

Napo Parliamentary Report

August 2024 to July 2025

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Summary and overview

The past year in Parliament has seen numerous initiatives by the new Labour government to tackle the prisons and probation crises inherited from the Tories, whose legacy of 14 years of unprotected austerity cuts to justice, coupled with its deadly failed privatisation experiment, has stretched our once-proud probation service beyond breaking point. Staff workloads were unbearable even before the rushed early release programmes rolled-out in the dog days of the last government, continued by its replacement, but these attempts to deal with prison overcrowding, alongside other changes including to recall, have just heaped further pressure onto probation.

Likewise, the third/third/third sentencing system recommended by former justice secretary David Gauke in his independent review means yet more work for probation. And despite warm words from ministers and increasing sympathy from other MPs and Peers, after a year in power the Labour government still appears reluctant to tackle the huge salary deficit suffered by probation staff after years of pay freezes – a real-terms pay cut of 60% since 2010 – to deal with the linked crises of staffing, workloads, morale and retention, leaving Napo no choice but to ballot for industrial action, announced as Parliament went into Summer Recess. Meanwhile the government’s manifesto promise of “a strategic review of probation governance” with a focus on “the benefits of devolved models” appears still to be lost in the prisons storm.

Napo’s campaigning continues through the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group (JUPG), alongside sister unions POA, PCS, UCU and the Police Federation of England & Wales, administered by Solidarity Consulting. The JUPG is co-chaired by Liz Saville Roberts, Westminster leader of Plaid Cymru, and former Unite general secretary Lord Woodley, who replaced Lord Ponsonby after his appointment as a justice minister in the new government, while Labour’s Kim Johnson and Conservative Lord Balfe are the new vice-chairs. Despite losing several dozen members at the general election, the JUPG has since recruited many more new MPs and current membership stands at over 150. Napo press releases and briefings, including top lines, background info and suggested questions/actions, are regularly circulated to members, encouraging them to participate in relevant debates and to table and support selected motions and amendments.

The general election on 4 July 2024 resulted in a record turnover of MPs, with 350 new faces out of 650. Labour won a total of 411 seats, giving them a majority of 174, while the Conservatives

collapsed to 121, their lowest number since 1832, after losing vast numbers of votes to Reform, which won five seats. The Lib Dems became the third-largest party again on 72 MPs, overtaking the SNP – who dropped to just nine seats. Plaid Cymru and the Greens both won four, while five independents campaigning against Israel's war on Gaza, including former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, won seats formerly held by Labour.

After debates on the first Labour King's Speech in 15 years, seven Labour MPs (John McDonnell, Zarah Sultana, Apsana Begum, Richard Burgon, Ian Byrne, Imran Hussain and Becky Long-Bailey – all JUPG members) were suspended for voting to scrap the two-child benefit cap, although four (Burgon, Byrne, Hussain and Long-Bailey) were restored the whip in February. However a year after the first wave of purges, in July 2025, four further rebels were suspended, with the PLP-popular and highly principled Rachael Maskell given a punishment-beating alongside three newbies – Brian Leishman, Neil Duncan-Jordan and Chris Hinchliff – for disloyalty during the disability-cuts debacle. Diane Abbott was also suspended amid reheated and spurious allegations of downplaying different kinds of discrimination. During summer recess, Corbyn and Sultana announced plans to launch a new party of the left, with an inaugural conference later in the year to contest local elections in May, although infighting between rival factions have blunted the effectiveness of "Your Party". In September 2025, shortly before Labour conference and after the period covered by this report, McDonnell and Begum were readmitted into the Parliamentary Labour Party.

After winning the election, Keir Starmer appointed some – but not all – of his shadow ministers to Government, with Shabana Mahmood becoming the first Muslim and second female Lord Chancellor in history. In a surprise move, a newly ennobled Lord James Timpson, chair of the Prison Reform Trust and head of the Timpson cobbling empire – famous for employing former prisoners – was given the role of Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending. Former JUPG co-chair Lord Ponsonby became Family Courts Minister, with Alex Davies-Jones as Victims Minister and returning former MP Sir Nic Dakin as Youth Justice Minister. Since November, Sarah Sackman has served as Courts Minister. Although after the period covered by this report, the reshuffle in September 2025 saw major changes to the justice team, with Mahmood moving to Home Secretary and replaced by David Lammy, who also became Deputy Prime Minister, while Dakin (who moved to the whips' office) and Ponsonby were replaced by newbie Jake Richards (Rother Valley) and former judge Baroness Levitt.

With the widely respected Tory chair of the Justice Select Committee, Sir Bob Neill, stepping down at the election, Labour's Andy Slaughter was elected as his replacement in September. The rest of the Committee are all newbies, with Labour members Alex Barros-Curtis, Pam Cox, Linsey Farnsworth, Warinder Juss, Sarah Russell and Mike Tapp, Conservatives Sir Ashley Fox and Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst, and Lib-Dems Josh Babarinde (the party's justice spokesperson in the Commons) and Tessa Munt. The Committee has launched relevant inquiries into Rehabilitation and Resettlement: Ending the Cycle of Reoffending, and Tackling Drugs in Prisons.

The Welsh Affairs Select Committee, chaired by JUPG member Ruth Jones, heard from Napo Cymru executive member Su McConnel in May as part of its inquiry into Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation in Wales, at which she warned: "The toll that this pressure [of early releases] is having on staff in terms of their health and mental health – it is awful," calling for "a root and branch review of probation, with a view to separating it from the Prison Service – as much as we respect our colleagues – to be a standalone organisation in its own right". Meanwhile the Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee is conducting a short inquiry into Electronic Monitoring.

Numerous JUPG members have spoken up for probation staff over the past year, especially while questioning ministers over early release schemes. In November, the Lord Bishop of Gloucester, Prisons Bishop Rachel Treweek, called on the government "not just to recruit more probation staff but to retain and develop staff so that they are respected and recognised as highly valued

professionals”, while Lib-Dem Lord German asked: “Why is it that we are already unable to recruit sufficient people to the probation service?”

JUPG co-chair Lord Woodley linked key multi-union campaigns in May when he asked what ministers were doing “improve the morale, recruitment and retention of police, prison and probation officers”, with Lib-Dem Lords spokesperson Lord Marks referencing the shocking Rademaker Review into HMPPS treatment of staff when he reminded Peers: “The Minister promised a ‘seismic shift’ to improve professional standards across the Prison and Probation Service. He described reports of bullying, discrimination and harassment as ‘a wake-up call and an opportunity to change’, and we agree.”

In the Commons, new Wolverhampton West Labour MP, Warinder Juss, a former employment rights solicitor, has spoken up for probation officers numerous times at the Justice Committee and during Justice Questions, asking ministers in March what the government was doing “to ensure that probation officers have manageable caseloads and that support is provided for their mental health and wellbeing to avoid high levels of stress and burnout, and also to help with the recruitment and retention of staff”. At June’s JQs, he asked: “Will the Lord Chancellor outline the steps being taken to recruit and retain probation officers, and to ensure that they have manageable caseloads and that their morale is improved?” And the following month, he told MPs: “Napo reports that probation workloads are unmanageable, staff turnover and sickness are high, and probation officers are often managing cases belonging to colleagues.” Fellow Committee member Josh Babarinde, who’s addressing Napo conference this year in his Eastbourne constituency, has also consistently called for more probation resources. Other relevant contributions are highlighted below in the Campaigns and Legislation sections.

Campaigns: staffing, workloads, morale and retention

Chronic and extreme pressure on probation – leading to widespread understaffing, unrealistic workloads alongside rock-bottom staff morale and retention – has only grown over the past year, a dire situation readily acknowledged by politicians on the left and right, front and back benches, Commons and Lords. At the first Justice Questions after Summer Recess (10 September), new Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham Ladywood) went out of her way to praise probation, “which has done a heroic amount of work over the summer to deliver this policy” of SDS40, while Minister Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) highlighted how staff had been “working around the clock” to ensure new releases had accommodation. Two days later (12 September), shortly before Parliament rose for Conference Recess, Peers led by Lib-Dem equalities spokesperson Baroness Burt of Solihull debated prison capacities and vulnerable prisoners. She pointed out that “the Probation Service is on its knees, with chronic staff shortages, excessive workloads and poor morale”, adding:

Baroness Burt: *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.*

Her Lib-Dem colleague Lord German also warned of “poor morale in the Prison and Probation Service workforce” and a “shortage of staff at all levels”, while the Conservative Earl of Effingham highlighted how some probation officers “had been given only four weeks to prepare for offenders confirmed for release”. Noting that “the Government said that at least 1,000 new trainee probation officers would be recruited by the end of March 2025”, he asked: “Can the minister explain why it takes seven months to recruit trainees? That is surely too long. Does he not agree that four months should be the target to complete this?” But wrapping up the debate, Minister Timpson revealed 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”, Timpson 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.*

On return from Conference Recess, new Plaid Cymru Peer Baroness Smith of Llanfaes asked an oral question (7 October) on whether the government “plan to implement the recommendations of the report of the Commission on Justice in Wales, chaired by Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd”. Former JUPG co-chair Minister Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede highlighted how “there are some recommendations that the Ministry of Justice is either already delivering or has agreed to take forward, including better disaggregation of Welsh data”, but added:

Lord Ponsonby: *However, the report’s principal recommendation to devolve justice to Wales goes considerably further than what is in the current Government’s manifesto. Our manifesto made commitments to explore the devolution of services to enable them to be more locally responsive, and as part of that strategic review we will look into probation as part of wider devolution across England and Wales. We will also work with the Welsh Labour Government to consider the devolution of youth justice. Overall, we will work with the Welsh Government to ensure that we deliver justice in a way that best serves the people of Wales.*

Baroness Smith: *My Lords, this month marks the fifth anniversary of the Thomas commission report, which called for the devolution of policing and justice to Wales. The Welsh Labour Government endorse this recommendation in their programme for government for 2021-26. Meanwhile, we have just heard that the UK Labour Government plan only to “explore” devolving youth justice and probation to Wales. Will His Majesty’s Government follow the calls of their Welsh Labour colleagues and take real action by devolving justice and policing to Wales?*

Lord Ponsonby: *The Welsh Government highlighted, in their May 2022 report Delivering Justice for Wales, the progress that they had made in implementing the Thomas commission recommendations that fall to them. They also commented that implementing the recommendation was delayed partly because of Covid-19. The commitment to pursue the case for devolution of justice and policing was included in the Welsh Government’s programme for government for 2021-26. However, as I made clear in the original Answer to the noble Baroness, the UK Government are not pursuing that option of complete devolution. We want to work in a constructive way on the initiatives that I have outlined to try to make the best possible benefit for the people of Wales.*

The author of report himself, crossbencher Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, pointed out that “the subject is a complex one; the report was lengthy”, adding:

Lord Thomas: *Do the Government intend to set out in detail why the report was wrong? It would be very useful to have a chapter-by-chapter explanation of why what was recommended unanimously by a completely apolitical group of experts is thought to be wrong.*

Lord Ponsonby: *The noble and learned Lord’s report was a large piece of work. As I said in my initial Answer, it is for the Senedd to take forward the vast bulk of the recommendations, and the UK Government are acting on some of the recommendations and are continuing to act particularly on the disaggregation of data. The Labour manifesto made clear that the principal objective of the noble and learned Lord’s report is not one that the current Government share. We want to work in practical ways for the benefit of Wales, and the examples that I gave of youth justice and probation are good examples of that.*

Peers returned to early release schemes at an oral question (21 October), with Minister Timpson contrasting the Labour government's scheme with its predecessor's: "Unlike the end of custody supervised licence scheme, or ECSL, introduced by the last government, SDS40 had an implementation period that allowed prison and probation staff properly to prepare for release, helping us to reduce the risk of reoffending." After Labour's Lord Watts recalled last government's "decimation of the Probation Service, putting the public at risk", he asked Timpson how long it would "take to repair the damage done". The minister replied:

Lord Timpson: *The noble Lord is correct that probation is under a lot of pressure and our probation colleagues do an amazing job in these difficult situations. I have been fortunate to spend a lot of time since I have taken on this role visiting probation staff around the country, and although we are recruiting an extra 1,000 probation staff by March next year—that is on track and going well—it takes time to train people and for them to gain experience, because much of their role is about relationship building and understanding the challenges that offenders face.*

