. Previously newly qualified officers would have a protected caseload in terms of the types of cases they handle and would work their way up to the more complex cases as they gained experience. This is not a criticism of line managers who have seen their workloads increase exponentially, but rather a criticism of the model and organisation.
- All of these factors increase the fear-culture, which in turn has hugely negative impact on staff wellbeing; and we are seeing staff leave as a result. In order to maintain a healthy workforce, a positive and supportive working environment and staff retention, the Minister must acknowledge that this aspect of TR is deeply flawed and cannot be resolved in isolation. Reunifying the probation service and bringing all work back in house will ensure that staff are not working in such intense and, frankly, unmanageable conditions. It will improve training for staff, staff retention, staff wellbeing and develop an environment of continuous learning and good practice.

Questions you may wish to ask:

- Has the Ministry carried out a staff survey on staff wellbeing and if so can he share those results with the House?
- What measures is the MOJ taking to review the quality of the clinical supervision being provided to staff and what action will be taken if it is found to be failing in provision?
- How many staff have left the NPS since TR and how many of those have cited work stress as a contributing factor, how many staff have left the NPS within 2 years of qualifying?
- What measures is the NPS taking to reduce workloads in the NPS and in particular to ensure that staff have as varied a caseload as possible?
- Is the NPS intending to review its current benchmarking for tasks given staff feedback highlights lack of time to carry out assessments etc. as one of the issues impacting on them negatively?
- What measure is the NPS taking to reduce workloads for line management so that they can provide management oversight for cases?

**Tania Basset**

**National Official Press, Parliament and Campaigns**