

# Napo Parliamentary Report

## October 2023 to September 2024

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### Summary and overview

The past 12 months have seen a change of Government and a prison-overcrowding crisis piling even greater pressure on an already-overstretched Probation Service. Just days before last year's Napo Conference in October, then-justice secretary Alex Chalk announced the End of Custody Supervised Licence scheme, in which prisoners were to be released up to 18 days early. This was extended to 60 days the following March – and then 70 in May – to cope with the capacity crisis, causing chaos for a service still reeling from the Government's botched reunification and reintegration programme. Despite these desperate measures, the prison crisis worsened and was widely reported to have been a key factor in then-prime minister Rishi Sunak's decision to call a General Election in May.

Sunak's one and only King's Speech in November contained two justice-related pieces of legislation – the Criminal Justice Bill and the Sentencing Bill. While the former was designed to excite the Tory right by further criminalising homelessness and increasing on-the-spot fines for anti-social behaviour, the latter contained potentially progressive measures to reduce prison overcrowding, such as a strong presumption for community sentences over prison spells of under a year and expanding Home Detention Curfew to up to six months' early release. Predictably, this was opposed by many Tory backbenchers – and, despite Chalk spending his last few months in office begging Number 10 to push forward this urgently needed legislation, both Bills fell after the election was called (see Relevant legislation, below).

After winning the election, Prime Minister Keir Starmer (Holborn & St Pancras) appointed some – but not all – of his shadow ministers to Government, with Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham Ladywood) becoming the first Muslim and second female Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice in history. Likewise, Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede moved from shadow to Minister (for Family Courts) in the Upper House but, in a surprise move, the role of Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending was given to a newly ennobled Lord James Timpson, cobbling magnate and chair of the Prison Reform Trust, rather than previous shadow Ruth Cadbury (Brentford & Isleworth). With shadow courts minister Alex Cunningham and shadow victims minister Kevin Brennan stepping down at the election and shadow youth justice minister Janet Daby moving to the Department for Education in the new Government, the rest of the justice team consists of Heidi Alexander (Swindon South, Minister for Courts and Legal Aid), returning to the Commons after resigning as an MP in 2018 to become Deputy Mayor of London for Transport, Sir Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe, Minister for

Youth Justice), returning to the Commons after losing his seat in the 2019 election, and Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd, Minister for Victims and VAWG). Alex Chalk lost his seat at the election, while former prisons and probation minister (and privatised-justice giant Serco lobbyist) Ed Argar (Melton & Syston) is now the Shadow Secretary of State for Justice. With the long-serving Conservative chair of the Justice Select Committee, Sir Bob Neill, stepping down at the election, Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith & Chiswick) was elected as its new Chair in September, with the rest of the membership still to be determined.

Even before Labour's landslide victory, it was clear the new Government would treat prisons as a top priority, with Starmer's powerful chief of staff Sue Gray identifying the capacity crisis as a so-called "black swan" – a potential disaster that could disrupt the administration's early days. One of the Government's first announcements was the reduction in time-served from 50% of a sentence to 40%, known as SDS40, from September – a move Chalk himself was openly advocating as he unsuccessfully sought re-election. Labour also ended the Tories' own early-release scheme, condemning it as "dysfunctional and unmanageable".

Announcing SDS40 in her first speech as Justice Secretary in July before the new Parliament had even opened, Shabana Mahmood described prisons as a "time-bomb" ready to explode. A week later in the House of Commons, she expanded on this in her first Ministerial Statement, revealing: "Since this Government took office two weeks ago, it has become clear that our prisons are in crisis and are at the point of collapse. The male prison estate has been running at over 99% capacity for the last 18 months", adding:

***Shabana Mahmood:*** *We now know that my predecessor warned No. 10 Downing Street but, rather than address this crisis, the former Prime Minister called an election, leaving a ticking time-bomb. If that bomb were to go off – if our prisons were to run out of space – the courts would grind to a halt, suspects could not be held in custody and police officers would be unable to make arrests, leaving criminals free to act without consequence. In short, if we fail to act now, we face the prospect of a total breakdown of law and order.*

These are strong words from a Secretary of State – and a welcome dose of Government honesty and realism – but her shadow, former minister Edward Argar, responded quite hypocritically by claiming his party had "significant public protection concerns" about the measures – taking no responsibility or offering any apology for the mess he himself left prisons in.

The following week, Mahmood moved the Statutory Instrument (SI) secondary legislation to launch SDS40. Debating the measure, new MP Mark Ferguson (Labour, Gateshead Central & Whickham) insisted: "I am sure that many of us will have been appalled by the comments of the former Lord Chancellor [Alex Chalk], who said that the measure that this Government are taking was not taken by the last Government because 'you have to win votes'." She replied: "We do have to win votes – it is a democracy, at the end of the day – but we must also govern the country in a way that does not risk the total collapse of the criminal justice system. It is a sign of the Tory Party's collective nervous breakdown in Government that the risk of running the criminal justice system into the ground, with the total collapse of law and order in this country, was allowed to happen in the first place." Mahmood continued:

***Shabana Mahmood:*** *The last occupants of 10 Downing Street left our prisons in crisis. They left our criminal justice system at the point of collapse. They were the guilty men – I know the historical weight of those words, but they are apt. The last Government placed the country in unconscionable peril."*

Mahmood's judgment may be correct but it will take a complete change in attitude by the MOJ and HMPPS – crucially, treating Napo and other justice unions as part of the solution, rather than the problem – for this Labour Government to make prisons and probation safe again.

Napo is a founding sponsor of the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group (JUPG), working alongside the POA, PCS, UCU and the Police Federation of England & Wales to advance campaigns of relevant concern in Parliament. Over 140 cross-party Parliamentarians are members of the JUPG, which is co-chaired by Liz Saville Roberts, MP for Dwyfor Meirionnydd and Westminster leader of Plaid Cymru, and Labour's Lord Woodley (former co-chair Lord Ponsonby is now a Justice Minister), with secretariat support from Solidarity Consulting (see @JusticeUnions on Twitter). Vice-chair Gordon Henderson stood down at the election and vice-chair Chris Stephenson lost his seat, with new vice-chairs to be elected at the JUPG's November meeting.

Group members make up the bulk of Napo's parliamentary support and continue to intervene on behalf of the union – including via written and oral questions, Early Day Motions, debates, select committee inquiries, legislation, letters to ministers and other activities. Napo members are encouraged to contact their own MPs and ask them to join the JUPG. Over the past year, the JUPG has continued to highlight Napo concerns, including those around excessive workloads and staff morale and retention in both probation and Cafcass, with regular written and verbal briefings distributed to MPs and Peers, especially ahead of key parliamentary business such as Justice Questions (see below for highlights of parliamentary activity).

### **Probation workloads, morale and retention**

Napo have long warned of unmanageable probation workloads and the impact this has on staff morale and retention, as well as public safety, but emergency measures to address the prison overcrowding crisis risk making these problems far worse. On the Monday (16 October) before the Napo's 2023 Conference (and after the union's 2022-23 parliamentary report had been completed), with the prison population reaching a record high of over 88,000, then-justice secretary Alex Chalk announced the Government's early prison release scheme in the Commons, although the new policy had been heavily trailed over the weekend.

Highlighting the need for "sufficient spaces to lock up the most dangerous criminals" and warning that, "today, the prison population in England and Wales is greater than it has ever been – nearly double the level it was three decades ago", Chalk outlined plans for a new presumption against short sentences, adding:

***Alex Chalk:** We have decided to use the power in section 248 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 to allow the Prison Service to move some less serious offenders out of prison on to licence up to 18 days before their automatic release date. [...] This will be overseen by the Probation Service – a Probation Service into which we have injected £155 million a year to recruit staff to bring down case loads and deliver better supervision of offenders in the community.*

Insisting that "prisons should not ruin the redeemable", Chalk pointed out that "more than 50% of people who leave prison after serving less than 12 months go on to commit further crimes" while "the figure is 58% for those who serve sentences of six months or less. However, the figure for those who are on suspended sentence orders with conditions is 22%." But despite promising to "legislate for a presumption that custodial sentences of less than 12 months in prison will be suspended and offenders will be punished in the community instead, repaying their debt within communities, cleaning up our neighbourhoods and scrubbing graffiti off walls", Chalk's proposed Sentencing Bill was eventually scuppered by his party's right wing and never made it onto the statute book.

His Labour shadow, Shabana Mahmood, responded by pointing out that Chalk had been been "on his feet for about 15 minutes, his statement is about 2,500 words long, he did an op-ed at the weekend in The Telegraph, and there have been endless briefings to the media over the last few days – yet in all that verbiage there has been not one word of apology to the British public for failing in the first duty of Government, which is to keep our citizens safe", adding:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *As everybody knows, the first stage of rehabilitation is to acknowledge mistakes and make a sincere apology to those affected and let down by those actions, or, in the Secretary of State's case, inactions. His failure to do so today is utterly inexcusable. It is a damning indictment of this Government's collective failure. Our prisons are completely full. We have been sounding the alarm for many years now, as overcrowding has skyrocketed. As of today, the public will undoubtedly be less safe.*

Conservative chair of the Justice Select Committee, Sir Bob Neill, insisted that prison "should be reserved for those who are a threat to us, not simply those with whom we are perhaps justifiably angry or irritated", while his fellow Conservative committee member, Rob Butler (who lost his seat at the election) pointed out that "the success of our prisons is not about having the highest possible number of prisoners in them – it is surely about prison rehabilitating offenders so that there are fewer victims of crime in the future."

A third Conservative committee member, Edward Timpson (who stood down at the election), brother of cobbling magnate and Prison Reform Trust chair James Timpson, who would himself become Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending under the new Labour Government, highlighted how, "despite resulting in lower reconviction rates, the use of community orders has halved in the last decade" and asked whether Chalk would "consider increasing the use of pre-sentence reports and speeding up the roll-out of community sentence orders where we are trying to get people treated?"

The then-secretary of state agreed that "pre-sentence reports are vital because the Probation Service can provide the sentencing judge or magistrate with all the surrounding information about the offender so that they can impose a sentence that meets the seriousness of the case while also being rehabilitative and appropriate. That requires trained probation officers who are experts in their area. That is why we have invested £155 million in addition, each and every year, to ensure that the Probation Service has the resource it needs. I know from my time as a practitioner that the reports the Probation Service provides are essential to ensure that justice can be done." But then-shadow solicitor general Andy Slaughter didn't pull his punches:

**Andy Slaughter:** *In a parallel Government universe, the Secretary of State's proposals for directing short-term prisoners into community sentences might be an idea whose time had come, but it requires experienced probation staff in post, properly organised and challenging community work, and genuine rehabilitation initiatives. His Government's evisceration of the justice system means that none of that is available, and he is doing it now only because of their mismanagement of the about-to-burst prison estate. Has he not been set up to fail?*

The announcement was debated the following day (17 October) in the House of Lords, with then-shadow minister Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede pointing out that "the Lord Chancellor put forward this package of proposals to address the immediate and entirely predicted crisis in our prison estate – it is full because of the mismanagement of the current Government over their whole period in office," adding:

**Lord Ponsonby:** *The Government's mismanagement goes beyond the prison estate to the Probation Service. There has been a substantial decline in courts sentencing with community and suspended sentence orders over the past 10 years: they have halved in 10 years, and that is because of sentencers' lack of trust in the robustness of community orders. We in the Labour Party support an increased use of community orders, but they require experienced probation staff in post, properly organised, with challenging community work and genuine community rehabilitation initiatives for them to work effectively.*

Revealing that, "on Thursday, I will be speaking at the conference of the National Association of Probation Officers, which represents the profession which has been under siege by the current Government", Ponsonby asked: "Will the Minister explain how the proposals in this Statement will rebuild the Probation Service so that pressure can be taken off the prison estate?" Lib-Dem spokesperson Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames welcomed the "recognition of the need to concentrate on rehabilitation and reform and greater use of community and suspended sentences,

but these must be supported, as the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, said, by probation and community services that are fully resourced and in overall operation”, asking:

**Lord Marks:** *What greater resources are proposed for the Probation Services so that community sentences work? The Statement claims credit for a past increase in funding but says nothing about the extra funding that will be needed to meet the increased demand resulting from these measures.*

Then-minister Lord Bellamy conceded that probation “has needed additional resources and, frankly, a degree of rebuilding in the last years, which the Government have been doing their best to do” – but then could only repeat the same funding line:

**Lord Bellamy:** *We are expending an additional £155 million a year on the Probation Service, and I am told that we have exceeded the recruitment target in each of the last three years and recruited 4,000 trainee probation officers over the last three years. Of course, recruiting a trainee probation officer does not mean you immediately have a fully fledged, experienced probation officer at hand to take on very difficult tasks. I accept that from this House, which very much knows what it is talking about, but the Government are in the process of strengthening and rebuilding the Probation Service, which – to answer the question I think from the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby – will indeed be, and has to be, an integral partner in the new programme.*

Admitting that, “as far as rehabilitation and the decline in community service orders over the last 10 or 15 years are concerned, that may well be connected to the problems that we have had in the Probation Service”, Lord Bellamy added: “We are doing our best to restore the Probation Service to its detailed place within the system. A renewed Probation Service will be an integral part of the new programme – the service is currently reconsidering its orientation and the deployment of its resources to support the Statement that the Government have just made.” But highlighting the vital role of service-providers of mental health and addiction treatments, Lib-Dem Baroness Hamwee warned that “the Justice and Home Affairs Committee of your Lordships’ House, which I chair, has heard evidence of their underfunding alongside the overloading of the Probation Service, which is very reliant on inexperienced staff.”