Probation pressure was again a hot topic in the Lords the following day (22 October) as they debated justice capacity, with Minister Ponsonby conceding that early releases would put "some more pressure on the police and also on the Probation Service and some social services such as housing. The philosophy underlying the government's SDS40 approach rather than the previous approach is planning down the whole pipeline, including people who will regrettably reoffend and how to deal with them." He insisted:

Lord Ponsonby: *We are increasing the number of people in the Probation Service. Obviously, we want to increase the rehabilitation figures and reduce the reoffending figures. The spotlight will be on the Probation Service to try to deliver that objective.*

The same day in the Commons, the Justice Secretary made a statement launching the Independent Sentencing Review by her Conservative predecessor David Gauke, explaining that, "today, the second tranche of [SDS40] emergency releases takes place, creating desperately needed space in our prisons, but that is not the long-term solution". Adding that "we must expand the range of punishments we use outside prison and consider how we punish those offenders who have broken our rules but are not a danger to society", Mahmood continued:

Shabana Mahmood: *In some ways, punishment outside of prison can be even more restrictive than prison. It is a sad fact that in many of our prisons today, a drinker can all too easily procure a drink. On a sobriety tag, however, with their sweat measured every 30 minutes and a 97% compliance rate, their teetotalism is almost as strict as mine. All of that is just using the technology that is immediately available to us, and used already in this country. I will be inviting the reviewers to consider the technology they have available to them now, and the next frontier of technology, used in other countries but not yet in ours. I believe that the modern world presents us with the opportunity to build a prison outside of prison, where the eyes of the state follow a prisoner more closely than any prison officer can.*

Highlighting the "soaring recall population, which has doubled from 6,000 to 12,000 in just six years", she revealed:

Shabana Mahmood: *Later this month, I intend to review the risk assessed recall review process, so that lower-risk cases can be considered for re-release after they have been recalled to prison for two to three months, and where their further detention is no longer necessary to protect the public. I should note that this will only change the cases that can be considered for release, with the final decision still in the hands of experienced probation officers and managers.*

Speaking for the Tories, shadow minister Ed Argar (Melton & Syston) wondered "what additional resource is going into victim support services and probation, over and above what we had already

committed to”, while new Justice Committee chair Andy Slaughter (Labour, Hammersmith & Chiswick) also asked:

Andy Slaughter: *Given that the initiatives she has announced today to relieve pressure on prisons will create additional work for already overstretched probation officers, will she make a further statement when she has decided what operational changes she is going to make to the Probation Service?*

Acknowledging the “very high workloads that probation officers are working under”, Mahmood insisted: “We committed in our manifesto to a strategic review of probation governance,” adding:

Shabana Mahmood: *I have made sure that we have brought forward the recruitment of an extra 1,000 probation officers by March next year. We are working closely with probation unions and probation staff on the frontline to manage the situation. I am very conscious that we do not want to take the pressure out of the prisons and just leave it with the Probation Service instead. This is a whole-system response, and the whole system needs to be stabilised and able to face the pressures we see in it.*

Former shadow chancellor John McDonnell (Labour, Hayes & Harlington) called on ministers to “ensure that the unions are fully involved in deciding on the composition of the panel and the engagement process for the review”, to which Mahmood insisted that “working closely with our trade unions is important to us” and promised “close engagement with everybody who works in His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service going forward”.

The statement was repeated in the Lords the following day (23 October), with shadow minister Lord Keen of Elie highlighting uncertainty about tagging:

Lord Keen: *The Minister mentioned tags and sensors, but that is a tiny part of that overall programme. When we have, let us say, thousands of offenders tagged, we require more than just the tag and sensor, however sophisticated it may be. Does the Minister agree with me that, for the programme to work, we require real-time monitoring, real-time reporting 24 hours a day and a real-time response—again, 24 hours a day? There is no point in noticing that someone has left home under curfew if we do not check on them for another week. That makes considerable demands on police resources, for example. What will be done to address that issue in the context of these reforms? If, however, we are going to use some other service, such as the Probation Service, does the Minister anticipate a significant and, indeed, material increase in the provision of that service?*

The new government’s first Budget at the end of the month saw a modest increase in resources for probation, earmarked for recruiting more staff – but seemingly with no plan to keep them – and at the following debate (6 November), Andy Slaughter highlighted how “we have to ensure that there is a plan for probation to grow in response to measures to reduce prisoner numbers”.

This issue was central to the oral question the next week (11 November) by Prisons Bishop Rachel Treweek, the Lord Bishop of Gloucester, on “the impact of the prisoner early release scheme on probation services”. After Minister Lord Hanson of Flint, who had previously served as a minister in the Blair and Brown governments, repeated “plans to onboard 1,000 new trainee probation officers across the year 2024-25”, Bishop Rachel responded:

Bishop of Gloucester: *Given that we need to be looking long-term, and in the hope that the sentencing review will promote alternatives to custody, will the Minister say what the Government are doing not just to recruit more probation staff but to retain and develop staff so that they are respected and recognised as highly valued professionals?*

Lord Hanson insisted the new trainees “will receive top-quality training, but we also need to look at how we retain the expertise of probation officers, value their experience and ensure that they are part of the government’s mission to reduce reoffending”. Lib-Dem Lord German pointed out that, “if we look at the position of the recruitment of probation officers, as the minister said, we see that all

the inspectorate's reports show a dire need for new recruits in that area at the first and second levels", asking:

Lord German: *Why is it that we are already unable to recruit sufficient people to the Probation Service, which now faces the additional work of having to work with local authorities—which are poorly stretched for housing—and health services? We need these people right now, and that is the problem that we face. The recruitment of the 1,000 officers will occur some time in the future, but how are the Government going to solve the problems immediately?*

Lord Hanson: *The noble Lord should know that the 1,000 are going to be in place by March 2025, and he can hold the Government to account on that figure. We are recruiting now; it is currently 14 November 2024, and, from memory, by March 2025 the 1,000 will be in place. We have improved support for probation staff and increased the pay level from 1 October to 1 April this year, to recognise and, I hope, retain people who are in post.*

Warning that “people are being sentenced to unpaid work but the Probation Service is saying there is no unpaid work for that person to do, so the sentence is written off”, former Met Police commander Lord Paddick, who was a Lib-Dem Peer before going non-affiliated after his appointment as a non-executive advisor for the Met in 2023, asked: “Does the Probation Service really have the capacity to do what it is being asked to do?” After Minister Hanson admitted: “The Probation Service is asked to do an awful lot,” Labour’s Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall pointed out that “the role of a probation officer is complex and requires a high level of skill” and asked Hanson about recruitment:

Baroness McIntosh: *Can he share with the House a bit more about how that recruitment process is being conducted, where the search is going on and what the minimum requirements are for people who might apply for it?*

Lord Hanson: *I am grateful to my noble friend for that question. If I may, I shall reflect on that and raise those points with the Minister, my noble friend Lord Timpson; he will have the detail of the recruitment exercise, which I do not have before me today. I ask her to rest assured that the 1,000 new officers are on track for March 2025, and quality is key to the delivery that those probation officers are seeking to ensure.*

A week later (19 November), the Commons Justice Committee heard evidence from Minister Timpson and Amy Rees, then CEO of HMPPS, with Conservative Neil Shastri-Hurst asking about SDS40 and “the impact that the scheme has had on the case loads of probation officers”. Rees explained that “there are two ways in which it impacts the workload of probation”, adding:

Amy Rees: *When the scheme is in normal operation people will be out for 10% longer, so they will be managed on the balance by the community for longer, but what was particularly difficult and added to the workload over the summer was the retrospective nature of the scheme. We had to prepare in eight weeks and then 12 weeks for a release that we would normally have had much longer to prepare for.*

Minister Timpson explained: “I have spent quite a bit of time in my role with probation because I am aware that this is a potential point of real pressure,” adding that, watching probation officers in Preston ahead of the first tranche of early releases, “there was a lot of overtime happening; people were really going for it to make sure that the SDS40 extra releases would work.” Shastri-Hurst asked whether the service was on track to recruit the pledged 1,000 extra probation officers, with Rees insisting: “Yes, I am confident that we will hit that figure of 1,000.” She continued:

Amy Rees: *It is worth saying—you have asked a lot about workload—that recruitment alone will not be enough in terms of probation. We need to look again at the work we are asking probation to do. Colleagues will know that we did a reset where we looked again at the work we were asking probation to do, in particular to try to make sure that probation officers spend the right time at the right point in the sentence with those most at risk. I think*

we need to keep asking ourselves: what work do we really want probation to do? In particular, where do we best target the efforts of our fully qualified probation officers?

Lord Timpson: *I will add two more points on that. It is good news that we are on track on recruitment, but I am also aware that it takes time to learn the skills to do this job well. A lot of them are not just the technical ones you need to know to do the job; it is the softer skills; it is how you build trusting relationships with the offenders you are working with, often for a long time. We cannot just put someone in a job and expect everything to be great to start off with. It takes time.*

One of the things I am interested in—it fits in a little bit with what Amy was saying—is technology and how we focus our expertise on the people at highest risk at the right time in their journey through probation. What can we do to enable our probation staff to have more face-to-face time rather than time doing administration? Whenever I speak to probation staff and ask, “If you had a magic wand, what are the things you would like me to do to help you do your job better?”, the first thing they say is, “Please help us to do less copy and paste.” One of my goals is to see how we can embrace simple technology to enable them to have more of what I call arm-round-the-shoulder time. That is really what they want to be doing—not filling out forms all day.

Shortly before Christmas Recess (17 December), Mahmood also gave evidence to the committee. Discussing SDS40, she explained “there has already been a lessons learned exercise between tranche 1 on 10 September and tranche 2 on 22 October”, continuing:

Shabana Mahmood: *We set quite a hard challenge for probation, in particular, to try to maintain business as usual planning for releases, even though they are on a tight timetable. I am very proud of the probation staff who worked so hard and so diligently over the summer. For the most part, the system was able to perform at a very good level, but of course we will review any further changes that need to be made.*

In a written statement in the new year (12 February) on probation prioritisation, Mahmood admitted “the pressure facing our Probation Service is considerable” and described how the service had been “burdened with a workload that was, quite simply, impossible”. She added:

Shabana Mahmood: *The Transforming Rehabilitation strategy failed. The rhetoric was of a revolution in how we manage offenders, but the reality was far different. Workloads increased, as new offenders were brought under supervision for the first time, and scarce resources were stretched further than ever. We know that morale plummeted, and worrying numbers of staff voted with their feet, leaving the service altogether, leading the then inspector to declare a “national shortage” of probation professionals.*

She explained there would now be “a process of prioritisation” in which “accredited programmes handed down by the courts to those who are considered to have the higher risk of reoffending will be prioritised”, adding:

Shabana Mahmood: *If the service is to fulfil its historic purpose—protecting the public by reducing reoffending—we need to look hard at what works, and where officers’ time is best spent. When it comes to the value of a probation officer’s time the evidence is clear that we must shift more of probation officers’ time towards the higher-risk offenders, spending more time on protecting the public, working with partners, and working with the offender to rehabilitate them and motivate them to change.*

Giving evidence to the Committee the following month (4 March), Amy Rees was put on the spot over probation by Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West), who asked: “Would you agree that, when it comes to rehabilitation, having an effective probation service is absolutely crucial?” After Rees replied: “Hands down, yes,” Juss followed up:

Warinder Juss: Does it concern you that the probation delivery units last year were assessed as either being inadequate or requiring improvement? What is being done to put that right? What are the causes of having an assessment whereby the probation service is assessed as requiring improvement or being inadequate?

Amy Rees: First of all, yes, it concerns us, and we are working really hard to try to fix it. There are a few things. I will start with the causes and then I might come to what we are trying to do to fix it. Some of the causes are things that have happened over the last 10 years. You all know that there has been a lot of structural reform in probation. That has definitely had an impact. At the time when we were trying to get unified, we had to do that against the backdrop of covid, and all those things provided huge challenges. The other thing is demand: demand has increased very significantly for probation.

What are we trying to do? First, it is to train and recruit people, because the workload is too high at the moment. We are very clear about that. Secondly, we need to focus on what it is we want probation to do, because it is clear at the moment they will not be able to manage the projected increase in demand. We have been very successful on recruitment, but even with that we will not be able to manage the increase in demand and improve quality, so we have to decide where we want them to focus.

We have done that in a couple of ways already. We have done Probation Reset, which is taking the equivalent operationally of circa 40,000 cases out of the caseloads, and that has made a very real difference. You will know that, when the Lord Chancellor made her speech, we talked about where we need to focus for lower-risk offenders, and that might be on reducing reoffending, as opposed to very intensive supervision done by fully qualified probation officers. We are trying to do all of those things.