A week later (24 October) the Justice Select Committee took evidence from then-prisons and probation minister Damian Hinds and Michelle Jarman-Howe, COO Prisons at HMPPS. Kicking off the session, chair Sir Bob Neill noted that “it has got to the stage where emergency measures have had to be taken as, in effect, we were running out of space in the prisons – it is as simple as that”, pointing out that this “has been projected as something that was likely to happen for months, if not years”. Edward Timpson asked the Minister: “What assessment have you made as to the impact these changes will have on the Probation Service and its ability to provide sufficiently resourced, high-quality opportunities for rehabilitation around education, housing, sobriety and a job – all the key areas that we know make a difference and help to reduce reoffending rates?” Hinds accepted: “You are absolutely right about the central role of probation and the huge difference that probation officers make in the lives of those individuals” and admitted:

**Damian Hinds:** *There had been – and, as you will know, in some parts of the country there still are – significant staffing challenges. Because we have recruited a lot of people in the last two to three years, there are quite a lot of people who are, effectively, going through their training and development. They will of course become experienced probation officers in time, but right now, as we speak today, there is on average a relatively shorter time in post. Your question was about what assessment we have made. We have absolutely made an assessment of the impact of these changes. The Probation Service is looking very carefully at how to make the most effective use of the time of its professional resource.*

**Edward Timpson:** *Can you help us in understanding the workload of an individual probation officer, accepting that every case is different, so an absolute number does not necessarily tell the whole story? Is there an accepted level of case load for a probation officer? Is the assessment that that will still be met with these changes?*

**Damian Hinds:** *There is such a view. You are absolutely right that situations vary by the exact type of case, by risk level and so on. Because of what I was saying about staffing challenges and how they have been different in different parts of the country, there have been a number of places where workloads have been too high and need to be made more manageable. What I was saying about the service – and the service itself is looking at this – is that we need to make sure that resource is being most effectively directed to where it makes most difference.*

At Justice Questions the following month (21 November), Daniel Zeichner (Labour, Cambridge) asked about the “potential impact of the suspension of short sentences on the Probation Service”, with Chalk repeating that, “to expand probation capacity, we have increased funding by £155 million a year to deliver effective supervision of offenders in the community” and adding:

**Alex Chalk:** *In 2020-21 we recruited an additional 1,000 trainee officers, 1,500 more in the following year, and 1,500 more in the year after that. This means that offenders who pose the highest risk to communities will receive robust supervision.*

**Daniel Zeichner:** *Successive Conservative Ministers have allowed the criminal justice system to fall into its current parlous state, making many communities, including in Cambridge, less safe. Now they propose to shift the burden from an over-pressed Prison Service to an over-pressed Probation Service. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that the money that should have been available to prisons will be moved to the Probation Service to allow it to keep our communities safe?*

**Alex Chalk:** *The first point is not right; since 2010, the overall levels of crime have fallen by 40%. As for the second point, reoffending has dropped from about 32% to about 25%. The third point, on probation, is, with respect, a better one. As we move towards suspended sentence orders, it is right for them to be robust and enforceable so that if people step out of line they can expect to hear the clang of the prison gate, and that is why I am engaging with the leadership of the Probation Service. Yesterday I also met frontline probation officers, because I want to hear from them how we can ensure that their workload is manageable and they have the resources that they need to keep our communities safe.*

Then-shadow minister Ruth Cadbury called out Chalk’s misleading original answer:

**Ruth Cadbury:** *In response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), the Secretary of State said that he had recruited 1,000 additional probation officers, but in fact that recruitment campaign has resulted in 76 fewer probation officers between March last year and March this year. Owing to the excessive workload, staff are leaving in droves. The proposed new presumption in favour of extended sentences and the extension of electronic monitoring will simply offload more pressure from prisons on to the Probation Service, will it not? What are the Government doing to address these issues of excessive workload and the loss of probation staff?*

**Alex Chalk:** *On a point of detail, as of 30 September 2023 the increase on the previous year was 4.2% for band 3 probation officers, 6.9% for band 4 officers and 13% for senior probation officers. The so-called attrition rate, or resignation rate, is also down. There are more probation officers, and more of them are remaining in place. The reason that matters is the fact that experience counts. This is an extremely difficult job, and making good judgments requires wisdom and experience. We are investing in the Probation Service so that its officers can do their job on behalf of our communities.*

A week later (29 November), JUPG co-chair Liz Saville Roberts secured a Westminster Hall debate on prisons in Wales, at which she raised both probation understaffing and Napo’s call for the devolution of probation and youth justice. Highlighting how “the number of Welsh prisoners recalled to prison has increased by 58% compared with 2017”, she accepted that “it is evidently necessary for dangerous or non-compliant offenders to be recalled” but added:

**Liz Saville Roberts:** *Speaking to members of Napo Cymru, the Welsh probation union, I was interested to learn of their fear that the increasing recall numbers are not just related to public safety, which is right and proper. They are also related to an understaffed, under-resourced and overloaded service that turns to recall as a first resort, when it should surely be better equipped to engage and assist people who are struggling to rehabilitate. [...]*

*Napo Cymru is calling for the devolution of probation and youth justice, as did Gordon Brown in the report of the Commission on the UK's Future. A devolved national probation service would allow us to start addressing structural issues in the Probation Service in Wales, and to focus on crime prevention in the first place. It would allow us to work with offenders to improve their post-release life chances, and would be integrated with areas that are already devolved, such as health, housing and social policy. Such devolved services are already working with prison leavers, and are integrated with a wider justice and policing strategy. With focused recourses, that makes logical sense.*

The Justice Committee met a fortnight later (12 December) for the pre-appointment hearing of Martin Jones as the new Chief Inspector of Probation, at which he pointed out: "We all know that the Probation Service faces significant challenges. The opportunity as chief inspector to scrutinise that, to be an independent watchdog and to provide reports to Minister is crucial given how important youth offending services and Probation Services are to reducing crime and ensuring the public are safe in the future." Asked by Rachel Hopkins (Labour, Luton South) about the challenges ahead, Jones admitted that "the Probation Service has some significant performance challenges", adding:

**Martin Jones:** *A lot of reports last year demonstrated real difficulties and challenges in staffing and the impact of organisational change. There will be some difficult messages that we may have to deliver over that period, but we should not shirk from that. We need to ensure that we explain how the system is working and where people are in relation to, hopefully, seeing some signs of improvement.*

**Rachel Hopkins:** *You picked up on an important point – staffing and where the organisation is. In an inspection, would you ensure that the views of the trade unions represented there were heard?*

**Martin Jones:** *It is absolutely crucial. If you look at the way in which the inspectorate works, it should be taking views from all sorts of people in the system – certainly the trade union side. The other important thing in our plans is talking to users of the system – people under probation supervision – to get their perspective on how effectively they are being supervised. It is important that you get all those views for a well-rounded view. Rather than just looking at the figures from the top, you have to understand what is happening on the ground.*

Edward Timpson highlighted how "the outgoing chief inspector of probation, Justin Russell, cognisant of the changes to the service in recent years that you have spoken about, called for an independent review of probation, and said that on the basis of his experience it should return to a more localised control approach. That would be only a few years on from the unification of the service that we have just seen. What is your view about the conducting of such a review?"

Jones replied that, although "I do not quite have the knowledge on where it should go ... there is one thing that I would caution against. Some of the problems that the Probation Service is currently experiencing are the effect of change – two significant pieces of reorganisation over the period. Of course, it is a matter for the Government to work out the future strategy, but I caution against running into a third major reorganisation." He added: "I would certainly not encourage a major transformation programme in the short term. I am not sure that the Probation Service could withstand it at the moment. That would be my concern." Timpson continued:

**Edward Timpson:** *You mentioned that one of the significant challenges was staff shortages. Any further reorganisation could have an impact on that, but overlaying that is the Government's most recent policy on a default against short sentences. That may put*

*further pressure on probation. How will you factor that in when you are looking at various services and inspecting them?*

**Martin Jones:** *It is clear, looking at the numbers, that there has been a huge turnover of staff. There has been some success recently in recruiting staff, but, as far as bringing experience in, when you recruit new people it takes time for them to build the experience to be excellent at their job. It is going to take time to bring that on board. Drawing on my experience at the Parole Board and at the Courts and Tribunals Service, I would say that probation officers are crucial to getting the right sentence in the first place, in relation to offenders who can be rehabilitated in the community. Clearly, the direction of travel on short sentences is about whether you can deal with people more effectively in the community. [...] In the meantime, it feels like a pinch point, as there are staff who are relatively new in their post. I suspect that it will be a couple of years before we start to see the benefit from the staff currently being recruited.*

At the first Justice Questions of 2024 (9 January), Shabana Mahmood led with the impact of new proposals on probation, highlighting how “many, many more offenders will be serving their sentences in the community as a result of the measures in the upcoming Sentencing Bill”, adding:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *We all know that the Government have had to rush these measures out to deal with the prisons capacity crisis that they have created, but it is essential to recognise that these measures will rely heavily on a functioning Probation Service. With only one of the 33 probation delivery units inspected being rated as “good”, and all others being rated as “requiring improvement” or “inadequate,” what additional resources have been put in place to ensure that potentially dangerous criminals are being properly monitored?*

Then-minister Gareth Bacon (Orpington), now a Shadow Justice Minister, repeated the line that “we have recently increased the budget for probation by £155 million and ramped up recruitment, with an additional 4,000 staff recruited over the last period of time”, but Mahmood countered:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *That is a four-year-old announcement dressed up as something new and, given the extensive changes in the Sentencing Bill, I am afraid that it will just not cut it. Under the Conservatives, our vital Probation Service has been taken to the brink of collapse, and on current performance it simply cannot handle the additional pressure that these measures will bring and keep the public safe. So will the Minister commit to ensuring that the measures in the Bill will not come into effect until there is not one probation delivery unit still rated as “inadequate”?*

Answering Cat Smith’s (Labour, Lancaster & Wyre) question on the “sustainability of probation officer case loads”, minister Argar also repeated the usual line about £155 million and 4,000 trainees, to which Smith raised Napo’s concerns around Post Sentence Supervision, introduced under Transforming Rehabilitation for people serving less than two years:

**Cat Smith:** *Probation workloads are too high, which is having a terrible impact on both staff morale and retention as well as public safety. What consideration has the Minister given to the very reasonable proposal agreed between His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service and the probation unions to free up staff time by abolishing the Post Sentence Supervision, which was brought in under privatisation and is seen as simply a waste of time by those probation officers and their employer?*

**Edward Argar:** *The hon. Lady raises an important point. Although, on partial data for this year, caseloads are going down, she is right to highlight that they are still high. She makes a good point about the Post Sentence Supervision requirement, which I am happy to reflect on carefully. I understand that the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the right hon. and learned Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) has met representatives to hear their views on the matter.*



Richard Burgon (Labour, Leeds East) then raised another key concern of Napo and the other probation unions, One HMPPS, asking:

**Richard Burgon:** *To reduce reoffending we need a strong, locally focused and stand-alone Probation Service – similar to how things were before privatisation – so why are the Government moving in the opposite direction with their One HMPPS programme, which has triggered a formal dispute with the probation unions because it subsumes probation still further into prisons?*

**Edward Argar:** *[...] The One HMPPS programme is about different parts of the system working well together to create a system that delivers the outcomes that society wants to see. I take the opportunity, prompted by the hon. Gentleman, to pay tribute to all the staff in the Probation Service. I had the pleasure of visiting some of them in Southwark recently, and I pay tribute to all the work they are doing.*

A fortnight later (22 January), the Government were questioned in the Lords about public confidence in non-custodial sentences, with Lord Bellamy explaining:

**Lord Bellamy:** *The Government's response to the Justice Select Committee's report, Public Opinion and Understanding of Sentencing, was published last Thursday, 18 January. The Government are currently considering the Justice and Home Affairs Committee's report of 28 December 2023, Cutting Crime: Better Community Sentences, and further note the Sentencing Council's current consultation on revised guidelines for the imposition of community and custodial sentences.*