The final thing, which we have touched on but where I know we are not going into depth today, is what we need to do in digital services, which in probation is really about a productivity measure for staff who have to spend too much time at the moment cutting between systems, cutting and pasting and drawing together information. As you know, probation, probably more than anyone, is reliant on a huge number of partners—the police, social services and others—and staff have to go and look for information in too many places. There are two digital programmes designed to mean that a probation officer can spend less time doing stuff they need to do on a computer and more time face to face with offenders. Those are the things that we are trying to do.

Warinder Juss: As you say, if the workloads are too high, that is going to reduce effectiveness, so you need to get more people working in the service. I understand you have had some difficulty in retaining staff. How successful are you in retention and recruitment now?

Amy Rees: I genuinely think we have been very successful in recruitment. We have had a record number of PQiPs—that is our acronym for recruiting qualified probation officers as they come into the service. One of the problems is that during TR there was no recruitment, so we have been playing catch-up ever since then. We have had record numbers. At the moment, we have a gap of 1,854 qualified probation officers. We have 1,154 in training. You will know that the Lord Chancellor announced that we were going to recruit for another 1,300, which to your question about retention will probably be a net increase of about 700.

It is true that not all of those will stay. I don't want to say to you there are no lessons that we can learn about recruitment or retention. Of course there are, but we have been very successful. I would expect in a world like ours, which is difficult and stressful work—we talked about that in a different context earlier—that it is not a job for everyone. Yes, of course, we can do more to try to make sure they understand the demands of the job before they come. An example of that is that we now have a non-graduate entry that a lot of our PSOs will want to apply for. They have a very good understanding of the work and what it entails, as well as what we need to do to support people to be in a very difficult, stressful

environment. Our probation staff are absolutely outstanding. They are the definition of public servants. They have done a brilliant job with all the context I just talked about over the last 10 years. Our retention is improving, but there is more to do.

Mahmood then highlighted the “vital reforms to the probation service, increasing its focus on medium and high-risk offenders, alongside recruiting 1,300 new probation officers” at the next JQs (11 March), at which Juss pointed out that “an effective Probation Service is essential to the rehabilitation of offenders and to prevent reoffending”, asking:

Warinder Juss: *What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that probation officers have manageable caseloads, and that support is provided for their mental health and wellbeing to avoid high levels of stress and burnout, and also to help with the recruitment and retention of staff?*

Condemning “the chaotic running of the service under the last Government”, Minister Sir Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) replied that the government were “are actively monitoring the effectiveness of the probation reset policy and assessing its impact on workload capacity, the time saved, and the increased focus on individuals posing the highest risk to public safety”, and admitting:

Nic Dakin: *We recognise the significant pressure that probation officers have been under, which is why comprehensive wellbeing support models have been put in place across our services, including dedicated wellbeing leads for both prison and probation services.*

At JQs the following month (22 April), Mahmood reminded MPs that, “in February, I announced reforms to the Probation Service that will focus more of its time on offenders who pose a higher risk of reoffending, and I have asked David Gauke to review how sentences could be reformed to address prolific offending, cut the cycle of reoffending and ultimately make our streets safer”. Minister Dakin also highlighted “the excellent work that our probation staff do day in, day out”, adding:

Nic Dakin: *Probation is an indispensable part of the criminal justice system, but the service currently faces significant pressures. That is why we will recruit a further 1,300 probation officers by March 2026, invest £8 million in new technology to reduce administrative tasks for officers and focus efforts on reducing reoffending.*

JUPG co-chair Lord Tony Woodley asked an oral question the following month (13 May) on what the government were doing “to improve the morale, recruitment and retention of police, prison and probation officers”. Answering, Minister Timpson again highlighted how Labour had “inherited a justice system in crisis, which placed a huge burden on our staff”, and insisted he was “committed to making HMPPS a world-class organisation”. Woodley responded:

Lord Woodley: *In a civilised society, our police, prisons and probation services must never be run on the cheap. Crumbling prisons and shortages of prison and probation staff are endemic. Therefore, does the Minister agree that it was a terrible mistake by the last Government not to protect these vital public services, which are so important to protecting the public, when they unleashed their short-sighted and counterproductive austerity agenda?*

Referencing the recently published Rademaker Review into bullying, harassment and discrimination in HMPPS, Lib-Dem spokesperson Lord Marks reminded Peers that “last week the Minister promised a ‘seismic shift’ to improve professional standards across the Prison and Probation Service. He described reports of bullying, discrimination and harassment as ‘a wake-up call and an opportunity to change’, and we agree.” Marks continued:

Lord Marks: *Retention rates are very bad: 10.4% of probation officers are leaving annually. For Probation Service officers, who include assistants and trainees, it is over 12%. They have too much to do, often with little experience; 7.8% of prison officers leave every year. Low morale is a major contributor but so are pay and conditions, given the*

challenges they face. What extra resources will the Government put into recruitment and retention in those services?

Lord Timpson: Last year we recruited 1,000 extra probation officers, and this year we are recruiting 1,300. It is clear that it is not just about recruiting staff and training them; it is about embracing technology to help them do their jobs better. Last week we announced that we would agree to all 12 recommendations of the Rademaker review, and we are very grateful to one of HMPPS's non-execs, Jennifer Rademaker, for all the work she did on it. It is totally unacceptable that our staff have to work in conditions where they are bullied, belittled and sexually harassed, and as Minister I am determined to stamp it out. Retention rates are not where I would like them to be. I am working very hard to make sure that HMPPS is a world-class organisation. That means high rates of training, high rates of morale and high rates of success.

At question time later that week (15 May), Peers again debated support for people leaving prison, with Lib-Dem Lord Fox pointing out "the Probation Service is an important link in this chain" and asking: "Could the Minister please update your Lordships' House on progress on recruiting the many more additional probation officers that we need in order to handle the workload and the important job that they do?" Minister Ponsonby replied:

Lord Ponsonby: Yes, I absolutely understand the point that the noble Lord, Lord Fox, is making. Last year, the Government recruited 1,000 new probation officers; in the current year, we aim to recruit 1,300 officers and my understanding is that we are on target to achieve that. Of course, it takes two or three years to train probation officers so that they can get the relevant experience and confidence, and that process is ongoing. We absolutely want to revitalise the Probation Service. That is absolutely central to our ambitions for greater use of community sentences in future.

The same day in the Commons, Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick (Newark) asked an Urgent Question on announced changes to recall, with Minister Dakin explaining that the government would "lay a fixed-term recall Statutory Instrument that will mean that those serving sentences of between one and four years can only be returned to prison for a fixed 28-day period", adding that this "builds on previous legislation, introduced by the last government, that mandated 14-day recalls for those serving sentences of under a year". After Jenrick claimed "this decision has put the public in danger and victims in jeopardy", Justice Committee member and new Labour MP for Congleton, Sarah Russell, highlighted how "the Conservatives appear to have forgotten quite a number of things, and I think it might be a good time to remind them", adding:

Sarah Russell: Former Justice Secretary Chris Grayling's disastrous partial privatisation of the Probation Service was overturned in 2019 after the number of serious offences—including rape and murder—committed by those on probation skyrocketed. Does the Minister agree that we are seeing the long tail of Conservative failure, which overshadows everything that we must do now?

Nic Dakin: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of the chaos and turmoil that the Conservatives applied to our very important Probation Service when they were in government. We are putting probation back together. We have already brought 1,000 new probation officers on board, and we are committed to a further 1,300 in the coming year.

Another new Labour MP, Polly Billington (East Thanet), pointed out "we have to be honest and do something different to ensure that we never again run out of prison places, including improving the existing prison estate and investing in the Probation Service, so that we can reduce reoffending and thereby reduce the pressure on prison places". Minister Dakin insisted the government were "investing in probation, and there will also be actions coming forward from the Independent Sentencing Review".

Relaying the statement to the Lords the following week (19 May), Minister Timpson pointed out that “probation is a fantastic service that is really struggling” and insisted: “We recruited 1,000 extra probation officers last year and 1,300 this year.” He continued:

Lord Timpson: *In my view, probation officers do the heavy lifting in the justice system. For too long, they have had too much work in their case loads. Some of that is to do with training and some with introducing technology to ensure that they have more time face to face with offenders. I have an internal review on training going on at the moment, similar to that which I did on prisons before I came into the House, and I assure all noble Lords that, if we are going to fix the problem in our prisons, we need to support our probation staff to do the job that they signed up to do when they joined the service.*

Probation staff had a chance to talk directly to MPs two days later (21 May) when Napo Cymru executive member Su McConnel gave evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee, chaired by JUPG member Ruth Jones (Labour, Newport West & Islwyn), alongside Unison’s Hugh McDyer and Gethin Jones from PCS. Asked about the most significant challenges facing probation staff in Wales, McConnel highlighted how excessive caseloads make the work “deeply stressful for staff and, in some senses, quite chaotic”. She added:

Su McConnel: *In order to deal with the overflow in probation, probation then has reset. As the prisons are letting people out early, the Probation Service is stopping its active supervision of people on its books early. That is a complete cut-off. They are held, hypothetically, on caseloads but they are not being seen. That is just a mathematical formula. Staff are finding that quite difficult to manage safely but constructively.*

Probation was originally a social work-founded organisation, frequently described as social workers to the courts. Well-trained professional probation officers will hold public protection and rehabilitation in each hand, keeping them in balance. However, the service is now imbalanced. Everyone is so busy trying to deal with just the public protection end of seeing people out of prison and trying to keep them out, that that has been thrown into imbalance.

And she revealed: “There is also the toll that this pressure is having on staff in terms of their health and mental health – it is awful,” adding:

Su McConnel: *The ability of an organisation that is exhausted, frightened and sick to take a balanced view about risk is difficult. There is a turnaround where men, primarily, are released almost willy-nilly from the prison estate in a hurry, which is inevitably leading to more rapid recalls because things are not set in place properly. It is pretty heartbreaking to see.*

On recruitment, she explained: “We are always told that the troops are coming over the hill, but they never seem to quite land and stay,” adding:

Su McConnel: *Recruitment is a problem, but so is retention. The Probation Service has lost, it must be, thousands of years of experience with people leaving the service, partly by retiring and partly by leaving early because it has become so difficult. I would like to note that—partly because, from a union point of view, probation is unwillingly tied to the Prison Service, and partly because of circumstances dealing with the immediate emergency that we have in the prison population—people joining the service are not staying for very long. I mean, it is a matter of years—a few years.*

One of the reasons that a lot of members express, and I think research bears this out as well, is that people join the Probation Service with a set of values that are traditional to probation, because they want to work in a social work-based way with people who are in trouble and help them to lead better lives in a supportive and constructive way. That is the rehabilitation side of probation work. Partly because of being tied as a oner, if you like, with the Prison Service and partly because of the pressures the whole system is under, the work of the Probation Service has changed. I do not know if it is apocryphal, but it was certainly

widely believed that the motto of the Probation Service used to be “Advise, assist and befriend”. At that time as I remember it, the joke was that in America—I do not know whether this is apocryphal or not—the unofficial motto of probation was “Surveil ‘em, nail ‘em and jail ‘em”. It was very much an enforcement-led punitive extension of prison. Actually, “Surveil ‘em, nail ‘em and jail ‘em” does feel to a lot of new probation staff like what they are being asked to do, because there is no scope or room for the reasons they joined. That becomes very demoralising.

Turning to post-sentence supervision, she explained:

Su McConnell: *I would pray that we get rid of post-sentence supervision. That is trapping primarily quite immature young men in the revolving door of going in and out of custody. It is doing serious damage and adding to the workload. It is doing damage to individuals and increasing their likelihood of reoffending. I would like to see PSS going. It is also bizarre that we can effectively enforce a recall to prison on someone who has finished their sentence. That is wrong—ethically, it is wrong—so PSS has to go.*

The new Sentencing Bill, introduced in September after the period covered by this report, follows Napo’s advice and abolishes PSS – alongside Rehabilitation Activity Requirements, which the union has also long called for the end of. Back at committee, the need for devolution of justice to Wales came up several times, with McConnell highlighting how the current system “is referred to as the jagged edge, isn’t it, which is very difficult to navigate”, adding that, “from staff on the ground, they just feel everything comes from the centre”. She continued:

Su McConnell: *A probation officer will work with a person under their supervision with local services. Certainly, those contracts are all supplied—those are all done under contract, which is done at the centre, primarily to huge organisations that, as I said in the submission I think, deliver line by line the terms of their contracts to very little effect at all. Probation staff in Wales are compelled—they are required—to use those services. They refer to those services and then they go down the road and refer to the person who they know works well in their community, and that will depend on each community.*

On that sense of central and devolved and the relationships, I would say that all the expert advice—the experts on the ground, but also academics and the inspectorate—is all saying the same thing, which is that probation needs to be very locally based and embedded in its communities. That is not happening. In terms of the relationship between the two Governments, I would leave it for people higher than my pay grade to talk about the actual arrangements for things, but it is notable that on the Welsh Government side, they are talking actively about devolution and locality, but the instincts on the UK side seem to be to centralise. All the advice is to go the other way. [...]