Crossbencher Lord Carlile of Berriew asked whether the minister agreed “that public support for non-custodial sentences would be improved considerably if the Government took immediate steps to deal with the workforce gap in the Probation Service?” Lord Bellamy simply repeated the £155m/4,000 trainees line before Labour frontbencher Baroness Chapman of Darlington raised pre-sentence reports:

**Baroness Chapman:** *My Lords, pre-sentence reports are vital to improving the effectiveness of community sentences. They allow courts to tailor sentences, and give sentencers confidence that the interventions they are recommending are not only suitable but available in their area. Worryingly, according to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, the number and quality of pre-sentence reports prepared by the Probation Service has been declining dramatically – thanks in no small part to the disruption caused by the Government's ill-judged attempt to privatise the Probation Service. Given that good pre-sentence reports and good sentencing decisions go hand in hand, what are the Government doing to reverse this decline?*

**Lord Bellamy:** *My Lords, I agree entirely with the noble Baroness on the importance of pre-sentence reports. As I just said, the Government have put a great deal of investment into the Probation Service to, among other things, restore and improve pre-sentence reports. The Sentencing Council consultation – open now and completing in February – indicates that pre-sentence reports should be available in all cases except where the likely outcome is a fine or a conditional discharge. Once again, the Government are addressing the question the noble Baroness raises.*

At Justice Questions the following month (20 February) Rachael Maskell (Labour, York Central), revealed that, “with the reoffending rate at over 25%, rising to nearly 50% for burglary, reoffending is costing the country £18 billion a year and the service is failing to keep us safe”, pointing out:

**Rachael Maskell:** *If just a small fraction of that cost were invested in probation staff to address the problems caused by 50,000 days lost through sickness and 2,000 people leaving each year, it could be transformative. Will the Justice Secretary back Operation Protect, the campaign spearheaded by the justice unions, and ensure that there is a comprehensive workforce plan to recruit, retain and return the staff needed to prevent reoffending?*

**Alex Chalk:** *The hon. Lady is right. We want to drive the offending rate down, and it is good news that it is down from about 31% in 2010 to 25% now, but we do believe in investing in probation. That is why the baseline is up by £155 million, and it is why we have added 4,000 trainees since 2020. Since the reunification of Probation Services, the number has risen by 17%. Probation officers keep society safe, and we will back them all the way.*

His shadow, Shabana Mahmood, asked about the number of prisoners released early, highlighting how, “despite a multitude of letters, questions and even a point-blank request from the Justice Committee, the Government are refusing to tell us how many prisoners are being released early and from where. The public and Parliament have a right to know, so will the Minister finally come clean on how the early release scheme has been used so far? If not, can he tell the House what he has to hide?” Argar replied that “the Lord Chancellor has made clear that in line with other statistics, for example death in custody statistics, we will publish those figures on an annual basis”.

Beth Winter, who was unable to stand as a Labour candidate in the 2024 election after a disputed selection process, asked a question about “the potential merits of devolving responsibility for justice to the Welsh Government”, with then-minister Mike Freer, who stepped down at the election, insisting “it is in the best interests of the people of Wales for justice to remain a reserved matter. The current arrangement works well and allows Wales to benefit from being part of a larger, world-renowned justice system. Devolving justice to Wales would mean losing those benefits and would be extremely expensive and complex, requiring the duplication of functions.” Winter hit back:

**Beth Winter:** *Following the publication last month of the final report by the independent commission on the constitutional future of Wales, the First Minister of Wales confirmed unambiguously that it is the policy of the Welsh Government, and indeed of the Welsh Labour party, to support the devolution of the justice system. In pursuing the devolution of the Probation Service, he said: “We will have to explore...governance...financial arrangements” and the interface between Welsh and English services. When will the Minister meet the Counsel General for Wales to discuss the devolution of justice?*

**Mike Freer:** *If the representatives for the Welsh Government wish to meet me, I am more than happy to explain why Wales being part of the English and Welsh legal system remains the preferred option for this Government. Why would Wales want to leave the most successful legal services system in the world?*

Following this exchange, both SNP and Labour employment rights spokespeople, Chris Stephens and Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port & Bromborough), condemned the planned reintroduction of tribunal fees:

**Chris Stephens:** *Unison, of which I am a proud member, has criticised Government plans to reintroduce employment tribunal fees, on the grounds that the “only people who would benefit from their reintroduction are unscrupulous bosses”. The Resolution Foundation has found that the lowest-paid workers were least likely to bring a claim, so how can the Justice Secretary defend plans to reintroduce employment tribunal fees, which will disproportionately affect those on low wages and present an obstacle to justice for those who need it most?*

**Mike Freer:** *The £55 claim issue fee is modest, and this is completely different from the previous fee scheme, so I simply do not accept the hon. Gentleman’s characterisation. I am quite happy to defend that small, reasonable fee as necessary to help defray the costs of our system.*

**Justin Madders:** *I have heard the Minister defend the reintroduction of employment tribunal fees, but the last time the Government brought them in, there was a 70% drop in applications. How many people will be denied access to justice this time?*

**Mike Freer:** *The hon. Gentleman is comparing apples with oranges. The two fees are completely different, in terms of quantum. A £55 claim issue fee is a small contribution*

*towards the tribunals, which cost us £80 million a year to run. I do not think that that is unreasonable.*

The following month (5 March), the Justice Committee took evidence from Amy Rees, Director General CEO of HMPPS, alongside Permanent Secretary Antonia Romeo. Rachel Hopkins raised One HMPPS, asking: "What is its purpose? What are its full financial costs, and how are those costs being met?"

**Amy Rees:** *There are two sides to One HMPPS. We talked about that a little bit at the beginning. One is to make sure we right-size headquarters and it is fully focused on serving the frontline. Overall, the programme is going to save us £37 million. The other side is to introduce area executive directors. They are the seven regional leads who will oversee both probation and prisons in their region. We are not making probation officers into prison officers. They are still separate entities, but it is trying to manage the hand-offs between the two and make sure we have really local, responsive decision making.*

**Rachel Hopkins:** *We have seen in some of the recent inspections and some of the feedback that probation is significantly understaffed. In fact, in some of the recent staff interviews as part of that inspection, over 60% said their workloads were not so or not at all manageable. How will One HMPPS contribute to improving workloads and the effectiveness and efficiency of the Probation Service?*

**Amy Rees:** *Shall I just talk to you about what we are doing about that in general and about trying to make the Probation Service as good as it can be? The first thing is absolutely investing in staffing, and we have done really well on that in the last few years. We have had 4,000 PQiPs – probation officers under training – recruited. That is a record number. We have invested £155 million in the Probation Service. We also went up nearly 10% – 9.9% – in one year on staffing levels. We are really trying to make the big investment. Of course, by making the investment in staffing, we hope that will drive down workload, which we absolutely recognise needs to happen.*

*We also have to have an investment in quality delivery. We do recognise that there will be a challenging balance of experience and inexperience because of all that recruitment that we now have to get right. We are doing things like investing in SEEDS, which is essentially a framework for how we engage. It is a quality improvement framework, looking at how the probation officer engages with the offender. Also, as the Permanent Secretary mentioned up front, we got some money in the productivity review to improve our digital systems for things like risk management. One of the things probation staff say is that they spend quite a lot of time re-keying data from one system to another. That investment will try to help reduce their workload in that respect.*

**Rachel Hopkins:** *You mentioned that there has been significant recruitment, and obviously there are a lot of trainees and newly qualified probation staff. How are they being supported? Is that taking time away from experienced staff to help develop them in their early career?*

**Amy Rees:** *It is a really good question. It is a challenge, and I am not going to pretend otherwise. The first thing to say is that we have done really well on the staffing but that is not even. We have some parts of the country, such as Wales and Greater Manchester, that are pretty much fully staffed, although they still need to work on the balance of experience and inexperience, as we talked about. In other places, such as London, we still have quite a lot more to do in terms of recruitment.*

*The first thing to say is that it is not uniform. The second thing is we are then trying to invest in quality, with things like quality improvement agendas and individuals who try to help them, but also an investment in the senior probation officer. We are trying to look at how we can do that. For example, in a recent inspection report in Wales, the human factors – how you invest in the senior probation officer to then help the newly qualified staff – was called out as being good practice. We have a variety of things that we are trying to do.*

To answer your question straight, it does take time from more experienced probation officers to help their colleagues, which is one of the reasons why we have had a profile of how we have recruited probation officers. We could have tried to recruit more than 1,500 in some of those years, but there is a recognition that there is a big requirement to invest in those staff that we recruit, otherwise it will be a wasted investment. We think there is a limit to how much experienced staff can help our new staff, hence we have quite carefully tried to profile how we recruit probation staff.

**Rachel Hopkins:** A number of reports and stakeholders, including the outgoing chief inspector of probation, recommended that the Probation Service should be more localised, with more local governance. How does One HMPPS help achieve that?

**Amy Rees:** The second part of One HMPPS is designed to do exactly that. It is designed to have a senior leader, an area executive director, who oversees both prison and probation, so it can be much more responsive to local needs. We also have our regional probation directors, who are very engaged on a local level. For example, in Greater Manchester they are doing lots of specific work on domestic abuse perpetrators. That is all run locally, and it is led by the regional probation director. We are trying to move the service as much as we can to having properly locally responsive and engaged staff. We are in no doubt that probation works best when it is really engaged with local stakeholders.

Having said that, I want to be really candid and direct: I feel quite strongly that another big change programme would be the last thing probation needs, for three reasons. One is the investment in staffing that we have talked about. The experience is that, when it was more devolved, that investment did not happen, particularly in fully qualified staff. I would worry about that. The second is the digital services, which is quite significant, as we have talked about. The last thing we would want is 37 different computer systems trying to talk to each other. I would worry about that. The third thing is much more human. We really need to focus on quality of practice, as we have briefly been talking about in this session. I fear that another change programme would just mean a diversion from the focus on practice and quality management.

**Rachel Hopkins:** So you do not agree with the outgoing chief inspector of probation that there should be an independent review about whether probation should be much more locally governed.

**Amy Rees:** Justin Russell's perspective is interesting, given that prior to being chief inspector he ran one of the incarnations of how we looked at Probation Services and how we did them. He obviously has an interesting perspective, but I am very clear that another big change programme of that kind would be the worst thing we could do for probation right now.

**Rachel Hopkins:** I appreciate your frankness. What steps are you building to ensure the independence of the Probation Service from the Prison Service? There is recognition of their different roles, as you said.

**Amy Rees:** Yes, absolutely. Again, I recognise the concern, because sometimes we have that played back to us. It is the complete opposite, in that both I and Phil Copple, who is the DG that runs ops, are very clear that we think the best way to get outcomes for HMPPS – i.e. protect the public and reduce re-offending – is for probation to take the lead with partnerships. It is probation that has the relationships with chief constables. It is probation that has the relationship with safeguarding boards locally. What we really want is for that engagement to be through probation.

Equally, as you will appreciate, offender management is an end-to-end system, and we know there are hand-offs. Probation is there right at the beginning and makes recommendations to court through the PSR, etc. It is also there when someone comes out of custody at the end, or indeed to manage a community sentence, if that is what happens.