Sadly, many people graduate from youth justice into adult justice so, clearly, the obvious thing is to keep the two joined up. I should note that there has been some excellent work done by the Welsh Centre for Crime and Social Justice and other colleagues about youth justice and maturity and the arguments for applying the same principles to people up to the age of 25. It would be great to see that lesson being rolled into adult justice. As we are talking about comparisons, I believe that youth justice in Wales has seen an absolute turnaround with plummeting figures going into any custodial estate.

Ending the session, chair Ruth Jones asked: “If you had a magic wand and you could fix one thing in your particular area in prisons and probation, what would it be?” McDyer replied that, “speaking from a membership point of view, is that we would want to take the workload and stress off our members right now, because it is grim”, while McConnell agreed, adding:

Su McConnell: *I have that one in my bag and I will add that I would want a commitment to a root and branch review of probation, with a view to separating it from the Prison Service—as much as we respect our colleagues—to be a stand-alone organisation in its own right.*

David Gauke's sentencing review was published the next day (22 May) and immediately debated in the Commons. Explaining that "the review was tasked with addressing the fact that our prisons too often create better criminals, not better citizens", and that, "instead of cutting crime, they are breeding grounds for it", Shabana Mahmood told MPs she accepted Gauke's key recommendation of "a three-part sentence called the earned progression model" whereby, if prisoners "follow prison rules, they will earn earlier release" – as early as a third way through their sentence. She continued:

Shabana Mahmood: *In the second part of the progression model, offenders will enter a period of intensive supervision. That will see more offenders tagged and close management from probation. The Government will therefore significantly increase funding: by the final year of the spending review period, an annual £1.6 billion will rise by up to £700 million, allowing us to tag and monitor tens of thousands more offenders. If offenders do not comply with the conditions of their release, the sentencing review has suggested that recall to prison should be capped at 56 days. We have agreed to this policy in principle, though the precise details will be placed before the House when we legislate.*

New Labour MP James Naish (Rushcliffe) revealed: "We heard this morning that probation services in Nottinghamshire have been rated inadequate following visits by inspectors. They have been judged as understaffed, with urgent improvements needed." He added:

James Naish: *I therefore welcome the £700 million increase for probation services, but can I ask the Lord Chancellor what other steps can be taken to drive up probation standards in constituencies like mine?*

Shabana Mahmood: *I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising issues relating to the Probation Service. We have already expanded the number of staff. Last year, we recruited 1,000 extra, and this year we are on track to hit our target of 1,300 extra staff. Increasing resource—first and foremost with more staff—is a clear priority for us.*

JUPG co-chair Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru, Dwyfor Meirionnydd) explained that, "on behalf of the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group, I welcome the independent review's recognition of probation officers and join the call from the National Association of Probation Officers for extra direct investment in staff now", while new Lib-Dem MP Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) revealed:

Jess Brown-Fuller: *A probation officer in my constituency recently told me that she was told off by her bosses for spending too long with offenders when she was booking just 15-minute appointments. Can the Lord Chancellor tell me when the promised investment will actually reach frontline probation services, and can she guarantee it will be enough to ensure public safety and reduce reoffending?*

Shabana Mahmood: *Let me reassure the hon. Lady that this is a huge uplift in funding for probation. It is a £1.6 billion budget as it stands, and it will increase by up to £700 million by the end of the spending review period. We have already invested in piloting AI and other technology designed to improve productivity, where AI can complete much of the paperwork that a lot of probation officers spend far too much of their time on, often repeating the same information in different documents. That shows huge promise. We will roll that out at pace to give probation officers more time with the offenders in front of them, doing the thing that only a human can do, which is to get to grips with what is driving that offender's behaviour and have a plan to tackle it, including by accessing treatment programmes and other things in the community. We are determined to make sure that the Probation Service can rise to the scale of the challenge. The funding will help with that, as will our investment in that technology.*

Debating the sentencing review in the Upper House (2 June), Lord Marks explained that the Lib-Dems "agree that we desperately need the increased investment in probation – and probably even more investment", while Minister Timpson paid tribute to "probation's important role", pointing out:

Lord Timpson: *In fact, it is more than important; it is vital. That is why we are increasing funding for probation by up to £700 million by the final year of the spending review—an increase of 45%. That will allow us to tag and monitor tens of thousands more offenders, which the evidence has shown cuts crime and makes our streets safer.*

Numerous other Peers raised the need for urgent investment in probation. Lib-Dem Lord Foster of Bath highlighted how, “if we want to further improve the levels of reoffending and increase public confidence, a community sentence programme will need to have far more investment than the very welcome £700 million for the Probation Service”, to which Minister Timpson replied:

Lord Timpson: *The £700 million of extra funding is absolutely vital, and will go an awful long way to making sure that we can deliver the service that our hard-working probation staff need. They know exactly what to do, but they have often been restricted in what opportunities they have.*

Labour’s Lord Bach also raised similar concerns, warning: “What I am particularly concerned about is the Probation Service, because how it has been treated in the past few years is, frankly, scandalous.” He insisted that “it has been run down and has not been able to do the very difficult and vital job that it is there to do” and asked:

Lord Bach: *Can the Minister ensure, please, that the Probation Service, which is at the heart of this change if it is to be successful, is properly funded and given every support—all the support that it has lacked for so many years?*

Timpson agreed: “My noble friend is 100% right about the Probation Service – that is where the heavy lifting is done, and it is at the heart of the system,” adding:

Lord Timpson: *If you do not get probation funded and operating properly, the rest does not work either. I have met so many amazing probation staff who know exactly what they need to do but feel that they have not been supported enough over the years and that they spend too much time on administration and not enough time face to face with offenders, helping them turn their lives around—and that is the job that they signed up to do.*

Cross-bencher Lord Macdonald of River Glaven explained that “a close relative of mine works in the Probation Service” and revealed: “It is demoralised, underfunded and depressed, and that will have to change urgently, although, of course, getting probation officers into positions of experience takes time.” He added:

Lord Macdonald: *The period when those prisoners who are most at risk of reoffending are being engaged with by the Probation Service and by rehabilitation services will be key to this working, and if that is not got right, the reform will not be got right. As the Minister says, the Probation Service is central to this. Is he confident that he is going to be able to secure sufficient funds to create the sort of transformation that will be required for this scheme to work?*

Lord Timpson: *I am learning how this business works, and when you go to the Treasury, you ask for what you want and then, in our case, we are happy with what we need to do the job. The £700 million is significant and will make a difference, but on top of that, we need to recruit more probation staff, which we are doing. We need to train them really well, and we are doing a review into training. We also need to support them, because the noble Lord is right: 39% of people reoffending is far too high and means more victims as well.*

At JQs the following day (3 June), Warinder Juss asked what the Government were doing “to help to reduce reoffending by people on probation”, with Shabana Mahmood reminding MPs that, “last week, I announced measures to toughen up community punishment, which results in lower reoffending rates than short custodial sentences”, adding: “We will also increase probation investment to manage offenders in the community safely.” Juss responded:

Warinder Juss: Will the Lord Chancellor outline the steps being taken to recruit and retain probation officers, and to ensure that they have manageable caseloads and that their morale is improved? What programmes or partnerships are in place to help those on probation to access stable accommodation, and employment, training or education, so that they can go through the rehabilitation process and reduce their chances of reoffending?

Shabana Mahmood: We are investing in probation. Funding will increase by £700 million by the final year of the spending review. That is a 45% increase in annual budgets, which will fund further recruitment on top of the 1,300 officers we will recruit this year and the 1,000 officers we recruited in the previous year. That will support our investment in services that rehabilitate offenders and cut crime.

The Justice Committee questioned David Gauke about his sentencing review later that month (17 June), with new Labour MP for Colchester, Pam Cox, asking about the impact of early releases on the Probation Service:

Pam Cox: How do you think probation will need to alter to cope?

David Gauke: We are clear within the report that probation is going to have a vital role to play within this. Probation is also under strain and that is why we suggest a whole set of reforms for probation. We make the case for additional resources for probation that, to be fair to the Government, has now been announced. What we argue for in the probation system is that the focus of their efforts should be at the, if you like, highest risk point, which is the period immediately after release. That is when a lot of ex-prisoners reoffend. That support needs to be there at that point.

There are other issues that are connected with this, greater use of approved premises and so on. There is no doubt that if you are moving people from custody to the community it is necessary for what happens in the community to work. Although this was a sentencing review and we wanted to stick to our terms of reference, we did spend quite a lot of time on, and quite a lot of the report is focused on, how probation should be able to cope with this, whether that is having the resources they need, making better use of technology, or redeploying resources in the most effective way. That is going to be vital in delivering this.

New Labour MP for Amber Valley, Linsey Farnsworth, highlighted how “the review proposes an expansion to the use of community sentences”, asking:

Linsey Farnsworth: Having been in the criminal justice system before coming into Parliament, I am interested to hear what your view is on what implications diverting more people into the community would have on the Probation Service, which I am aware has been under quite a lot of strain for a significant period of time now.

David Gauke: No, I think it is a perfectly fair question and does come back to our earlier discussion in the context of the progression model. Yes, if we are moving people from custody to the community, whether that is at the end of the sentence or whether that is instead of a custodial sentence, that is going to place greater demands on the probation system. That is why we devote a whole chapter to that.

Probation requires the resources. They need the technology. We need to ensure that qualified probation officers do what qualified probation officers can do and only they can do, if you like. If there is other work that can be done elsewhere, whether that is within the Probation Service or whether we can make greater use of the third sector, certainly my experience—and I suspect members of the Committee may have a similar experience—is that there are a lot of terrific charities out there very keen to help, making use of volunteers and making a real difference. I think there is more that we can do with those organisations to expand that. I think they probably can scale up quite rapidly in these circumstances.

As to your point on whether this increases pressure on probation if community sentences are used more, yes, absolutely. We completely accept that, which is why we have to take probation—not just the Probation Service but the probation system—very seriously. It has to be valued. I think that has to be a key culture change. I know, just because I heard James Timpson make this point in two separate speeches last week, that that is very much the agenda he wants to pursue. I hope there is wholehearted support across the political spectrum for that.

MPs debated departmental budgets the following week, with Justice one of the ministries under the spotlight (25 June). Opening the debate, Justice Committee chair Andy Slaughter pointed out that probation “will receive an additional £700 million a year to support the reforms in the sentencing review. That is a substantial increase in funding, which is intended to enable probation to supervise more people in the community and expand electronic tagging.” He continued:

Andy Slaughter: *The Probation Service currently manages 240,000 individuals on court order or licence. Worryingly, in last year’s annual report, HM inspectorate of probation labelled 10 local probation services as “requires improvement” and 14 as “inadequate”. It identified staffing challenges, unmanageable workloads, deficits in casework and insufficient management of risk, public protection and safeguarding. However, it also found outstanding statutory victim work, commitment and vision from staff and some good partnership working. The Committee has seen that itself on its visit to probation services.*

I will however raise my concern about the ability of Serco, the current electronic tagging provider, to deal with the dramatic increase in demand on its services that will inevitably result from the sentencing Bill. The Committee has been in frequent correspondence with the Prisons Minister to raise our concerns regarding Serco’s poor performance, which has also been highlighted by Channel 4 and its “Dispatches” programme.

The Committee has identified several issues with management of the tagging contract, including substantial delays to the fitting of tags, even to serious offenders. We were shocked to learn that financial penalties have been levied on Serco every month since it took on the service in May 2024. It is unclear how Serco will be able to deal with increased demand given its unacceptable performance in managing the electronic tagging service at its current level.

His fellow Committee member, new Tory MP for Bridgwater Sir Ashley Fox, highlighted how “there is already a shortfall of nearly 2,000 probation officers”, claiming: “In fact, there are now 200 fewer probation officers than when Labour took office.” He continued:

Ashley Fox: *If the Government intend to go ahead with this plan, we need to know how they plan to recruit the additional probation officers that they will need. What is their plan? If they go ahead with abolishing short sentences, those community sentences will have to be seen by the public to be really tough and worthwhile if the criminal justice system is to retain confidence. I fear that the Government do not have a plan for that. Although we see more money allocated in the Budget for prison and probation services, we do not get any detail about what that means for the recruitment of those extra probation officers.*

His fellow Committee member, Pam Cox, insisted that new “reforms must be matched by investment in probation” – because:

Pam Cox: *The Probation Service is under severe strain, with many local services rated as inadequate and staff turnover still too high. The £700 million earmarked for probation reform is a start, but we must ensure that it delivers real, measurable improvements in reoffending rates.*

And her fellow Committee member Linsey Farnsworth called for “proper sustained funding, particularly to support the Probation Service, which is at the heart of a functioning and fair justice system”, adding:

Linsey Farnsworth: *The Probation Service is at a crossroads, and its future will be decided by the adequacy of resourcing, staffing, and funding. The Government have promised that it will receive an increase by 2028-29 of up to £700 million to support the reforms set out in the Independent Sentencing Review, and the Minister responsible for prisons, parole and probation has set a target to recruit 1,300 probation staff in the next year. The Ministry of Justice's budget for 2025-26 shows other welcome increases, including nearly £800 million more for day-to-day spending, £523 million of which is allocated to prisons and probation, and a huge 32% increase in capital expenditure.*

The justice system has suffered from years of underfunding and under-resourcing, which has resulted in overcrowding and overburdening. Justice reform is about protecting communities, supporting victims, and giving offenders the opportunity to transform their life and reintegrate into society. If we are to avoid a return to the crisis we inherited, the Probation Service must receive the resources that it desperately needs.

And her fellow Committee member, Lib-Dem Tessa Munt (Wells & Mendip Hills), also warned that “the money that goes into the probation system may not be enough to deal with the scale of the added pressures on the probation system”.

The following week (30 June) saw MPs debate changes mandating 28-day fixed-term recall as default, with Minister Dakin explaining that “the Government inherited a Probation Service on its knees, and from day one, we have been hard at work getting a grip on the crisis”. He continued:

Nic Dakin: *It is vital that the Probation Service is properly equipped and resourced to deliver this change effectively. We are already making progress to rebuild the capacity of the Probation Service. We are committed to recruiting 1,300 trainee probation officers in 2025-26 to help meet additional demand, having exceeded our ambition to recruit 1,000 trainees in 2024-25. We are also reducing the administrative burden on probation officers by investing an initial £8 million in pilots of new technology. That will allow probation officers to focus more of their time on higher-risk offenders, for whom closer supervision is needed to reduce the risk they pose.*

The Government have committed up to £700 million of additional funding to probation services by the final year of the spending review period, which is a funding increase of around 45%. That will mean thousands more tags, more staff and more accommodation to ensure that offenders are supervised and supported more closely in the community. Probation capacity will continue to be closely monitored as the new measures are introduced across the service. The Ministry of Justice carefully considers any policy changes with operational colleagues and workforce modelling teams. A transformation programme is also under way that aims to ease workload demands and to streamline processes for probation staff.

Shadow minister Kieran Mullan (Bexhill & Battle) pointed out that “the impact assessment for the draft order concedes that it would ‘increase the workload’ on the Probation Service”, calling this “an under-statement.” He continued:

Kieran Mullan: *In reality, the order would transfer pressure from the prison estate to the community, demanding that probation officers, already overstretched, manage a sudden influx of higher risk, less thoroughly assessed offenders. There has been a decrease in the absolute number of probation officers in the year up to March 2025, at a time when the Government are pledging to expand probationary services. The impact assessment says that will “increase demand for probation services as offenders will spend more time on average on licence being supervised” in the community. When do the Government expect to increase the total number of probation officers in a sustained way? How much of the additional funding in the spending review was allocated to this policy?*

Moving this Statutory Instrument in the Lords the following day (1 July), Minister Timpson insisted he would not “shy away from the reality that an increase in the number of offenders managed in the community will place additional demands on the Probation Service”, adding:

Lord Timpson: *We are working closely with Serco to ensure that any additional demand on electronic monitoring is deliverable in the introduction of these new measures. We remain confident in our ability to expand the electronic monitoring service. Probation's capacity will continue to be closely monitored as new measures are introduced across the service.*

Lib-Dem Lord Thomas of Gresford highlighted how “this SI asks a lot of the Probation Service to prop up all these failures elsewhere in the criminal justice system”, adding:

Lord Thomas: *The Probation Service has very similar problems of retention and recruitment. The Minister referred to being one on one with a probation officer. I was told of one incident where one probation officer was looking after a group of a dozen or so, whose day's task was painting a wall. One youth complained of vertigo after climbing a ladder and demanded that he be taken home. The sole probation officer, who drove the van, had no option but to pile all his charges into the back of the van to take the unfortunate individual to his place of abode. When they returned to the painting job later, someone had nicked all the paint tins. The system is broken.*

Labour's Lord Lemos said he also was “concerned about probation capacity and capability”, explaining: “There is no scenario, if we implement this reform and the others that are coming, in which the probation system will need to do less.” He continued:

Lord Lemos: *It will have to do a great deal more and a lot quicker, and, as the Minister said, it will be dealing with much more high-risk offenders. I should like some reassurance from him that the resources that have been made available in the spending review and wider reforms, including the use of technology that he talked about, will really make a fundamental step change in the performance of the Probation Service, without which all this would not be adequate.*

Winding up the debate, Minister Timpson conceded that “the ask of probation is significant, and noble Lords and noble and learned Lords are 100% correct that this is where the heavy lifting needs to be done. It is about investing in recruitment, training and technology.” He added:

Lord Timpson: *We need to make sure that the staff who work in the Prison and Probation Service have far more consistent leadership and policy-making from us so they know what they need to do, rather than it changing all the time. We need to make sure that capacity is sustainable, and that we have enough probation and prison staff to do the job.*

A week later at JQs (8 July), Warinder Juss again asked what the Government were doing to support probation officers, with Minister Dakin insisting: “We are determined to back our hard-working probation staff by investing up to £700 million, which is a 45% increase in funding” and adding that “we have already exceeded this year's target by recruiting over 1,000 trainees. We will recruit another 1,300 more probation officers in 2025-26.” Juss started his supplementary question by noting that “an effective Probation Service is crucial for the rehabilitation and resettlement of prisoners to reduce reoffending”, before continuing:

Warinder Juss: *Although I welcome the number of new probation officers to be recruited, Napo reports that probation workloads are unmanageable, staff turnover and sickness are high, and probation officers are often managing cases belonging to colleagues, when evidence suggests that prisoners on licence are less likely to be recalled if they have had the same supervising officer from the day of their release. Can the Minister please outline the steps being taken to address these issues, so that morale is improved and probation officers have sufficient time for and attention to give to individual cases?*

Nic Dakin: *My hon. Friend is right that we need to ensure that [probation] officers have the time to do the job they came in to do, which is to spend time with offenders and turn their lives around. In addition, we have invested an initial £8 million in technology and launched a new programme to develop a sustainable work process that will allow probation staff to focus on the work they joined the service to deliver.*

And the following day (9 July) again saw Lords debate early release schemes, during which Conservative Viscount Hailsham asked: “Is the Minister satisfied that the Probation Service is properly resourced to manage and supervise prisoners on discharge?” Minister Timpson admitted that, “at the moment, the Probation Service is really struggling”, adding:

Lord Timpson: *It is struggling because of the workload of staff and the lack of integrated technology—staff spend far too much time doing admin rather than spending face-to-face time with offenders. When it comes to resourcing, when I leave this place eventually and go back to running my business, I would like the Lord Chancellor to support me in negotiations, because the amount of money that we managed to secure for probation, £700 million, is a really important amount—nearly a 45% increase. That, along with the other reforms that I am planning to do on probation, will go a long way.*

But for this vital investment really to go a long way to restoring the Probation Service to its former glory, much of it must be spent encouraging staff to stay, which ultimately comes down to boosting pay, terms and conditions. And with the Sentencing Bill set to pile yet more pressure on probation, the fight for frontline resources is more urgent than ever – and JUPG members stand ready to work with Napo to ensure probation staff secure the recognition and reward they so richly deserve.

Relevant legislation

The 2024 King’s Speech (17 July), outlining Labour’s first legislative programme in 15 years, contained only two justice-related Bills – the Crime and Policing Bill, introduced in the Commons on 25 February, and the Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill, introduced as the Victims and Courts Bill on 7 May, with the Public Protection part presumably moving to the new Sentencing Bill (introduced on 2 September 2025 after the period covered by this report) ostensibly to implement the recommendations of the Independent Sentencing Review (see Campaigns, above).

But the government were forced to rush through emergency legislation – the Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Act 2025 – after a furore over new guidelines from the Sentencing Council on pre-sentence reports (PSRs), published on 5 March and due to be implemented at the start of April. These included a section on PSRs that said such reports would normally be considered necessary if an offender had one or more specified characteristics, including being female, from an ethnic minority or a victim of exploitation, as it has long been acknowledged that these cohorts are disproportionately penalised by the criminal justice system.

Despite the last government welcoming these proposed changes in draft form, with then minister Gareth Bacon (Orpington) praising the “fuller guidance around the circumstances in which courts should request a pre-sentence report” back in February 2024 in a letter to the council, Conservative MPs immediately expressed outrage over the new guideline. Shadow justice secretary Robert Jenrick raised the issue at a statement debate on Crown court capacity (5 March), claiming that “new sentencing guidelines published alongside this statement will make a custodial sentence less likely for those ‘from an ethnic minority, cultural minority, and/or faith minority community’” and asking:

Robert Jenrick: *Why is the Justice Secretary enshrining this double standard—this two-tier approach to sentencing? It is an inversion of the rule of law. Conservative Members believe in equality under the law; why does she not?*

Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood hit back, insisting that, “as somebody from an ethnic minority background, I do not stand for any differential treatment before the law for anyone. There will never be a two-tier sentencing approach under my watch or under this Labour government.”

Three Tory backbenchers raised the issue at Business Questions the following day (6 March), including Justice Committee member Sir Ashley Fox:

Ashley Fox: *The Sentencing Council has issued guidelines saying that a pre-sentence report will normally be considered before sentencing a criminal from an ethnic, cultural or faith minority, or if the criminal is a woman or a transsexual, but not, apparently, if someone is a straight, white, Christian man. That evidence of two-tier justice is corrosive to public trust and confidence in the criminal justice system. Given that Ministry of Justice officials attend the Sentencing Council, either the Lord Chancellor knew of the policy or she was asleep at the wheel.*

Speaking for the government, the Leader of the House, Lucy Powell (Manchester Central), also denounced the changes:

Lucy Powell: *As I made clear to the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans) earlier, the Government have made it absolutely clear that we disagree with the guidance issued by the Sentencing Council. The hon. Member will know that the process and consultation for developing that guidance happened on his Government's watch—it absolutely did. The Lord Chancellor has made her position and that of the Government absolutely clear today, and that is why she has written to the Sentencing Council.*

Mahmood indeed wrote to the council that same day, asking it to review the guideline and explaining that she would be reviewing the council's role and powers. Council chair Lord Justice Davis replied on 10 March 2025, highlighting disparities in sentence outcomes between white offenders and offenders from ethnic minorities, adding: "I do not accept the premise of your objection."