*We need to do as well as we possibly can with the handovers, because we have to manage people at the beginning, right the way through the system and in the end, in terms of when they are in custody. We are really trying to make sure that system has much better hand-offs, which is why we think managing regionally is the best way we can achieve good offender management overall.*

**Rachel Hopkins:** *Do you understand why Napo and its members are worried about the retention of their professional identity, though, rather than its being merged?*

**Amy Rees:** *We definitely do.*

**Rachel Hopkins:** *I can understand the journey of an offender, but that professional identity is really important. While the journey is one thing, what steps are you taking to reassure members that this move to the area director model will not undermine some of that?*

**Amy Rees:** *I totally understand the question, and we are having lots of engagement on that. Like I say, my candid view is that it is the opposite. We would like probation to take a lead. It is not that we want probation to be overtaken from prisons – far from it. The other thing we are trying to do is invest in the professional identity of probation. We have had a skills register. If we can, we are looking to take that further to a proper independent registry, because I totally believe that probation is a profession and should be recognised as such. It is a different profession from running prisons, without a shadow of a doubt. It is just that we have to manage these people right the way through the system and the hand-off should be good. I do not seek in any way to try to merge or smush the roles of probation and prison – they are different.*

**Rachel Hopkins:** *I am pleased to hear you say they are two separate entities. That comes to some concerns that you have probably heard about the new area executive director model – the fact that they will have a lot of autonomy and how that might butt up against established collective bargaining arrangements for the probation profession. Can you give some assurances that that new regional model will not undermine that?*

**Amy Rees:** *Yes, I absolutely can. Again, I understand the concern. As you would expect, I have been engaged in conversations like this. I had a good away day with the probation trade unions about all this stuff. There is no change to collective bargaining arrangements. That is the straightforward, candid answer. There is no change at all.*

A week later (11 March), MPs debated Government plans to change Fixed Term Recall arrangements, with Argar insisting on the need “to strike the appropriate balance between safely managing any risk posed by offenders and not having people in prison on recall for longer than necessary for that objective”. His shadow Ruth Cadbury highlighted how the change “will reduce from 28 to 14 days the time that an individual on a fixed recall must spend in prison”, adding:

**Ruth Cadbury:** *On its surface, this initiative may help address the overcrowding crisis in our prisons. Once again, however, the Government are rushing into yet another change that will put more pressure on our already overstretched Probation Services – which are a fundamental part of the criminal justice system – without giving them any extra support. Halving from 28 to 14 days the time that that already overstretched service, probation officers and charities will have to prepare each offender on release means that there will be less time to sort where that prisoner will stay, what they will do with their time, what income they will have, whether there will be any restrictions on where they can go, and whether an ankle monitor will need to be fitted. Frontline probation workers are already under huge pressure, and this feels like yet another rushed change to the early release policy. We should remember that we are here today because of the prisons crisis that successive Conservative Ministers have caused.*

Cadbury continued by pointing out how this was yet another policy “shifting the pressure from prisons on to, as I have said, the overstretched Probation Service”, adding:

**Ruth Cadbury:** Probation staff are overworked and undervalued, and we know that there are huge vacancies and problems with staff retention. The Minister will no doubt respond by saying that 2,000 new probation officers have been recruited, but we know that 19% of the new starters left within the first year. Cases that require experience are being left to probation officers with too little of it and who have been in post only a few months, sometimes with tragic consequences. Many officers leave because they are stressed. Nearly 50,000 work days were lost in 2022 because of stress among probation staff. [...]

One of the core functions of the Probation Service is public protection. We have seen warning after warning – there have been too many damning cases, whether it was Damien Bendall, Jordan McSweeney or Joshua Jacques. Our Probation Service is at breaking point, and the public are the ones at risk from that. The Government have pointed to the Sentencing Bill as a way out of the crisis, but I am taking this opportunity to ask the Minister to confirm on the record when the Sentencing Bill will be returning. Can he confirm that Committee stage will be happening and, if so, when? Will he confirm that the Bill will not get pulled? We have all read the latest account of blue on blue in *The Times* today, which suggested that No. 10 are dragging their feet because they are worried about their backbenchers. I remind the Minister that we are in this Committee today because we do not have enough prisons or enough prison places – and that is because the Government have failed to stand up to their own backbenchers with the new prison proposals.

This crisis is not victimless. The capacity crisis in prisons is also hitting victims of crime. As the reoffending rate continues to rise, prisoners are not getting the access they need to the classes, training or sessions that help to reduce their reoffending, improve their behaviour, treat their addiction or anger management and so on. This measure is not going to reduce reoffending if there has not been time to put together the elements of an essential support package once through the prison gate.

I also remind the Minister that the Government have acknowledged that the changes they are introducing to address the prison overcrowding crisis are putting huge pressures on our Probation Service but we have not seen any policy changes since October around probation. We have heard warm words, but we have seen no action. Frontline probation officers are having to work on their days off and in their holidays in a frantic bid to keep the public safe, but they are being set up to fail. The Ministry of Justice and Ministers seem to be trying to pretend that there is no crisis and seem to be allergic to releasing information on these various schemes that are releasing prisoners early. Probation officers frankly do not have faith in the Government after 14 years of failure, and this SI is yet another admission of failure. [...]

**Edward Argar:** The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth talked about what would happen and whether it would put undue pressure on probation staff, which could see people released without sufficient time for their risk or licence conditions to be considered. I would make the point that these people would already be automatically released at this point. What we are talking about is what happens subsequently, should they breach any of the conditions on their licence. The hon. Lady also raised broader points about the Probation Service, such as its capacity and how it is working. She and I are united in our respect and gratitude to the Probation Service for what they do; I do not think there will be any dispute between us on that.

Where there may be a dispute, however, is in highlighting what we have done to address the workload of the Probation Service. In fact, we have had 4,000 new trainee probation officers going through the system since April 2020, who are being trained up and coming into the workforce, so we are supporting the service with staff. We are investing in community payback and in the Probation Service, with an extra £155 million. Of course, we are doubling the number of GPS tags that are being put in place. Alongside that, as the hon. Lady would expect, I am also looking at the workload of probation officers to see whether it contributes to rehabilitation and public protection. Those are hugely important tasks, and I want officers to be able to focus on those and their statutory obligations. I am

*also looking at the workload as a whole, and whether officers are doing things that do not contribute to those outcomes and that, therefore, they might not need to be doing.*

Alex Chalk made a Ministerial Statement the next day (12 March), revealing: "From April, we will reset probation so that practitioners prioritise early engagement at the point where offenders are most likely to breach their licence conditions. That will allow frontline staff to maximise supervision of the most serious offenders. Similarly, for those managed on community orders and suspended sentence orders, probation practitioners will ensure that intervention and engagement is prioritised towards the first two thirds of the sentence, as experience shows that that most effectively rehabilitates offenders." Shadow Mahmood responded:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *The Secretary of State has acknowledged, at last, that all the changes put real and profoundly concerning additional pressure on our already overstretched and understaffed Probation Service. He tells us that there will be a reset for probation to ensure that it prioritises early engagement, but it is not clear what that means or what part of its vital work he is suggesting probation officers will not do as a result of today's statement.*

*What is glaringly absent is any additional resource to support the thousands of cases that will now have their release dates brought forward. It is wholly inevitable that rushing out such measures will increase the risk to the public. I hope the Secretary of State will have the honesty to admit that in his response. Again, what measures have been put in place to ensure that probation has the time and the resources to assess risk adequately and protect the public? Has there been a risk assessment of the expansion? If so, will he publish it? How will the Government ensure that inexperienced probation staff are not left unsupported to supervise dangerous offenders?*

Also raising the probation "reset", Rob Butler asked Chalk: "Will he set out in a little more detail how he hopes it will reduce reoffending and so cut crime?"

**Alex Chalk:** *Probation is critical and I have made a point since coming into this role of speaking not only to senior probation officers, important though they are, but to probation officers on the frontline. That has been an incredibly instructive experience. One I spoke to in Luton and Dunstable told me that the measures we have taken to roll out 12 weeks' guaranteed accommodation were the most significant steps that any Government had taken in the 30 years he had been a probation officer. The reset I referred to will follow evidence, not emotion. In other words, it will allow probation officers to calibrate and prioritise their resource to those parts of the licence period where reoffending is most likely to take place. That is common sense and it follows the evidence. Ultimately, measures such as that are why reoffending has gone down from 31% to 25%, thus saving a number of people from being victims of crime in the first place.*

At the Statement's repeat in the Upper House the following day (13 March), Lord Ponsonby highlighted how "prisoners will now be released not 18 days early, but up to 60 days early. No other Government have ever found themselves having to do that on such a scale." He added that "the Statement also mentioned the £155 million per year first mentioned in 2021, three years ago, for the Probation Service. What it did not mention was any extra money for probation, with all this extra work that the Probation Service is likely to inherit as more prisoners are released on licence."

Responding for the Government, Lord Stewart of Dirleton insisted: "We are conscious also of the impact our changes may have on probation, so on top of the extra £155 million a year being put into the Probation Service, from April we will reset probation so that practitioners prioritise early engagement, at the point at which offenders are most likely to breach their licence conditions, allowing front-line staff to maximise supervision of the most serious offenders". He added:

**Lord Stewart:** *In many ways, this will simply instrumentalise a process that already happens quite naturally: if a person appears to be making good progress and satisfies those responsible for his management that that is the case, it is right and proper, I submit, that their attention should be focused on persons more in need of support, rather than*

*having support spread out across the full period of somebody's licence. That, I submit, will permit the maximisation of supervision and the most effective use of resources and time.*

But Ponsonby insisted: "The early release scheme will put an additional burden on the Probation Service. The noble and learned Lord quoted the £155 million which was first raised in 2021. Can he confirm that there is no specific additional money for this additional work by the Probation Service as a result of yesterday's Statement?" Unfortunately Lord Stewart replied that the question fell "within the category of information which I have sought but do not readily have available. So, with the noble Lord's leave, I will correspond with him on that matter."

A fortnight later (26 March) at Justice Questions, Mahmood called on Chalk to "level with the public about the true scale of the prisons capacity crisis that is unfolding on his watch" and warned:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *Probation officers have told me that they genuinely fear not being able to keep the public safe, because they are being forced to rush through the early release of violent men in order to free up space. He will have heard the same concerns, so what is he going to do about it?*

**Alex Chalk:** *It is really important that the public are not inadvertently misled. Early release does not apply to those on life sentences, those on imprisonment for public protection sentences, those on extended determinate sentences, any sex offenders, any terrorism offenders and any serious violent offenders. The difference between our scheme and the Opposition's is that, under their scheme, governors had no discretion to block the release of prisoners; under ours, they do. That is the difference: we prioritise public safety; the Opposition prioritise politics.*

Chi Onwurah (Labour, Newcastle upon Tyne Central & West) pointed out that "our Probation Service is in crisis, with staff overworked, overstretched and undervalued", adding:

**Chi Onwurah:** *The expansion of the early release scheme will put yet more pressure on them, so what is the Minister doing this year to help our probation staff face that extra workload?*

**Alex Chalk:** *Probation officers do an exceptionally important job, as I believe we all agree. Let me set out what we have done in respect of prison and probation staff. First, we accepted every penny of the Prison Service pay review body recommendations. We have injected extra funding of more than £155 million a year into probation. Prison officers do a tough job, as do probation officers, but I am delighted to report that the retention of prison officers is improving, with the staff resignation rate in prisons dropping from about 10.7% to 8.3%, and their numbers have increased. As for probation, we have recruited about 4,000 people in the past three years. That is positive and we will continue to support them every step of the way.*

Less than two months after the early-release scheme had been extended to 60 days, it was extended again to 70. Answering an Urgent Question (8 May) from Mahmood, Argar insisted: "We have a duty to ensure that the prison system continues to operate safely and effectively, with offenders held in safe and decent conditions", adding:

**Edward Argar:** *This means ensuring that no prison exceeds a safe maximum operating limit. ECSL [End of Custody Supervised Licence] allows lower-level offenders to be released before their automatic release date. In March, the Lord Chancellor stated that we will "work with the police, prisons and probation leaders to make further adjustments as required." This extension is in line with what he said. ECSL operates only when absolutely necessary and is kept under constant review. I know that many Members of this House will be concerned about the early release of offenders into the community, but I make it clear that only offenders who would soon be released anyway will be considered for ECSL.*



Mahmood responded that “never in this country have a Government been forced to release prisoners more than two months early. This is the price that the public are paying for a justice system in crisis and a Government in freefall.” She continued:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *The early release scheme has now undergone three major extensions in just six months: it was quietly started in October, when the Government began releasing prisoners up to 18 days early; in March it was slipped out that it had been expanded from 18 to 60 days; and now it has emerged through a media leak that it has been extended once again, this time to 70 days. Worst of all, the Government are doing all of this in secret. They have not responded to any freedom of information requests, parliamentary questions or even the Justice Committee with any useful details about this scheme. The Government are releasing prisoners but not the facts.*

*The strategy is clear for all to see: say nothing, try to get away with it and get to the other side of the general election. It is shameless and, frankly, a disgrace. The public and this House rightly expect the Minister to be transparent and honest, so let us see whether he will answer these basic and simple questions. Why the increase of early release to 70 days? How many offenders have been released in the six months since the scheme became operational? How will they ensure that the Probation Service has the time and resources to adequately assess risk and protect the public? And will he give a guarantee to the House today that this secretive scheme will not be extended again?*

**Edward Argar:** *I am grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for her question and would gently say a number of things to her. First, she suggests we were sneaking this out in October and March; that included statements to this House and was entirely transparent. On the hon. Lady's party's record, it operated an early release scheme for three years between 2007 and 2010, which leaves her on rather shaky ground. She talked about a media leak. This was an operational decision with operational guidance sent out to His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and prison governors as well as other stakeholders, including, if I recall correctly, the probation union, for a minor change that was already reflected in the points made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Justice in March to this House.*

Argar continued by repeating the £155m/4,000 trainees line, before Rebecca Long Bailey (Labour, Salford) revealed that “Napo has said that ‘the ECSL scheme is an unmitigated failure and has not only been extended without parliamentary scrutiny but represents an increasing risk to public safety’,” and asked:

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** *The Secretary of State knows that our Probation Service is in crisis and cannot cope without a significant increase in support and resources. Will the Government be providing that?*

**Edward Argar:** *I am very grateful to the hon. Lady. As I said to the shadow Secretary of State, I have great respect for the work done by those in our Probation Service. Indeed, I have met the probation unions in the past. Although we do not always agree, I have huge respect for the work those unions do in representing their members. I would make two points. First, to say that it was done without scrutiny in this House stretches the bounds of credibility. There have been two statements by the Secretary of State and multiple oral parliamentary question sessions, and I have undergone a polite but thorough grilling at the Justice Committee by its Chair. I do not think it stacks up to say that this has not been subject to scrutiny. On the hon. Lady's underlying point, I set out earlier that we are investing in probation. There is £155 million of additional investment a year since 2021 and there are 4,000 more probation officers and staff in training.*

The following Monday (13 May) saw the Government make a Statement on the extension to 70 days in the Lords, at which Lord Ponsonby pointed out that “the Government have failed to properly manage the prison estate for capacity, safety and basic decency”, asking the minister: “Does he also agree with me that there needs to be a renaissance in our Probation Services so that we make more use of community orders and suspended sentences, rather than ever increasing the prison

population?” Lord Bellamy insisted that “temporary measures are unavoidable” but “I agree with the noble Lord that sentencing, in terms of community orders and suspended sentences, is very much a subject that should continue to be considered fully.”