The issue was a hot topic at Justice Questions the following day (11 March), with Jenrick first disputing that the previous government had approved these changes, and then proposing his own legislation to tackle this alleged "two-tier justice":

Robert Jenrick: *In 21 days' time, by the Justice Secretary's own admission, we will have two-tier justice. Her plan to fix that will not come into effect for a year, and that is unacceptable. As she has been too lazy to do her job, I will do it for her. Today I am presenting a Bill to block these two-tier sentencing guidelines and fix her mess; it is here and ready to go. Will she support it? Will she stand with us on the Conservative Benches for equality under the law, or will it be two-tier justice with her and two-tier Keir?*

Shabana Mahmood: *The whole House can see that the only pretence at a job is the one that the shadow Lord Chancellor is making, because he is pretending to be the Leader of the Opposition. We all know exactly what he is about. My reaction to what has happened in relation to the Sentencing Council's guidelines was very clear when I made the oral statement last week in this House: we will never stand for a two-tier approach to sentencing. I am actually getting on with fixing the problem, rather than looking for a bandwagon to jump on, which is why I have already written to the Sentencing Council. I will be meeting it later this week, and I have made it very clear that I will consider its role and its powers. If I need to legislate, I will do so, but I will ensure that whatever changes I bring forward are workable and deliver the fair justice system that we all need and deserve—one that his Government did not deliver.*

Labour backbencher Liz Twist (Blaydon & Consett) joined in with throwing the council under the bus:

Liz Twist: *The principle of equality before the law is integral to our justice system, but the new guidelines from the Sentencing Council—which were welcomed by the previous Government—have put that principle at risk. Does the Lord Chancellor agree that Conservative Members have a lot of explaining to do?*

Shabana Mahmood: *I notice that in all his references to letters, the shadow Lord Chancellor did not refer to the letter from the previous sentencing Minister, now the shadow Transport Secretary, who welcomed those guidelines. He knows full well that that was a reference to the guidelines around race, ethnicity and cultural background.*

Tory former minister Esther McVey (Tatton) also called for legislation to tackle the issue:

Esther McVey: *I welcome the Secretary of State's attempts to prevent the Sentencing Council from changing the sentencing process, which would lead to a two-tier justice system. If, however, the council will not budge—as appears to be the case—a two-tier justice system will arrive in just 21 days, contradicting the key principle of the legal system that everyone should be equal before the law without discrimination. Will the Secretary of State introduce legislation immediately to ensure that that two-tier justice system does not come about?*

Shabana Mahmood: *I have already set out exactly what I am going to do. I have written to the Sentencing Council, using the powers that I have to do so, and I will be meeting it later this week. I have made it very clear that I will consider its role and powers, and if I need to legislate, I will not hesitate to do so.*

But Green justice spokesperson, Sian Berry (Brighton Pavilion), welcomed the changes and called on the government instead to back the council:

Sian Berry: *On Radio 4's "Today" programme last week, Matthew Ryder KC, who sits as a judge, praised the extreme helpfulness of pre-sentencing reports for passing effective sentences. Will the Secretary of State do as he asks and endorse the importance, value and independence of the Sentencing Council?*

Shabana Mahmood: *We all agree across the House, I hope, that pre-sentencing reports play a vital role in ensuring that whoever is passing a sentence has all the relevant facts at their disposal. I do not believe that access to such reports, or whether a sentencer asks for them, should be dictated by race or ethnic background. They should be made available, and I would like to see more use of pre-sentencing reports across the board for every type of offender.*

Independent MP Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) highlighted how “one of the key objectives of the Sentencing Council is to ensure that there is parity of sentence up and down the country”, adding that “it is a known fact that people from ethnic minorities sometimes get tougher custodial sentences than their white counterparts for similar offences” and asking:

Ayoub Khan: *Does the Lord Chancellor regret her attempt to discredit the considered and evidence-based conclusions of some of the most esteemed members of our judiciary when they published the guidelines on pre-sentencing reports?*

Shabana Mahmood: *What I am shocked about is that we can see a disparity in the overall cohort sentencing outcomes. Everybody accepts that we are not quite sure why it is happening, and there has not been sufficient curiosity over the last few years to work out why that is the case. My view is that if we can see a problem or think we have one, we need to get to the bottom of what is actually going on before we start coming up with broad policy solutions to fix that problem. I also think that some of these broad policy decisions are better made by Ministers, because we are directly elected individuals who will pay the price for the consequences of our choices. That is a conversation that I will pick up with the Sentencing Council when we meet later this week.*

But “Blue Labour” poster boy, newbie Jonathan Hinder (Pendle & Clitheroe), however, attacked the council directly:

Jonathan Hinder: *I was shocked to read the Sentencing Council's response to the Secretary of State last night, with its arrogant tone. As she has said, this Parliament is sovereign, and the fact is that we have given too much power away to these unelected bodies in recent years. Can I reassure her of my support, and can she reassure me that she will not rest until we retain equality before the law?*

Shabana Mahmood: *I thank my hon. Friend. I am very much looking forward to my meeting with the Sentencing Council later this week. As I have made clear, I am looking into the roles and powers of the council, and I will not hesitate to legislate if I need to do so.*

And responding to Sir Ashley Fox, Mahmood again was clear that legislation was on the table:

Ashley Fox: *The two-tier sentencing guidelines take effect on 1 April. If the Lord Chancellor is sincere about having a justice system that treats everyone equally, will she not support our Bill to block the guidelines?*

Shabana Mahmood: *I have already made my position clear. I have written to the Sentencing Council, and I will be meeting it later this week. I am reviewing the roles and powers of the council, and I will not hesitate to legislate if I need to do so.*

Tory backbencher Andrew Snowden (Fylde) raised the issue at Prime Minister's Questions the following day (12 March), insisting that, "in just 20 days' time, new sentencing guidance will come into effect that the Justice Secretary has already conceded will be two-tier in its nature", adding:

Andrew Snowden: *It will mean that the colour of a person's skin or their religion can mean that they are viewed with leniency in the eyes of the law. It will plunge public confidence in the judiciary into crisis, but it is avoidable. We Conservatives have tabled a Bill that, if backed on Friday, can stop this guidance in its tracks. Will the Prime Minister overrule his Justice Secretary, and confirm here and now that he will back that Bill, or will he simply step aside and prove that he has been two-tier Keir all along?*

Keir Starmer: *Everyone should be equal before the law, and that is why the Lord Chancellor has taken up the issue with the Sentencing Council, but the hon. Gentleman needs to do his homework. The proposal that he complains about was drafted in 2024, and the last Government were consulted. When they were consulted, what did they say? They said they welcomed the proposal. I understand that the shadow Justice Secretary, the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), is taking the Sentencing Council to court. Perhaps he should add himself as a second defendant, so that he can get to the bottom of all this.*

Mahmood and Lord Justice Davis met the next day, with the Justice Secretary conceding a week later in a letter to the council that there is a difference in sentencing outcomes for people from minority ethnic groups, but insisting this was a question of policy for the government to address. She asked the council to review the guideline or at least re-open the consultation, but responding a week later, Davis said that, having met, the council had concluded that the guideline did not need revision and that clarifying the language might correct widespread misunderstanding.

The Tories were then granted an Urgent Question on the topic (17 March), at which Jenrick claimed that, "in just 14 days, new two-tier sentencing rules will come into force", insisting:

Robert Jenrick: *These sentencing rules will infect our ancient justice system with the virus of identity politics, dividing fellow citizens on the basis of their skin colour and religion. The rules will ride roughshod over the rule of law and destroy confidence in our criminal justice system.*

And highlighting how capacity issues in probation limit the number of PSRs, he asked Minister Sir Nic Dakin:

Robert Jenrick: *Has the Department conducted an assessment of the additional pre-sentence reports that will be required and the impact of that on the Probation Service, given that it is already working above capacity? Is it considering providing the Probation Service with additional resources to cope with the extra demand? [...] If there is one thing we know about Labour Governments, it is that they always end in tears. This time, it is a second-tier Justice Secretary pursuing two-tier justice, all to suck up to her boss, two-tier Keir.*

Nic Dakin: *There is one thing that we know about Labour Governments: they always have to clear up the mess left by Conservative Governments. That is what the Lord Chancellor is doing at the moment. She is clearing up the mess left by the previous Government: the clogged-up the courts, the overflowing prisons and the overworked Probation Service.*

Getting back to the facts of the case, the Lord Chancellor met the Sentencing Council last Thursday and had a constructive discussion. It was agreed that she will set out her position more fully in writing, which the Sentencing Council will then consider before the guidance is due to come into effect. This is serious government, not auditioning for government. The Conservatives were not only consulted; they welcomed these guidelines when they were in office. The former Minister for sentencing wrote a letter of welcome to the Sentencing Council setting this out on 19 February 2024. There is a process in place now that needs to be allowed to play out. We will not pre-empt that process.

He was followed by Justice Committee chair Andy Slaughter, who pointed out that “the Sentencing Council is – it should not need saying – a non-political body whose guidelines are carefully drafted and widely consulted on”, adding:

Andy Slaughter: *These guidelines received positive responses from the Justice Committee under its previous Chair and from the previous Government. They do not require that a pre-sentence report is ordered, they do not limit who should be the subject of such a report and they do not tie the hands of the sentencer. Does my hon. Friend agree that by dragging the Sentencing Council into the political arena without good cause, the shadow Justice Secretary degrades both the Sentencing Council and himself?*

Nic Dakin: *My hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee makes a good point about the way in which the shadow Justice Secretary conducts himself. The important thing is that the Lord Chancellor had a constructive meeting with the chair of the Sentencing Council and there is now a process in place to address this issue.*

Imran Hussain (Labour, Bradford East) highlighted how the “two-tier” narrative was in fact upside-down and that, “if there is a two-tier justice system, it is not the one claimed by the Conservatives, but it is certainly one that was created by them – one where victims of crime are let down by delays, where working-class communities see justice delayed and denied, and where the reality remains that black and ethnic minority defendants are disproportionately sentenced?” He asked the minister:

Imran Hussain: *Does he agree that instead of playing political games with sentencing, we should focus on delivering real justice, ensuring that every decision made in our courts is based on evidence, not culture wars or headlines in right-wing rags?*

Nic Dakin: *My hon. Friend is right to contrast the approach of the soundbites from the shadow Justice Secretary with the Justice Secretary’s approach of rolling up her sleeves and getting on with the job of sorting out the mess left in our prisons, Probation Service and courts.*

Labour newbie Emma Foody (Cramlington & Killingworth) explained: “As a former magistrate, I have been personally involved in sentencing decisions and have relied on and can attest to the importance of pre-sentencing reports giving as much information about an offender as possible before deciding an appropriate sentence.” Highlighting how, “used properly, they can cut reoffending rates”, she asked:

Emma Foody: Does the Minister agree that pre-sentencing reports should therefore be available for all offenders and that access should not be determined by an offender's ethnicity, culture or faith?

Nic Dakin: My hon. Friend is exactly right that pre-sentence reports play an important role, and we ought to applaud the work that the Probation Service and others do in preparing those reports. She is exactly right to point to how effective they are in helping with sentencing.

Fellow Labour newbie Chris Vince (Harlow) also called for PSRs for everyone:

Chris Vince: It has already been mentioned that pre-sentencing reports are important for judges. However, does he agree that pre-sentencing reports should be available for all offenders, and that their availability should not be determined by an offender's ethnicity, culture or faith?

Peers debated the question two days later (19 March), with Lib-Dem spokesperson Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames calling the Mahmood's position "baffling", pointing out:

Lord Marks: As the Minister is well aware, there is strong evidence—often discussed in this House—that offenders from ethnic minorities are more likely than their white counterparts to receive immediate custodial sentences, and particular care is needed to change that. We all agree on equality before the law and the guideline is intended not to encourage unfair sentencing but to prevent it. So, on reflection, do the Government now agree that, in view of their vulnerability to unfair sentencing, the guideline is right to highlight the need for pre-sentence reports for ethnic minority offenders?

Minister Lord Timpson insisted that "the issue of tackling disproportionate outcomes in the criminal justice system is a matter of policy and should be addressed by government ministers and not the Sentencing Council", adding:

Lord Timpson: It is my view and that of the Lord Chancellor that everybody should be treated equally in the eyes of the law. It is worth noting that the party opposite was not only consulted but welcomed these guidelines when it was in office.

Other Peers called for PSRs for everyone, with Viscount Hailsham insisting that, "in general, a community sentence should be imposed rather than a custodial one" and asking the minister:

Viscount Hailsham: Would he agree that, in general, and not confined to the cohorts referred to in the guidelines, there should be a pre-sentence report to assist the court in determining whether a defendant is likely to be compliant with a community sentence and also to benefit from one?

Lord Timpson: Our independent judiciary is best placed to decide whether a community or a custodial sentence is required. From my experience, pre-sentence reports can be very useful in supporting the judiciary in their decision-making. They are even more helpful when the pre-sentence report is written by someone who knows the offender well and has a lot of training and background information on that person.

Former Liberty director Baroness Chakrabarti (Labour) pointed out that, "contrary to the confected outrage from across the House, sentencing is not a matter for politicians and should be independent of government", asking the minister:

Baroness Chakrabarti: Does he also agree that it would be a jolly good thing if all offenders, whoever they are, had the benefit of a pre-sentence report?

Lord Timpson: I thank my noble friend for her question. It is up to the independent judiciary to decide whether to request a pre-sentence report. What we do know is that in a

number of cases they are very appropriate. We also know that our judiciary—in which many noble, and noble and learned, Lords in this House have taken an important role—is respected around the world. We need to ensure that that is maintained.

And former New Labour minister Lord Browne of Ladyton pointed out that nowhere in the guidelines “do they require judges to hand down lighter sentences to ethnic minorities or any category of offender – they simply recommend that pre-sentence reports be sought for more categories of offender, so that sentences can better take into account any and all relevant factors”, asking:

Lord Browne: *Does my noble friend agree that having pre-sentence reports in greater numbers and in more cases would be a welcome step in helping sentencers arrive at fair, appropriate, transparent and effective sentences for all offenders?*

Lord Timpson: *I thank my noble friend for that question. It is clear that pre-sentence reports can be very useful. Our focus needs to be on having good pre-sentence reports and, when people leave prison and custody, making sure that they have a one-way ticket, not a return, because we do not want them to reoffend.*

On the day the change was set to take effect (1 April), Mahmood made a statement to the Commons revealing that “the guidelines have been put on pause while Parliament rightly has its say”, adding:

Shabana Mahmood: *In general, I should be clear, I welcome the use of pre-sentence reports. In the last few months, I have created capacity within the Probation Service to ensure that it has more time for vital work such as this. But the new guidance, if it came into force, would encourage judges to request them for some cohorts of offenders and not others. Specifically, it notes that it would “normally be considered necessary” to request pre-sentence reports for ethnic, cultural or faith minorities. It is important to be clear about the impact that a pre-sentence report is likely to have in this instance: it is more likely to discourage a judge from sending an offender to jail. It is this that creates the perception of differential treatment before the law and risks undermining public confidence in the justice system.*

A repeated theme of my engagement with the Sentencing Council over the guidelines has been the intention behind them. It was attempting to address very real inequalities that exist in our justice system—inequalities that are evident in the sentences that offenders receive. It is unclear why this happens, as the Sentencing Council acknowledges. There is no doubt that more must be done to understand the problem we face and to address it.

And insisting “it is essential that the boundaries between what is policy and what is judicial decision making are clear”, she announced:

Shabana Mahmood: *For that reason, the Government will today introduce the Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill. It is a tightly focused Bill. It does not interfere with the vital work of the council providing guidance to judges on how to sentence offenders. It addresses the issue of when a pre-sentence report should be ordered. The Bill adopts a targeted approach. It does not prevent council guidance from advising in general terms that pre-sentence reports should be requested when judges need more information about an offender’s personal circumstances. It will remain the case, for example, that where an offender is a victim of domestic abuse, a judge can consider it in deciding whether to order a pre-sentence report. But it prohibits the council from making guidelines about pre-sentence reports with specific reference to the offender’s personal characteristics, such as their race, religion or belief, or cultural background.*

But “Mother of the House” Diane Abbott (Labour, Hackney North & Stoke Newington) highlighted how “report after report and repeated statistical analysis have demonstrated what some of us consider to be unfairness in relation to black and brown people and the criminal justice system”, adding that Mahmood “will also be aware that the reason the Sentencing Council was made a

statutory independent body was to avoid even the appearance of ministerial interference in sentencing”, asking:

Diane Abbott: *Can she explain why she is so triumphant about not just interfering in sentencing, but passing a piece of legislation to cut across what the Sentencing Council is saying?*

Mahmood insisted that “it is entirely proper for a politician – a government minister, the Lord Chancellor – to assert that there is a boundary between that which is policy and a matter for Parliament and that which is judicial practice and consistency in judicial cases”, adding: “I have sought to reassert that boundary.”

Calling for PSRs for all, Lib-Dem spokesperson Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) highlighted how “the Liberal Democrats believe that such reports should consistently be made available whenever anyone’s liberty is at stake”. Mahmood insisted: “There is a strong push towards obtaining pre-sentence reports in the vast majority of cases,” adding that “the Probation Service that I inherited from the previous Administration has struggled under increased workloads. It was a service that the Conservative party privatised and then partly renationalised – our Probation Service officers, who do vital work every single day, have been through the mill”. She continued:

Shabana Mahmood: *I have been making changes to the focus of the Probation Service in the last few months to pivot its work to focus on high and medium-risk offenders and free up probation capacity, so that more time can be spent doing vital work such as the preparation of pre-sentence reports. I will carry on working with the Probation Service to ensure it is ready to do what is asked of it, to a very high and consistent standard, which I know will be important to all Members. I have already announced 1,300 extra probation officers in the financial year that has just passed and another 1,000 in the coming financial year. Probation remains vital to the preparation of pre-sentence reports, and we will ensure it is in a position to meet the asks that are made of it.*

JUPG co-chair Liz Saville Roberts pointed out that “black people in Wales were the most over-represented ethnic group in prison in 2023, followed by those from a mixed background and people belonging to an Asian ethnic group”, adding: “That over-representation is worse in Wales than in England.” She continued:

Liz Saville Roberts: *Pre-sentencing reports can help us to understand why people of black and minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be sent to prison. Even if she disagrees with the method, surely the Secretary of State agrees that action is necessary to tackle evidenced inequality within the criminal justice system, so what solutions is she bringing forward?*

Replying that “the proper role of a pre-sentence report is to give a judge who is about to pass down a sentence vital information about the context of that offender – for example, whether there has been domestic abuse, their age and other vital factors relevant to the offending behaviour – so that the judge can make a decision about the best sentence to pass”, Mahmood insisted:

Shabana Mahmood: *The pre-sentence report is not about setting right any other wrongs that exist, however legitimate they are—that is not the point of the pre-sentence report—but about giving the sentencer in every single individual case the information that they need, such as whether a woman is pregnant or has recently given birth, as the Court of Appeal upheld recently. Those circumstances should be properly understood by judges. The position in law is that a pre-sentence report should be sought by judges in all cases, unless the court considers it unnecessary to do so. That covers the majority of cases where a pre-sentence report should be sought, but we should not confuse the proper role of what the pre-sentence report is there to do.*

New Labour MP for Rochdale, former journalist Paul Waugh, also called for wider use of PSRs, insisting that “pre-sentence reports should be available for all offenders and should never be linked

to ethnicity, culture or faith". Mahmood replied: "I wish to see the widest possible use of pre-sentencing reports," adding that it is her job "to ensure that the Probation Service is in a position to provide pre-sentencing reports whenever they are required by the court, and that courts have confidence in the reports that they are getting". And another Labour newbie, Chris Vince, pointed out: "The biggest cause of two-tier justice was the mess that the Conservative party made of our Probation Service," to which Mahmood replied:

Shabana Mahmood: *In all of the Tory party's terrible legacy in the criminal justice system, including prisons on the point of collapse, what it did to the Probation Service was unconscionable. This Government are putting things right. I have already made changes to the Probation Service, and I will ensure that it is on the strongest possible footing going into the future.*

The following day (2 April), Peers debated the changes at an oral question from crossbencher Lord Carlile of Berriew, at which Minister Timpson insisted: "The guidelines represent a differential treatment before the law and that is why we oppose them." Lib-Dem spokesperson Lord Marks explained "there is a mass of evidence, including the Lammy Review, that ethnic minority defendants are far more likely to be sent to prison than their white counterparts", insisting: "So we already have a two-tier justice system." He continued:

Lord Marks: *Thorough pre-sentence reports are the only robust way to address that, and that is what the proposed guideline is about. Instead of emergency legislation, can the Government not, even now, work with the Sentencing Council to reach a solution that addresses damaging rationing of pre-sentencing reports and ensures that the personal circumstances of defendants in vulnerable cohorts are fully considered?*

Lord Timpson: *Nothing in the Bill prevents judges requesting a pre-sentence report for pregnant women—it is normal practice for judges to request pre-sentence reports in cases involving pregnant women—nor does the Bill affect Court of Appeal case law, which states that a pre-sentence report is desirable in those cases. I believe that pre-sentence reports are very important, but they have declined in number considerably over the last 10 years. From 2013 to 2023, they declined by 44%. That is why we are putting extra resources into probation, recruiting more probation officers so that they have the time to produce high-quality pre-sentence reports.*

And the Commons statement from earlier that week was repeated in the Lords the following day (3 April), with Lord Marks highlighting how "the Probation Service was hopelessly mishandled by the last Government, and one result is that there is not enough money to fund the number of pre-sentence reports we need." Calling for the new Bill to be scrapped and for "rational and moderate discussion between the Sentencing Council, the Lady Chief Justice and the Government", he continued:

Lord Marks: *The first aim would be to reach a solution that ensures that pre-sentence reports are properly funded so that they become the norm once again in all cases where a substantial prison sentence is not inevitable. The second would be that we recognise these reports play an important part in addressing and reducing the inequality of outcomes for ethnic minority defendants—this must be a major priority of the Government. The third would be that we all respect and ultimately achieve genuine equality before the law.*

Minister Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede replied by saying he agreed "with a lot of the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Marks", adding:

Lord Ponsonby: *I was just reflecting that, in my previous role as a magistrate, I would have ordered many hundreds of pre-sentence reports, but I am conscious that, sitting in this Chamber now, there are colleagues who would have ordered many thousands of pre-sentence reports throughout their career. Of course, I agree with the points he made that they are an invaluable tool for anybody seeking to sentence in our criminal courts and that they had been degraded under the previous Government in their use and, to be frank, in*

the trust they were held in by sentencing magistrates or judges. It is very much the current Government's intention to increase the number of probation officers—there were 1,300 more last financial year and there will be another 1,000 in the current financial year, and it is very much anticipated that there will be an enhanced role for the probation services as we move forward with future recommendations on sentencing, which are imminent. I agree with the general points that the noble Lord made about the importance of pre-sentence reports, and we want to build on that.

Crossbencher and former judge Baroness Butler-Sloss highlighted how “we have heard that there are likely to be more probation officers and more resources” and asked: “Does that mean that judges and magistrates will have the opportunity to ask for more pre-sentencing reports?” Minister Ponsonby replied:

Lord Ponsonby: *The short answer is yes. We are certainly recruiting more probation officers, as I said in answer to an earlier question. Of course, judges are already 100% free to order pre-sentence reports, but we want to build up the confidence, if you like, of judges and magistrates in the Probation Service so that more reports are ordered. It is quite likely—I think there is no secret here—that there will be greater use of community sentences and suspended sentences in the future, and we need to work towards that. One way to do that is rebuilding the Probation Service, which was so badly damaged by the previous Government.*

Labour's Lord Lemos called on the Minister to ensure “resources will be made available for the Probation Service, which, as he rightly said, suffered terribly under the previous government and has been reunified into a national Probation Service only in the last few years”, asking:

Lord Lemos: *Will he reassure the House that resources will be found not only to improve the quantity and quality of pre-sentence reports as necessary but to increase the use of community sentences, which he referred to and which we hope will be the case following the review of sentencing by David Gauke? Lastly, will he reassure the House that this row, if I may call it that, does not influence too much the way that David Gauke's recommendations are considered?*

Lord Ponsonby: *Yes, I can give my noble friend all the reassurances that he seeks. I share the objectives that he alluded to. Clearly, we want a greater quantity and quality of pre-sentence reports. The review being undertaken by David Gauke will be far more wide-ranging. We wait to see the specific details that it will bring forward but I very much hope that this specific issue, which is dealt with in the Bill currently before the House of Commons, will have a minimal impact, if any, on the recommendations of the Gauke review.*

MPs had their first chance to debate the new Bill at Second Reading later that month (22 April), with the Bill's Remaining Stages debated the following week (30 April) before moving to the Lords, which held separate debates for Second Reading (7 May), Committee Stage (19 May), Report (4 June) and Third Reading (10). Many armed with fresh briefings from Napo, parliamentarians highlighted how the problems addressed by the Bill all led back to a lack of probation resources.