At Justice Questions the next day (14 May), Rachel Hopkins pointed out that “the Government’s latest panic measures to deal with the prison capacity crisis, including expanding the early-release scheme to 10 weeks, have simply fuelled the probation crisis instead, with staff warning that many of these releases are unsafe and result in recall in a matter of days”, asking:

**Rachel Hopkins:** *Can the Minister confirm what specific extra resources he has recently put into this struggling service, so that it can cope with the sharp rise in probation workloads?*

With Argar only able to repeat the £155m/4,000 trainees/probation “reset” line, this head-in-the-sand approach became unsustainable – and just one week later, Rishi Sunak called a General Election for 4 July. Although crime and justice, especially prisons and probation, barely featured in the campaign, Labour’s manifesto highlighted how, “after 14 years of chaotic reorganisations, the national probation service is struggling to keep the public safe” while pledging to “conduct a strategic review of probation governance, including considering the benefits of devolved models, [which] will explore the devolution of services to enable them to be more locally responsive”.

One of the new Labour Government’s first announcements was the reduction in time-served in prison from 50% of a sentence to 40%, known as SDS40 after Standard Determinate Sentences, and an end to the “dysfunctional and unmanageable” early-release scheme they inherited. Making her first Ministerial Statement (18 July), new Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood highlighted how “our prisons are in crisis and are at the point of collapse. The male prison estate has been running at over 99% capacity for the last 18 months”, adding:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *As the House knows, most of those serving standard determinate sentences leave prison at the halfway point, serving the rest of their sentence in the community. The Government now have no option but to introduce a temporary change in the law. Yesterday, we laid a statutory instrument in draft. Subject to the agreement of both Houses, those serving eligible standard determinate sentences will leave prison after serving 40%, rather than 50%, of their sentence in custody, and will serve the rest on licence. Our impact assessment estimates that around 5,500 offenders will be released in September and October. From that time until we are able to reverse this emergency measure, 40% will be the new point of automatic release for eligible standard determinate sentences.*

*The Government do not take this decision lightly, but to disguise reality and delay any further, as the last Government did, is unconscionable. We are clear that this is the safest way forward. In the words of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, these steps are “the least worst option”. He went on to say that “the worst possible thing would be for the system to block”, and that any alternative to these measures would be “dangerous for the public”.*

Mahmood added that “this change will not take effect until early September, giving the Probation Service time to prepare” and that “the Government will strengthen probation, starting with the recruitment of at least 1,000 new trainee probation officers by the end of March 2025”. She continued:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *In a speech last week, I called the previous occupants of Downing Street “the guilty men”. I did not use that analogy flippantly. I believe that they placed the country in grave danger. Their legacy is a prison system in crisis, moments from catastrophic disaster. It was only by pure luck, and the heroic efforts of prison and probation staff, that disaster did not strike while they were in office. The legacy of this Government will be different. We will see a prison system brought under control; a Probation Service that keeps the public safe; enough prison places to meet our needs; and*

*prisons, probation and other services working together to break the cycle of reoffending and so cut crime.*

Former prisons minister turned shadow justice secretary Edward Argar claimed that his party had “significant public protection concerns about what she has announced so far, and I hope that she will be able to address those concerns today” – rather hypocritically given his role in the mess as minister. He continued:

**Edward Argar:** *What additional resources are being made available to probation? We hear what the Lord Chancellor says about getting 1,000 more trainee probation staff by March 2025, but how many of those will actually be new? How many will be additional to those whom we already planned to have in place through the existing trajectory for new trainees?*

But Mahmood wasn't having any of it, highlighting Argar's “heroic attempt to gloss over many years of failure in planning by the previous Government – I was surprised that he managed to say it all with a straight face”. But she admitted that “the announcement on probation does not involve new money. It is a re-prioritisation of resources, because strengthening probation to make sure that it is in the strongest possible position to deal with the early release scheme is incredibly important to us.” She continued:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *Longer term, however, we will also look at driving down reoffending, because the entrenched cycle of reoffending creates more victims and more crime, and it has big impacts on our ability to have the capacity that we need in our prison estate. That is why this Government will make it a key priority to drive down reoffending. That is a strategy for creating better citizens, not better criminals. It is a strategy for cutting crime, and in the long term, it will deal with our capacity problems for years to come. [...]*

*On probation, I pay tribute to all probation staff for their tremendous work. My first visit in my new role was to meet probation staff in Bedfordshire. I recognise that they have been working in a system and a service under extreme strain and facing real difficulty. That is why we will onboard 1,000 new trainee probation officers before March 2025 to add extra capacity, and why returning the probation system to health will be a key priority for this Government.*

Former shadow chancellor John McDonnell (Labour, Hayes & Harlington) insisted that “in seeking to be fair, as she always is, my right hon. Friend is being too kind on the last Government”, adding:

**John McDonnell:** *They brought about a staffing crisis in our prisons that has brought rehabilitation to an end and levels of violence that we have never seen before. Will she bring forward as soon as possible a workforce strategy for our prisons and probation?*

Mahmood wouldn't answer directly but pledged to “bat hard for our Department and the people I represent” when negotiating with the Treasury, insisting she was “committed to publishing our 10-year capacity strategy as quickly as possible so that we can begin the process of returning our system to some sort of health”.

Debating the King's Speech the following week (23 July), Andy Slaughter pointed out that “the overcrowding of prisons is a problem that the Labour Government inherited, and a problem that they intend to solve. The early-release scheme run by the previous Administration was chaotic: the Probation Service was completely overstretched and prisoners were being released without support.” Newly elected Lib-Dem Paul Kohler (Wimbledon), explained that, “as an academic lawyer, I will do all I can to defend the rule of law, which is under threat from our badly neglected and crumbling civil and criminal justice system. In particular, our Prisons and Probation Service are in crisis.”

Repeating the prison capacity Statement from the previous week, the newly sworn-in Lord Timpson acknowledged the next day (24 July) that it was “rare for a Minister in your Lordships' House to take a Statement before giving their maiden speech. However, given the timely importance of the subject at hand today, we thought it helpful to take this Statement at the earliest opportunity.” Shadow

Minister Lord Stewart asked: “When the Lord Chancellor says that she will recruit at least 1,000 new trainee probation officers, is that in addition to those that we announced?” He continued:

**Lord Stewart:** *Will the Government commit more funds to recruitment and training of probation officers? We do not see any acknowledgement of that in the Lord Chancellor’s Statement. [...] The previous Government left the new Government with no ticking time-bomb, but the Lord Chancellor’s Statement prompts real concern for public safety. These Benches will watch what develops with anxious concern.*

But Lord Marks insisted that “a wholesale programme of prison reform is needed”, adding:

**Lord Marks:** *We need more use of community sentences and that means more probation officers – we welcome the commitment in the Statement to an urgent recruitment programme. However, to echo the question from the noble and learned Lord, Lord Stewart, does that include a commitment to fully funding an increased overall number of probation officers?*

Responding, Lord Timpson insisted: “We will be launching a review of sentencing. While the terms of reference are not yet defined, this will look to ensure that the sentencing framework is consistent and clear to the public. More details of this review will be announced in due course.” He continued:

**Lord Timpson:** *This Government are committed to a 10-year capacity strategy, and we recognise that we need to make sure that this country has the prison places that it needs. We will deliver where the previous Government failed, and we will never allow the planning process to get in the way of having the prisons we need. Talking about the prisons we need, we need to build more prisons, because we need to keep the public safe, but one of the themes also raised is around reducing reoffending. I have been working on this for the last 22 years, finding ways to recruit people from prison to help them get a job, live a normal life and not reoffend. This is not a quick fix – it takes time – but recruiting 1,000 probation officers is a good start. These will be in addition to the probation staff we have now.*

*Only late last week, I went to the Camden and Islington probation delivery unit and met the team there, which was preparing to deal with the offenders who were being released in September and October. I was delighted at the commitment, focus and professionalism of this team, and I am confident that they will do their best in very difficult circumstances. On training, I do not know about probation officers but, just before I came into this role, I completed a review for the Government on prison officer training. It was clear to me where the gaps were, and I am looking forward to working with colleagues in the months ahead to see what can be learned not just for prison officers but for probation officers. [...] Community sentences are vital, but we need to resolve the capacity crisis we have now, because our probation officers are overworked. The recruiting of 1,000 extra probation officers will help, but they also need time for the system to settle down.*

Crossbencher Baroness Butler-Sloss highlighted how the new Minister had “said that the Probation Service is overworked, so what will the Government do to help it immediately to deal with the 40% situation coming in September?” Admitting that “recruiting 1,000 extra probation officers will take time”, Timpson insisted: “From conversations with the probation officers that I have recently met, I know that we are asking a lot of them, but they are confident that they can manage the influx of offenders in September and October safely. In the longer term, they need the extra colleagues and a system that is more stable.” Former home office minister Lord Browne of Ladyton welcomed the new Minister to his role, adding:

**Lord Browne:** *From the noise the House made earlier, I think I am not alone in thinking that he is probably the best man for the job. I suppose I should draw attention to my entry in the register of interests; I am a non-practising member of the Faculty of Advocates. In fact, I presently have another interest that I suppose is not yet registered, in that I have a pair of shoes in my local Timpson for repair.*

*Speaking to Channel 4 News earlier this year, my noble friend said that in his view only one-third of people in prison needed to be there. In order to emphasise that radically reducing the prison population is not impossible, he added that the Netherlands had halved its prison population while reducing crime. That contradicts what I think the noble and learned Lord, Lord Stewart of Dirleton, implied in what I can describe only as a plea in mitigation on behalf of the previous Government, which was that these two things were impossible. I know the Minister has studied this. How did the Netherlands manage to reduce crime and reduce the prison population by almost half?*

**Lord Timpson:** *Before we look at any other countries and international comparisons, we need to fix the system we have first. Before we can do anything on reducing reoffending and having prisons we are proud of, we need to stabilise the system. It is our first priority. We need to fix it, and we need to fix the capacity so that we do not have this problem again. We need to enable our fantastic staff in our Prisons and Probation Services to do what they want to do, to put the building blocks in place so people who go to prison have a much better chance of not going back.*

Peers returned to the subject later the same day (24 July) when debating the King's Speech. Making his maiden speech, Minister Lord Timpson made sure to "thank the prison staff across the country who make initiatives such as this possible, as well as their colleagues in the Probation Service, who continue the efforts to get people on the straight and narrow when they are released. They work every day with some of the most complex people in our country, inside one of its most complex systems." He continued:

**Lord Timpson:** *I will mention the late Lord Ramsbotham, who was a Chief Inspector of Prisons before coming to your Lordships' House. He encouraged me to carry on working with offenders when other people were not so convinced. I will also mention my friend the noble Lord, Lord Carter of Haslemere, who is a trustee of the Prison Reform Trust. I thank my fellow "justice league" members, my noble friends and sponsors, former Prisons Minister and deputy chair of the Prison Reform Trust, the noble Lord, Lord Bradley, and my Ministry of Justice colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, for their sage advice and support.*

Bishop for Prisons, the Lord Bishop of Gloucester, pointed out that "we need to properly resource, train and value prison and probation staff. More needs to be done with them, and for them – it is the big picture." Labour's Lord Dubs also focussed on front-line staff:

**Lord Dubs:** *I am concerned about the extra pressure that the prisoner release scheme will put on probation officers. I know the Government are going to recruit some more, but there is another issue. I understand that the function or the role of probation officers has changed in recent years. It has become more limited and more a matter of making sure that people behave when they are under probation. I think probation officers had a wider remit in the past. I wonder whether my noble friend would look at that as part of his remit.*

Crossbencher Lord Carter of Haslemere highlighted how "radical reform of sentencing like this, with more non-custodial options, will work only if it is combined with a highly trained, properly resourced and effective Probation Service, not a Probation Service that is failing in 97% of areas", adding:

**Lord Carter:** *The Labour manifesto correctly said that "prisons are a breeding ground for more crime". Building more prisons may be necessary as a short-term measure to cope with a capacity crisis, but let us have a long-term strategy of gradually closing quite a lot of prisons. Sorting out sentencing policy would be an excellent start.*

Back in the Commons the following day (25 July), Mahmood laid the SI authorising SDS40:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *We have explored all the options available to us. In the precious little time we have, we cannot build more prisons or add more prison blocks, and we cannot fit out an existing site to make it secure enough to hold offenders. Although we are deporting foreign national offenders as fast as legally possible, we cannot do so quickly enough to*

*address the crisis. Although we must make progress on the remand population – those who are in prison while they await trial – such measures take time we do not have. That has left us with only one option to avert disaster.*

Andy Slaughter asked whether the Justice Secretary was “confident that, by the time the changes to the scheme come into effect, both victim notification and probation – and, indeed, police and accommodation services – will be in a position to pick up those being released?” Mahmood replied:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *That is precisely why we have ensured that we have an implementation period for this policy change. That work will continue at pace over the summer, so that the Probation Service has the time to prepare proper release plans for offenders who will be released as a result of the changes and to ensure that all our obligations to victims and the wider public are fulfilled. [...]*

*Thanks to the action – or rather, inaction – of the last Prime Minister, our predecessors ran the prison estate to within days of disaster. As a result, they were forced to introduce a series of emergency measures, such as Operation Safeguard, which turned police cells into prison overflow, and Operation Early Dawn, a daily triage system that managed the flow of prisoners from police cells to the courts. They even came perilously close to triggering Operation Brinker, which is effectively a one-in, one-out measure in our prisons. It is the very last, desperate act available to forestall, by a matter of days, the total collapse of law and order in this country. [...]*

*ECSL was one of a series of decisions that this Government believe must be examined more fully. That is why I have announced a review into how this capacity crisis was allowed to happen, which will look at why the necessary decisions were not taken at critical moments. We will shortly be appointing an independent chair for the review, which will conclude by the end of this year.*

Newly elected Lee Pitcher (Labour, Doncaster East & the Isle of Axholme) highlighted how “I have three prisons in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State explain how bad the situation will be if we do not act today?” Mahmood warned that, “If we do not act today, we face a total collapse of law and order in this country. If we are forced to enact Operation Brinker, it will be a one-in, one-out system and we are then days away from the total collapse of the criminal justice system.” Lib-Dem chief whip Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) pointed out that, “as the Minister in the other place recognised yesterday, if we do not have the right conditions in our prisons, we are only making our prisons a place where people learn how to reoffend, rather than preventing it”, adding:

**Wendy Chamberlain:** *We need the Probation Service to have the resources it needs. We need to improve and properly fund the supervision of offenders in the community, with far greater co-ordination between the Prison Service, Probation Service providers, the voluntary and private sectors, and local authorities, and that will achieve savings in the high costs of reoffending.*

Andy Slaughter welcome the “important safeguards” but added that, “although there will of course be cost savings, this will put pressures on the Probation Service”. He continued:

**Andy Slaughter:** *The explanatory memorandum states: “There is a package of measures to alleviate Probation pressures including limiting Post-Sentence Supervision to non-Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements...eligible offenders.” So there are consequences here. There are consequences for post-custody accommodation services, as we have heard, which are not working terribly well at the moment. There are also consequences for the police if there are situations of reoffending or recall that need to be dealt with.*

The Lords debated the Justice and Home Affairs Committee’s report on Community Sentences (to which Napo gave [evidence](#)) the next day, with Committee Chair Baroness Hamwee explaining that the “starting point was, as the title indicates, cutting crime, particularly reoffending, and making better use of sentences served in the community. We looked at the benefits of community sentences to society – for instance, value for money, the intergenerational impact of imprisonment, and as a

humane and practical response for the individual offender. The use of community sentences had dropped considerably, though there were and, no doubt, still are varying interpretations of the data.” She continued:

**Baroness Hamwee:** *I was surprised that pre-sentence reports are not more widely used. This is partly a matter of capacity and of saving court time, and because the short-format reports are insufficiently detailed and there are varied views of their purpose, and some misconceptions – of course, these are all connected. One ex-offender saw PSRs as probation’s advice to the court on the sentence and was emphatic that the court did what probation told it. PSRs can give offenders the opportunity to consent to treatment and give sentencers confidence to impose treatment requirements. The MoJ was encouraging about increasing the number of PSRs. Again, can the Minister update us on the feasibility of adopting the new model?*

*The Probation Service is central, but it is an unattractive profession with unmanageable caseloads – I hesitated before writing that, but it was the evidence we received. We were well aware of the impact, still felt, of the reorganisation of a decade or so ago, and, if we were not, many witnesses would have made sure that we were. But we were clear that there should be no large-scale restructuring in the next few years. The reunification of 2021 must be allowed to settle down. [...]*

*The previous chief inspector talked of the role having evolved to focus more on supervision and administration: more “assess, protect and change” – its current tag line – than “advise, assist and befriend” offenders, which is the statutory duty under the 1907 Act. The relationship between an offender and his probation officer is crucial. The ex-offenders – I stress “ex” – we met were impressive not only in demonstrating their successes but in explaining obstacles along the way. So were the treatment providers – the relationship with them is also central.*

Fellow Committee member, crossbencher Baroness Prashar, pointed out that “the Probation Service has been subjected to enormous changes. It has been pulled and pushed in different directions, which has led to an identity crisis: pushed into being a law enforcement agency, with a greater emphasis on public protection and less on rehabilitation of offenders. Inevitably, this has led to less concentration on less-serious offenders.” Condemning the “unimaginable case loads”, she continued:

**Baroness Prashar:** *We need a well-supported, well-trained and adequately resourced Probation Service that is not subjected to constant change and contradictory expectations. The current changes announced on early release will put further pressure on the Probation Service. What steps are being taken to mitigate the impact on it?*

Other Peers also made insightful contributions to the debate, including Lib-Dem Baroness Ludford, who pointed out that “another barrier to greater use of community sentences is the sorry state of the Probation Service a decade after Chris Grayling launched his ideological and disastrous Transforming Rehabilitation so-called reforms, which actually involved fragmentation and part-privatisation.” She continued:

**Baroness Ludford:** *The role of the Probation Service is key, as the report highlights. Lack of sentencer confidence in probation’s ability to effectively deliver community sentencing must have been shaped in part by the chaos and constant policy churn in the Probation Service, which has suffered a disastrous impact on its staff retention. The Lord Chancellor made a welcome commitment to recruit 1,000 more trainee probation officers by March 2025 but, as she has acknowledged, this is not new investment but a “redeployment of resources”. This is not particularly encouraging. The committee stresses the need for manageable case loads, as probation officers are often managing more than 70 cases. As my noble friend pointed out, the Chief Inspector of Probation in England and Wales, Martin Jones, was reported on Monday as saying that the current model for the Probation Service was not sustainable; unfortunately, one of his suggestions was to reduce the demand on*

*probation officers to monitor people released from prison. Will the Minister respond to those concerns about the non-sustainability of the Probation Service?*

Former Director of Public Prosecutions, crossbencher Lord Macdonald of River Glaven, said he had been “delighted when, on Wednesday – I cannot remember whether it was during questions on the Lord Chancellor’s Statement or during the King’s Speech debate – the Minister went out of his way to remark upon the great attachment to public service of those working within the Probation Service”, explaining:

**Lord Macdonald:** *I was delighted, because my experience running the CPS taught me that there is nothing more destructive to the morale of a workforce than to be constantly criticised and abused – in the press and, sometimes, even by members of the Government, as I am afraid we have seen in the past. This drains enthusiasm and demotivates; it sucks the lifeblood out of a workforce. I was interested to hear what the Minister had to say in his remarkable maiden speech about his own business and the way he treats his employees. I hope the Government will take a similar approach. Of course, when things go wrong, they have to be investigated and put right, but it seems that we hear only when things wrong; we do not hear about the countless occasions when the men and women working in our public services get things right.*

*There are other pressures; it is not simply media and political pressure. As others have made clear, the Probation Service is badly understaffed and underfunded. There are too many relatively junior probation officers taking on cases which should be reserved for more senior, experienced people, who do not exist in the service. This will take a long time to put right. Recruiting 1,000 new probation officers is better than nothing, but they will be trainee probation officers, at the bottom. Programmes to try to tempt back into service more senior figures who have left in recent years will also be important.*

Conservative Committee member Lord Sandhurst insisted that “the unification of the Probation Service has been successful”, adding:

**Lord Sandhurst:** *There have been praiseworthy increases in recruitment. Progress has been made in absorbing the new recruits. Now is the time, as others have said, to educate the public that locking up relatively – I emphasise “relatively” – low-level offenders is often not the answer.*

Wrapping up the debate, Lord Timpson welcomed the “opportunity to start a conversation about this Government’s vision and priorities for the future of community sentencing”, adding:

**Lord Timpson:** *It also provides an avenue to recognise the work going on across the Probation Service and other public, charitable and private organisations to deliver better community sentences. On this subject, I acknowledge the fantastic work that probation staff, as well as those from other organisations, do on a daily basis, despite the pressures caused by the prison crisis that this Government have inherited. [...]*

*The Probation Service has a crucial and often overlooked role in delivering these sentences by protecting the public while supporting offenders to turn their lives around. A more joined-up approach to reducing reoffending is required if we are to maximise the potential of community supervision. We can see this in action in Greater Manchester, where probation is linked up with housing and health services to ensure that offenders leaving custody receive the support they need. That is why this Government will conduct a review of probation governance, following the evidence of what works to cut reoffending. [...]*

*This Government will strengthen probation by building a supported, skilled and resilient workforce that is able to deliver high-quality supervision that is focused on the areas of highest risk and delivered within manageable case loads. I have found over the years that building the most effective workforce and achieving an outcome to its fullest potential*



*means ensuring that the people on the front line are happy, motivated and respected. In my role as Minister, I intend to embed this culture.*

*Probation practitioners, supervisors and managers keep the public safe. I am here to support those professionals in their endeavour to protect, rehabilitate and build trusting relationships with those they supervise. That is why I am determined to increase recruitment to mitigate case-load stress. We have committed to recruiting more than 1,000 trainee probation officers by March 2025. I can feed back to the noble Baroness, Lady Ludford, that my visit last week to meet front-line probation staff was absolutely inspiring, and although they are up against a huge amount of work with the current releases and those coming soon, they were determined to make this a success. I have every faith in their ability. [...]*

*The department also seeks to increase transparency by bringing together senior representatives from across the judiciary in quarterly meetings, chaired by the Chief Probation Officer, Kim Thornden-Edwards, to share information about new projects and get feedback on probation's performance. [...]*

*Like the committee, I believe in the value of technology in improving the public services we deliver. New and efficient software is integral to the task of increasing productivity. I am encouraged by the rollout of the new HMPPS assess risks and needs instrument – known as ARNS – a replacement for the core risk assessment tool used day in, day out by probation staff. The introduction of this technology will free up administrative time for sentence management to allow valuable face-to-face meetings with supervised individuals and improve our digital capability so that information on offenders' risk will be better shared across prisons and probation.*

The day before Parliament rose for Summer Recess (29 July), it was the turn of the Lords to debate the SDS40 SI, with Minister Timpson admitting that “the measure that I have set out today does not end the prison crisis or provide a long-term solution – it buys us time to take further measures to address prison capacity, not just now but in the future”. Other Peers contributed, including the Conservative grandson of legendary Labour PM Clem Attlee:

**Earl Attlee:** *My Lords, I welcome the Minister to his position; this is the first time I have been able to debate with him. I hope he has plenty of time to sort out the mess of the prison system. I support the order; there is obviously no alternative to passing it. The Minister touched on the reasons why that has occurred. My understanding is that the offender management unit in the Ministry of Justice calculates what the demand will be for prison places, taking into consideration all the changes in legislation. Anything that we do in legislation makes it change its calculation, and I am pretty confident that the unit told Ministers a long time ago that we had problems.*

*One reason why I got involved in looking at the penal system was a debate initiated by Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood in 2017 on overcrowding in the prison system. We just let it go on and on until eventually we had to do something, which is exactly what the Minister is doing. My only question is: is there any scope to do something about unnecessary recalls? Released prisoners can be recalled for fairly trifling bureaucratic reasons, which causes a lot of disruption and an increase in the prison population. Also, is there any scope to reduce the remand population, which the Minister mentioned? I look forward to supporting the Minister in his work.*

At Justice Questions after Summer Recess (10 September), Mahmood praised the Probation Service, “which has done a heroic amount of work over the summer to deliver this policy” of SDS40. Two days later, just before Parliament rose for Conference Recess (12 September), Peers led by Lib-Dem equalities spokesperson Baroness Burt of Solihull debated the “challenges around prison capacities and ensuring the safety and wellbeing needs of vulnerable prisoners”. She pointed out that “we cannot build our way out of an overcrowding problem”, adding:

**Baroness Burt:** *The Probation Service is on its knees, with chronic staff shortages, excessive workloads and poor morale. Many of us will have had a briefing from the probation officers' union Napo, which is dismayed at the mass release of 1,700 prisoners this week; it fears that they will not cope, so there will be more risk to the public and to themselves, and more mistakes will be inevitable. Turning people out of jail earlier, without proper preparation before and after release, is a recipe for disaster. People will not get the help they need. They will reoffend, and the whole merry-go-round will go faster and faster until the parts fly off.*

The Conservative Earl of Effingham said that “it has been reported that probation officers are aware of criminals convicted of sexual and serious violent offences who are eligible for the early-release scheme because they are serving consecutive sentences and Prison Service staff take into account only the sentence for a less serious, non-sexual offence. Please can the Minister reassure the House that this is not the case and confirm that any offender serving such consecutive sentences will not be eligible for early release?”

Wrapping up the debate for the Government, Minister Timpson explained that he had “visited the probation units at Cheshire East and Camden and I know that staff are doing their very best in what are very difficult circumstances”. Adding that “I have been around prisons for longer than I care to admit”, he continued:

**Lord Timpson:** *In all these years, I have never known things as bad as they were when this Government took office. We are acutely aware of the pressure this has put on our Prisons and Probation Services when they operate so close to the limits of their capacity. Full prisons put prison staff and prisoners at risk of harm from violence and disorder, and they make it much harder for our dedicated staff to support offenders properly. For a small but significant number of vulnerable offenders, that can lead to tragic cases of self-harm and suicide. As Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending Minister, I am clear that any one tragedy in our prisons is one too many. I am determined to work throughout the life of this Parliament to support prisons to become safer places to work and live for everybody inside them.*

It is to be hoped that the new Minister will agree with Napo about the urgent need to improve pay, terms and conditions in the Probation Service to raise staff morale and retention, which would then lead to a virtuous circle of more manageable workloads and improved morale and retention.

### **Relevant legislation**

After Rishi Sunak’s only King’s Speech (7 November), which had announced the Criminal Justice Bill and the Sentencing Bill, Peers debated law and order the next day. With the release of prisoners up to 18 days early (extended to 60 days in March and 70 in May) announced less than a month before, Labour’s shadow minister Lord Ponsonby highlighted how “the degradation of our criminal justice system has led to a lack of trust that undermines our communities” and asked: “Where are the optimism, confidence and vision for our Probation Service, which is surely at the heart of any strategy to contain our ever-growing prison population?”

Lib-Dem Lord Beith, who sits on the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, revealed that “we have had witnesses in front of us complaining about the fact that community sentences are underused, partly because of lack of information and partly because the Probation Service is so badly understaffed”. Committee Chair and fellow Lib-Dem Baroness Hamwee also highlighted its inquiry into community sentences, calling for these to “include tailoring the order to the individual offender whose real need is mental health, or substance abuse treatment, or education, and supporting them to the point where a chaotic life can be sorted out. This requires treatment to be available, and probation officers in sufficient numbers and with sufficient experience. This should be the lens, not just a way to reduce the prison population.”

Crossbencher Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd agreed: “First, you need experienced probation officers. We need more of them. Secondly – and I have had this said to me so many times and spoken to so

many Ministers about this that I have lost count – you will lose public confidence in community sentencing unless you are seen to make it tough and work.” Conservative backbencher Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth highlighted the “importance of community service for less serious crimes to ensure that perpetrators do not become enlisted in a sort of a university of crime – that the costs are not added to, because it is expensive to keep people in prison – and that there is not a breakdown of family life. We need to focus on what we are doing to ensure that there are resources for the Probation Service to ensure that that happens.” And Labour whip Baroness Taylor of Stevenage pointed out: “The botched privatisation then renationalisation of the Probation Service has brought chaos and a loss of valuable experience at a time when this service is critical.”

The following month (6 December) at the Second Reading of the Sentencing Bill in the Commons, Richard Burgon welcomed the presumption against short sentences as a way of “cutting reoffending, cutting crime, cutting the number of victims and helping to turn lives around” – but pointed out this “will mean greater pressure on Probation Services to do the job of rehabilitation outside a custodial setting”, adding:

**Richard Burgon:** *Lord Ramsbotham, who is sadly missed in this place and more widely, produced an excellent report, which I had commissioned, called “People Are Not Things”, about the future of a successful Probation Service. Will the Justice Secretary agree to meet me and representatives from the Probation Service to look at Lord Ramsbotham’s report and see how it could help to build the kind of Probation Service that we need?*

**Alex Chalk:** *I am at pains to meet directly with the Probation Service – not just the leaders, important though they are, but frontline practitioners. They do an exceptionally important job. My mum trained as a probation officer and I know how much of a difference they make. I am speaking to them directly about the workload that they face and how they can target it to protect the public most effectively.*

With the help of Napo and justice charities Revolving Doors and Catch 22, Burgon drafted and tabled three amendments on changes to Post Sentence Supervision, Rehabilitation Activity Requirements and Fixed Term Recall to reduce the pressure on probation officers. However, due to Tory infighting, the Bill never had a Committee Stage and so there was no opportunity to debate these amendments – although JUPG members received full briefings on the issues involved.

Back at Second Reading, then-shadow justice secretary Shabana Mahmood explained that, “even if I were to believe the Secretary of State and accept that this desire to cut reoffending is entirely unconnected to the fact that he has run out of prison places, the truth is that the Government are introducing these changes without any thought-through or proper consideration of the infrastructure and resource that would support programmes such as suspended sentences”, adding:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *The truth is that the Government will not break the cycle of reoffending without a functioning Probation Service. It is therefore astonishing that there is nothing in the Bill or any accompanying document that prioritises or appropriately resources the Probation Service. Under this Government, we have seen the botched privatisation of the Probation Service. In fact, it was so disastrous that the Government then had to renationalise the same service. Only these Conservatives could manage to make an absolute mess of both.*

*Today our Probation Service is understaffed, undervalued and overstretched. Workloads are soaring, almost 50,000 working days among probation staff have been lost due to stress and nearly 20% of the new trainee probation officers that the Government boast about recruiting have already quit. We have a Probation Service under huge pressure, and the problems of chronic understaffing point to a demoralised workforce and overstretched probation officers. In fact, the Probation Service is in such a poor state that in the 31 inspections since it was reunified in June 2021, only one has received a report of “good”. The rest were rated either as “requires improvement” or “inadequate”.*

*The Government are simply failing to keep the Probation Service properly staffed, and these shortfalls could have dangerous consequences. Further pressures caused by the*

*measures in the Bill and the end-of-custody supervised licence scheme have the potential to make matters much worse, and the Government's strategy appears to be to take the pressure off the Prison Service, only to transfer it to the Probation Service instead. That is not good enough.*

Continuing on the lack of new probation funding:

**Shabana Mahmood:** *The Secretary of State has previously claimed that he is giving an additional £155 million a year to the Probation Service, but he knows – and I know, and this House will know – that that is not new money. It was announced in 2020 as part of the reunification of the Probation Service, to help the service at that point to recruit staff, bring down caseloads and deliver better supervision of offenders in the community. It is fair to say that that money has not yet resulted in a service that is functioning as well as we would all, I am sure, want to see, and now there is to be a huge increase in its workload as a result of the measures in this Bill.*

*The Government have provided no new funding, no new resources and no action plan to deal with the significant additional workload for the Probation Service. That is not credible, not reasonable and not safe. We will be tabling amendments in Committee to push the Government on their plans for the Probation Service, to ensure that it is working effectively and can deliver these new changes in a way that does not compromise public protection. We have all been witness to the tragic outcomes when the Probation Service fails, and it is paramount that the staffing and capacity issues in the service are urgently addressed before its workload is hugely increased by the measures in the Bill.*

Conservative Rob Butler agreed that “it will, of course, be necessary to ensure that the Probation Service is properly resourced to support the additional offenders who will be serving their sentences in the community”, adding that “Probation staff do an outstanding job, as I have seen for myself on many occasions. We must make sure that there are enough of them and that they have all they need to do an effective job in helping to reduce crime.” And shadow minister Kevin Brennan highlighted how “this Bill is supposed to be rectifying problems in our criminal justice system, which is beleaguered by overcrowded prisons, an overstretched Probation Service and the dire consequences of the past 13 years of mismanagement”, adding:

**Kevin Brennan:** *The Government's own impact assessment estimates an increased caseload of 1,700 to 6,800 cases due to more suspended sentences, and at least 850 due to the expansion of the home detention curfew, yet there is no corresponding increase in support for the Probation Service, which is already on its knees. How can we expect a system to rehabilitate people when that system itself is in need of urgent repair? [...]*

*Let us not forget the Government's botched privatisation and subsequent renationalisation of the Probation Service, which has done nothing but exacerbate the problems in our justice system. Probation is in such a dire state that of the 31 inspections by HM inspectorate of probation since reunification in 2021, only one has received a good rating. That is a damning indictment of the current Government's ability to protect the public and rehabilitate offenders.*

Responding for the Government, then-minister Gareth Bacon admitted that “some prison capacity measures will increase the demand for probation, but we are committed to ensuring that probation has the resource it needs to meet demand”, and repeated the standard Government line about an extra £155 million and new 4,000 trainees.

Meanwhile, the Criminal Justice Bill moved into Committee, with the tenth sitting (18 January) hearing from Minister Laura Farris that “Clause 31 ensures that categories of offender who were previously out of scope for polygraph testing are brought into scope”, adding:

**Laura Farris:** *Polygraph examinations are used, most importantly, to monitor compliance with licence conditions, and the information obtained during testing is used by probation practitioners to refine and strengthen risk management plans. They have proved to be*

*somewhere between 80% and 90% effective and have been used successfully by the Probation Service in the management of sexual offenders since January 2014.”*

Shadow minister Alex Cunningham explained that, “although we support the clause, I am left to ask the Minister – is this all there is?” He continued:

**Alex Cunningham:** *Offender management has been in disarray for years, especially following the failed structural reforms through which the Government have dragged it. The Public Accounts Committee said that the Probation Service was “underfunded, fragile, and lacking the confidence of the courts.” That was even before the additional serious challenges that it has faced throughout and following the pandemic.*

*The chief inspector of probation noted that the high-profile independent reviews into the supervision of the likes of Damien Bendall and Jordan McSweeney found “broader systemic issues in both cases which we are seeing time and time again, both in our local probation inspections and thematic reviews. These included: overloaded practitioners and line managers with well above their target workloads; significant delays in handing over cases from prison to community probation staff, resulting in last minute and inadequate release planning; and incomplete or inaccurate risk assessments. This is the case at both the court stage and start of supervision, with very inexperienced staff being handed inappropriately complex cases with minimal management oversight.” That is the reality of our Probation Service today. It is another criminal justice agency in deep crisis. [...]*

**Laura Farris:** *To answer the point about who administers the polygraph testing, it is the Probation Service. The hon. Gentleman asked about resourcing and funding. We have injected extra funding into the Probation Service, as he acknowledged: it is now getting an extra £155 million a year. In the past 12 months, there has been a recruitment exercise that brought in over 1,500 new recruits. That is on top of the 2,500 since 2021, so in the past two and a half years alone we have added 4,000 people to the service and given it some increased funding. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman’s questions. [...]*

**Alex Cunningham:** *I acknowledge that we also now have additional staff – 4,000 people. That is very good news, but the Probation Service is still playing catch-up, and the people recruited are of course very inexperienced in comparison with those who have left the service. It was not so many years ago that the then Justice Secretary, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), implemented a disastrous privatisation of the service, and it has been under a huge strain ever since. Even with the partial reversal of those reforms in 2021 with the partial renationalisation of probation, the service is still facing huge challenges and pressures due to a host of issues. That impacts very much on the work introduced by the clause.*

*I will quote directly from a report from the chief inspectorate that contains important context. It states: “We’ve found chronic staff shortages in almost every area we’ve visited and poor levels of management supervision – as well as large gaps in whether the needs of people on probation that might have driven their past offending are being met. It swiftly became clear that the service was thousands of officers short of what was necessary” – I acknowledge that more have been more recruited – “to deliver manageable workloads under the new target operating model for the re-unified service...68 per cent of probation officers and 62 per cent of PSOs rated their caseloads as being...‘unmanageable’”. Against that backdrop, does the Minister expect these changes to fulfil their stated objectives?*

*Furthermore, the outgoing chief inspector of probation, Justin Russell, reported in September that “chronic staffing shortages at every grade...have led to what staff report perceive to be unmanageable workloads”. The Government frequently boast about the funding put into the recruitment of staff and having beaten their target of recruiting 1,000 trainee probation officers. However, that should not distract from the huge problems around retention and burnout in the service. The probation system’s own case load management tool shows that probation officers are working at a case load of between 140% and 180% of*

*their capacity. It should be 90% 95%, so half the current load, for staff to do their job effectively.*

*In the year to March 2023, 2,098 staff left the Probation Service, which is an increase of 10% on the year before. Two thirds of those had five or more years' experience; 28% of probation officers who left in 2023 had been in service for less than four years, so something clearly needs to be done to recruit and retain staff; and 19% of trainee probation officers recruited in 2021 have left the service. The staffing shortages and retention issues put a strain on those doing more work than they can manage. In 2022, 47,490 working days were lost due to stress among probation staff; the average working-day loss per staff member due to stress was two days. We know that that has an impact on public safety. The recent report by Justin Russell warned about the impact that cuts to probation were having and said that there was "consistently weak" public protection. That followed a similar report in 2020. [...]*

*The impact assessment for the Sentencing Bill, which is being scrutinised in parallel to this Bill, shows that the case load for probation will increase by between 1,700 and 6,800. That will cost around £3 million for probation, with a running cost of between £3 million and £4 million a year – a good measure, with real costs and issues behind it. I look forward to the Minister's response.*

But then-minister Chris Philp would only respond: "Many of the questions concerning the Probation Service are for the Ministry of Justice, not the Home Office, but I know that the Ministry of Justice is investing more resources", adding:

**Chris Philp:** *Now that the Probation Service has been effectively renationalised, there is a lot more direct control over its activities and some of the quality problems that arose a few years ago. It is worth saying that it is not the Probation Service that manages SCPOs, but the National Crime Agency, but I wanted to offer the hon. Gentleman reassurance about the Probation Service.*

Neither the Sentencing Bill nor the Criminal Justice Bill progressed any further before they fell after the General Election was called in May. Only the Victims & Prisoners Act, which had been carried over from the previous parliamentary session, made it onto the statute book after the Government and Opposition agreed to fast-track the legislation in the final "wash-up" stage before Parliament rose for the election. The Act enshrines the Victims Code and makes modest reforms affecting people on IPP sentences released on licence.

At the Second Reading of the Community and Suspended Sentences (Notification of Details) Bill (23 February), a Private Members' Bill by Ruth Jones (Labour, Newport West & Islwyn), shadow minister Kevin Brennan highlighted how "our Probation Service is already critically understaffed, undervalued and overstretched", adding:

**Kevin Brennan:** *Probation workloads are soaring. Almost 50,000 working days among probation staff have been lost to distress, with 68% of probation officers rating their case load as unmanageable. More and more experienced prison officers, who were also mentioned, are leaving the service, and there are over 1,000 vacancies for probation staff.*

But then-minister Mike Freer insisted he shared a "commitment to making sure that the Probation Service is effective and is funded appropriately", adding:

**Mike Freer:** *We value its work, which is why we are investing an additional £155 million a year in the service, so that it can recruit record levels of staff, and are investing up to £93 million in community payback as a way of complimenting that. [...] In December 2023, recruitment numbers for band 4 probation officers were up 6.3% on the previous year, and the numbers for band 3 probation officers were up 2.1% over the same period. We are confident that our Probation Service can deal with this issue.*

Since winning the General Election, Labour has moved at pace to deliver its promised legislative agenda. At the first Labour State Opening of Parliament for 15 years a fortnight after the landslide victory (17 July), King Charles III announced a new Crime and Policing Bill and the Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill, which together would “strengthen community policing, give the police greater powers to deal with anti social behaviour and strengthen support for victims”. The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill aims to “modernise the asylum and immigration system, establishing a new Border Security Command and delivering enhanced counter terror powers to tackle organised immigration crime”, while the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill will “improve the safety and security of public venues and help keep the British public safe from terrorism”. The monarch added: “My Government will bring forward plans to halve violence against women and girls.” Announcing a new Employment Rights Bill, he insisted:

**King Charles:** *My Government is committed to making work pay and will legislate to introduce a new deal for working people to ban exploitative practices and enhance employment rights.*

None of the above Bills has yet been introduced, but First Readings, certainly of the Employment Rights Bill, are expected to be announced shortly after Parliament returns from Conference Recess on Monday 7 October, at which point proposed legislation can be properly scrutinised and amendments tabled.

### **Trade Union Co-ordinating Group**

Napo is a founder member of the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (TUCG), which was established in 2008 to coordinate campaigning activities in Parliament and beyond on issues of common concern between member unions. The TUCG now comprises 11 trade unions – BFAWU, Equity, FBU, NAPO, NUJ, NEU, PCS, POA, RMT, UCU and URTU – bringing the total membership of TUCG-affiliated unions to over one million trade unionists. The RMT held the Chair for 2023, which has now passed over to the UCU for 2024.

Key activities in this period include:

- Held Annual General Meeting and Parliamentary Reception with new Chair for 2024, Jo Grady (UCU) and Fran Heathcote (PCS), and confirmed executive dates for the year ahead
- Wrote letter to Keir Starmer and senior advisors urging no watering down of the New Deal for Working People
- Wrote privately to Paul Nowak asking TUC to develop a more ambitious economic strategy
- Organised TUC Women's Conference fringe on examples of victories for winning in the workplace
- Organised STUC fringe on the theme of what workers need from whoever forms a government after the General Election
- Supported Lord Woodley's Private Members Bill on Fire and Rehire.

Since the General Election, activities have included:

- Circulated statements from individual unions on the importance of anti-racism and anti-fascism in relation to the Summer's riots
- Organised support for open letter to Keir Starmer asking for action to avoid the normalisation of demand for food banks in British society
- Held TUC Congress fringe meeting calling for a more ambitious economic strategy, with speakers including John McDonnell MP
- Held joint Labour Party Conference fringe event with Labour List and the Institute of Employment Rights on the implementation of the New Deal for Working People, with Minister Justin Madders
- Planning written briefing of MPs around the Autumn Budget statement
- Organising briefings/lobby of MPs and Peers around the Employment Rights Bill

- Encouraging active steps to educate and mobilise union members at all levels to fight the threat of the far right

The TUCG website can be found at [www.tucg.org.uk](http://www.tucg.org.uk). We are [@TUCGInfo](https://twitter.com/TUCGInfo) on X.

### **Links to transcripts of parliamentary sessions**

Monday 16 October 2023 – Commons Ministerial Statement on Prison Capacity:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-10-16/debates/50D29A75-C1E4-4FFC-A77D-11BBC20BCD99/PrisonCapacity>

Tuesday 17 October 2023 – Lords Statement on Prison Capacity:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2023-10-17/debates/31304C45-9BD1-4704-8FEF-5E5758961FC3/PrisonCapacity>

Tuesday 24 October 2023 – Justice Committee evidence from Minister Hinds:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/13753/html/>

Wednesday 8 November 2023 – Lords debate King’s Speech:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2023-11-08/debates/01B324A6-46FB-4BD5-A583-58D79EBFFC54/King'SSpeech>

Tuesday 21 November 2023 – Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-11-21/debates/1E3E3684-B68F-4B81-9E47-245A0B26C868/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Wednesday 29 November 2023 – Westminster Hall debate on Prisons in Wales:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-11-29/debates/E9C4539D-CE22-4C45-B5E1-FF333BC4BCFD/PrisonsInWales>

Wednesday 6 December 2023 – Second Reading of Sentencing Bill:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-06/debates/77B5411B-A141-4048-8F1C-A19A28D9EFD8/SentencingBill>

Tuesday 12 December 2023 – Justice Committee evidence from Martin Jones:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14035/html/>

Tuesday 9 January 2024 – Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-01-09/debates/C344C2DF-BD85-4417-99A8-DE9CDAF100AA/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Thursday 18 January 2024 – Criminal Justice Bill (Tenth sitting):

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-01-18/debates/6744575d-4079-4f82-9e1e-9b16791e3dac/CriminalJusticeBill\(TenthSitting\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-01-18/debates/6744575d-4079-4f82-9e1e-9b16791e3dac/CriminalJusticeBill(TenthSitting))

Monday 22 January 2024 – Lords Question: Non-custodial Sentences: Public Confidence:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-01-22/debates/E475D56F-E536-4EA6-B19B-3820E7D5EF56/Non-CustodialSentencesPublicConfidence>

Tuesday 20 February 2024 – Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-02-20/debates/F86B37DC-45AA-4C30-8E64-2C6EF9C9C1A0/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Friday 23 February 2024 – Second Reading of the Community and Suspended Sentences

(Notification of Details) Bill: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-02-23/debates/5EB4DAAB-2260-4FAC-970D-86150CDD1721/CommunityAndSuspendedSentences\(NotificationOfDetails\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-02-23/debates/5EB4DAAB-2260-4FAC-970D-86150CDD1721/CommunityAndSuspendedSentences(NotificationOfDetails)Bill)

Tuesday 5 March 2024 – Justice Committee evidence from Antonia Romeo and Amy Rees:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14425/html/>



Monday 11 March 2024 – Draft Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Suitability for Fixed Term Recall) Order 2024: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-03-11/debates/654186b8-70ed-4052-b522-e320d9582198/DraftCriminalJusticeAct2003\(SuitabilityForFixedTermRecall\)Order2024](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-03-11/debates/654186b8-70ed-4052-b522-e320d9582198/DraftCriminalJusticeAct2003(SuitabilityForFixedTermRecall)Order2024)

Tuesday 12 March 2024 – Commons Ministerial Statement on Prisons and Probation: Foreign National Offenders: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-03-12/debates/841C7297-E462-40E6-A461-66F25D55B1E3/PrisonsAndProbationForeignNationalOffenders>

Wednesday 13 March 2024 – Lords Statement: Prisons and Probation: Foreign National Offenders: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-03-13/debates/901D0DE9-45FD-4061-9F4C-FB3A3F66AC1D/PrisonsAndProbationForeignNationalOffenders>

Tuesday 26 March 2024 – Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-03-26/debates/9F87C899-3D88-4107-9C01-5BCF3850A18F/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Wednesday 8 May 2024 – Urgent Question on End of Custody Supervised Licence: Extension: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-05-08/debates/E7D50ECB-6DE4-4EB9-B361-73D99C4BE899/EndOfCustodySupervisedLicenceExtension>

Monday 13 May 2024 – Lords Statement on End of Custody Supervised Licence Scheme: Extension: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-05-13/debates/89A27B63-AC6C-4043-BAB8-98A3467BF555/EndOfCustodySupervisedLicenceSchemeExtension>

Tuesday 14 May 2024 – Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-05-14/debates/02539552-0665-4740-962F-1FB9F8F4EF56/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Thursday 18 July 2024 – Commons Statement on Prison Capacity: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-07-18/debates/FA393282-D6B3-4485-84C5-DAD88D0E9FB4/PrisonCapacity>

Tuesday 23 July 2024 – Commons King’s Speech debate: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-07-23/debates/C133D2F0-7130-4DE8-BA4D-6E04AD0F5703/ImmigrationAndHomeAffairs>

Wednesday 24 July 2024 – Lords Statement on Prison Capacity: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-07-24/debates/4029B6F5-0348-4DDB-B488-DB8D4D64EB24/PrisonCapacity>

Wednesday 24 July 2024 – Lords King’s Speech debate: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-07-24/debates/6C3F5032-5C20-4B49-A20F-2D27E96E3809/King'SSpeech>

Thursday 25 July 2024 – Commons Criminal Law statutory instrument: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-07-25/debates/67B4BB95-71F5-44D9-8C99-2AA55FF68A31/CriminalLaw>

Friday 26 July 2024 – Lords debate on Community Sentences (Justice and Home Affairs Committee Report): [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-07-26/debates/43C5907E-4F4A-43DC-BD33-193634911609/CommunitySentences\(JusticeAndHomeAffairsCommitteeReport\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-07-26/debates/43C5907E-4F4A-43DC-BD33-193634911609/CommunitySentences(JusticeAndHomeAffairsCommitteeReport))

Monday 29 July 2024 – Lords Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order 2024: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-07-29/debates/D50E0961-C702-40EE-8602-9332D08EA842/CriminalJusticeAct2003\(RequisiteAndMinimumCustodialPeriods\)Order2024](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-07-29/debates/D50E0961-C702-40EE-8602-9332D08EA842/CriminalJusticeAct2003(RequisiteAndMinimumCustodialPeriods)Order2024)

Tuesday 10 September 2024 – Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-09-10/debates/1F7025D2-8718-4D30-A105-A2C88E2ADC92/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Thursday 12 September 2024 – Lords debate on Prison Capacities:  
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-09-12/debates/C774C022-45A3-4F1B-8A5E-1FFB38BAE285/PrisonCapacities>

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