In the Commons, Labour newbie Catherine Atkinson (Derby North), highlighted how PSRs “are important in considering punishments that can address offending behaviour and help reduce the likelihood of reoffending” and warned that, “very often, probation is stretched so thin that officers do not have time to complete them”, asking:

Catherine Atkinson: *What will the Minister do to ensure that, where a pre-sentence report is required, probation has the capacity to do that important work?*

Lib-Dem spokesperson Josh Babarinde highlighted how “the previous government underfunded our probation and courts system so severely that pre-sentence reports have since been rationed and are not used universally, or indeed anywhere near it”, adding:

Josh Babarinde: *In fact, the use of pre-sentence reports has declined by 44% over the last decade almost, according to Lord Timpson. That is despite the sentencing code having a presumption in favour of their use, regardless of any personal characteristic or circumstance. [...] The Liberal Democrats believe that we should really be having a debate about how we can resource a criminal justice system that can fulfil pre-sentence reports for all offenders who need them, rather than a debate that feels grounded in rationing their use.*

Responding, Minister Dakin insisted: “For the avoidance of doubt, this Government support the use of pre-sentence reports and we have publicly committed to creating more capacity in the probation service to ensure it is able to do the valuable work that includes preparing pre-sentence reports,” adding:

Nic Dakin: *We are also happy to continue to work with the hon. Member for Eastbourne on disparities in the criminal justice system and the use of pre-sentence reports more generally. We fully support the increased use of PSRs in our courts. PSRs include an assessment of the offender’s behaviour and the risk they pose, and the recommendations for sentencing options. It is a valuable tool, as many Members have said, in helping to ensure a sentence is tailored to an individual offender and their circumstances.*

In the Lords, Lib-Dem Baroness Hamwee pointed out that “pre-sentence reports are important and ideally should be for everyone – unless, of course, the court considers that they are not necessary – but the Probation Service is very overstretched”, but highlighted their impact on probation:

Baroness Hamwee: *The Lord Chancellor said she was clearing the way to free up capacity in the Probation Service, so we will be interested to know the details of at what cost that might be to the service’s other work. That in itself deserves debate.*

Former Unison officer Baroness Nichols of Selby (Labour) revealed that, “over the years, I have represented many of our members in the Probation Service and have seen the amount of work that they have to do”, adding:

Baroness Nichols: *Receiving a PSR is more likely to discourage a judge from sending an offender to prison, and therefore will help to reduce pressure on prison numbers. We know that there are inequalities and disparities in society and in our justice system, which must be addressed. [...] Pre-sentence reports are important but, very often, probation is stretched so thin that officers do not have time to complete them. What will the Government do to ensure that, where a PSR is required and requested, the Probation Service will have the capacity to do that?*

Labour’s Lord Bach, a former justice minister under Gordon Brown, told Peers: “What unites us, and what makes this legislation quite hard to understand, is that all of us believe in the importance of pre-sentence reports, which play a vital part in sentencing.” He added:

Lord Bach: *I practised criminal law for over 25 years, defending more than prosecuting. That was some time ago, of course, but in those days, it was inconceivable that a first-time offender—or any offender, really—who might face a first custodial sentence would be sentenced without a properly prepared pre-sentence report. By properly prepared, I do not mean a 10-minute interview in the cells and then back into court; I mean a well prepared and thorough report, with a probation officer being given the time and space to do their job. We were all surely shocked to learn that the number of pre-sentence reports has fallen by 42% between 2015 and 2023, from 160,000 to 90,000. I am afraid that one has to ask the question: how many of these reports are having to be prepared much too quickly? I hope we can all agree that pre-sentence reports are an essential part of our system and cannot be allowed to be compromised for financial reasons. That is why the future of the Probation Service is so vital to this debate, and why, in my view, it would have been better, if possible, to have waited until the Gauke review and the legislation that follows it.*

The former Supreme Court deputy president, crossbencher Lord Hope of Craighead, pointed out that, “as everyone knows, due to years of hollowing out by successive governments, the Probation Service is short of money”, adding:

Lord Hope of Craighead: *It is underresourced, and that has given rise to the tragic situation that the noble Lord, Lord Bach, described so well—the diminution in the number and possibly the quality of the reports that are being delivered. The problem we are addressing is that although everybody who faces a custodial or community service should have a pre-sentence report, that is not something that the Probation Service can deliver for everybody.*

Viscount Hailsham also called for PSRs for all, insisting: “I suspect that everyone who has experience in this field would agree that in the great majority of cases where an offender is facing the possibility of a custodial or a community sentence, it is highly desirable that the sentencer should have available a properly considered pre-sentence report – but not one which is the product of a few minutes of discussion in the cells.” He added:

Viscount Hailsham: *What is required is a considered and researched pre-sentence report by a qualified member of the Probation Service. That implies a Probation Service which is properly staffed and properly financed to address the required workload. I deeply regret that, in recent years, there has been a serious decline in the number of pre-sentence reports, and I have in mind the decline of 42%, from 160,000 to 90,000, between 2015 and 2022, mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Bach, in the Second Reading debate, and by others too. I acknowledge, with very great regret, that one of the immediate causes of this decline in the availability of proper reports was the policy of the Government whom I supported. I will add too, if I may, that the existence of a properly financed and staffed Probation Service is fundamental to the success of the sentencing reforms proposed by Mr David Gauke.*

Lib-Dem spokesperson Lord Marks pointed out that “the demoralisation that has taken place in the Probation Service has been very serious indeed”, highlighting the disaster caused by privatisation:

Lord Marks: *That has been partly the effect of the ill-starred changes to and reorganisation of the whole of the probation services, initiated by the previous Government. The later reversal, while welcome, merely proved that the whole experiment was profoundly unsettling and damaging to the probation services as a whole. But the declining quality of pre-sentence reports has been principally the result of a lack of resources allocated to the production of individual reports, particularly the time probation officers have had to prepare them. These reports need to be thoughtful, and thoroughly and individually researched, with a real assessment of the most appropriate sentences in individual cases. The reports need to consider the individual circumstances of offenders with care, and officers need the time to do that. There needs to be much more opportunity for officers carefully to consider individually suitable community sentences and to research their availability. They need to have the time and resources to consider the conditions that might be appropriately attached to such community sentences, along with the employment and housing, and opportunities and risks, that need to be considered in individual cases. [...] During the course of the noble Lord’s tenure as Prisons Minister, he has made it clear that it is his ambition to bring more investment into the Probation Service and to increase the number of probation officers—which should also improve, I would add, the retention of probation officers within the service and raise standards generally. For us, this is a crucial issue.*

Minister Timpson admitted that, “as noble Lords are well aware, and I have spoken to a number of noble Lords privately about this, it takes time to train and induct new staff to allow them to become the brilliant probation officers we so highly value”, and insisted:

Lord Timpson: *Given the challenges the Probation Service faces, new staff and better processes are not sufficient on their own. We need to think about how we use the Probation Service, which faces a case load of just over 250,000 offenders, more effectively.*

The Bill received Royal Assent on 19 June, becoming the Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Act 2025.

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 Chair of the TUCG was held by the UCU in 2024 and has passed to Equity for 2025.

During the period covered by this report, activities undertaken by the TUCG include:

- held TUC Congress 2024 fringe meeting calling for a more ambitious economic strategy, with speakers including John McDonnell MP;
- held joint Labour Party Conference 2024 fringe event with Labour List and the Institute of Employment Rights on the implementation of the New Deal for Working People. Planning written briefing for MPs around the Autumn Budget statement;
- organised private letter to TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak, calling for the TUC to commission work on developing more radical alternative economic strategies;
- held joint online public Zoom rally with Arise, reviewing the Autumn Budget statement;
- met with Green Party co-leader Carla Denyer MP to discuss support for union demands, including on Employment Rights Bill;
- distributed briefings and event invitations ahead of the Employment Rights Bill 2nd reading and Committee stage
- executive heard from Amanda Walters from the Safe Sick Pay campaign on the need to increase the rate of SSP, and Jessie Hoskin on the End Not Defend sexual harassment campaign;
- held joint fringe with Institute of Employment Rights at the TUC Women's Conference 2025 in March;
- co-ordinated joint letter to Keir Starmer from 11 General Secretaries opposing the disabled benefit cuts;
- organised strategy discussion of General Secretaries about co-ordination and reform of the TUC;
- held joint STUC 2025 fringe in Dundee on the Employment Rights Bill with the Institute of Employment Rights, with speakers including RMT General Secretary Eddie Dempsey;
- held fringe with PCS at TUC Disabled Members Conference in Bournemouth on stopping the disability benefit cuts;
- held joint online rally with Arise on stopping the disability benefit cuts (June 10);
- circulated briefing to Peers urging support for Lord Hendy's amendments to the Employment Rights Bill;
- organised joint online rally with Arise ahead of the Spending Review statement (10 June) opposing welfare benefit cuts;
- held TUC Congress Fringe on "Restructuring the Economy" with speakers including Rachael Maskell MP;
- held Labour Conference 2025 fringe in Liverpool on theme "Can Labour Still Deliver the Change we Need – and Stop the Rise of Reform?" with the IER and Campaign for Trade Union Freedom.

TUCG can be found on X (formerly Twitter) @TUCGinfo and at www.tucg.org.uk

Links to transcripts of parliamentary sessions

Tuesday 10 September 2024 – Justice Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-09-10/debates/602512D9-8387-4F5F-886E-095E7979FC30/Justice>

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

Monday 7 October 2024 – OQ on Commission on Justice in Wales: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-10-07/debates/A0CCE537-81A2-47BF-ABC2-98C52498DBE9/CommissionOnJusticeInWales>

Monday 21 October 2024 – OQ on Prisoners: Early Release Scheme: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-10-21/debates/D30123ED-386C-4BF8-9C41-671133BFB868/PrisonersEarlyReleaseScheme>

Tuesday 22 October 2024 – Commons statement on Sentencing Review and Prison Capacity: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-10-22/debates/8D3769B7-66B7-47C0-91B3-5198D47CA532/SentencingReviewAndPrisonCapacity>

Tuesday 22 October 2024 – Lords statement on Criminal Justice System: Capacity: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-10-22/debates/B85D0513-3B96-4F5A-9FCA-2AF5DD6B4002/CriminalJusticeSystemCapacity>

Wednesday 23 October 2024 – Lords statement on Sentencing Review and Prison Capacity: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-10-23/debates/29E3F5DC-6C28-4EFC-8D8D-1ED2B8A6A7D7/SentencingReviewAndPrisonCapacity>

Wednesday 6 November 2024 – Budget Resolutions: Andy Slaughter: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-11-06/debates/DBE9C141-29E1-4666-B0D1-CF616C409D66/BudgetResolutions>

Monday 11 November 2024 – Autumn Budget 2024: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-11-11/debates/380D9962-3F78-47D4-ABF8-33E6B38D77C7/AutumnBudget2024>

Thursday 14 November 2024 – OQ on Probation Services: Prisoner Early Release Scheme: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-11-14/debates/38911815-68C2-4BC7-BD06-FF2F619F768D/ProbationServicesPrisonerEarlyReleaseScheme>

Tuesday 19 November 2024 – Justice Committee with Lord Timpson and Amy Rees: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15028/html/>

Tuesday 10 December 2024 – JQs: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-12-10/debates/88FFDDB3-93C0-4ECF-9207-D389D6014A6B/Justice>

Tuesday 17 December 2024 – Justice Committee with Shabana Mahmood: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15178/html/>

Tuesday 28 January 2025 – JQs: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-01-28/debates/D3772E9D-9CF6-43C8-BC0C-C476CEBE60CE/Justice>

Tuesday 4 March 2025 – Justice Committee with Amy Rees: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15467/html/>

Wednesday 5 March 2025 – Statement on Courts and Tribunals: Sitting Days:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-05/debates/04627A5E-E10E-4D14-98EF-9164949B89F4/CourtsAndTribunalsSittingDays>

Thursday 6 March 2025 – Business Questions: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-06/debates/EEBBB668-1EE5-4453-821A-5D3C35E92E7E/BusinessOfTheHouse#main-content>

Tuesday 11 March 2025 – JQs: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-11/debates/C9EAC72C-825D-474F-890E-D89DB21F9480/Justice>

Monday 17 March 2025 – UQ on Sentencing Council Guidelines:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-17/debates/DBEDE38B-34BD-452C-8AA5-554F6940B36F/SentencingCouncilGuidelines>

Wednesday 19 March 2025 – Lords repeat of UQ on Sentencing Council Guidelines:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-03-19/debates/6D37A55B-2ABD-451C-8154-0FF7D50DEACE/SentencingCouncilGuidelines>

Tuesday 1 April 2025 – Statement on Sentencing Council Guidelines:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-04-01/debates/D0E42452-F1BC-4399-98F5-CE672ED0D2AB/SentencingCouncilGuidelines>

Wednesday 2 April 2025 – OQ on Sentencing Council Guidelines:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-04-02/debates/FDC27A15-75B5-47EF-9BB2-2B01C3BF42BF/SentencingCouncilGuidelines>

Thursday 3 April 2025 – Lords repeat statement on Sentencing Council Guidelines:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-04-03/debates/DFA5F12E-58C6-44F7-9812-D9BB79582576/SentencingCouncilGuidelines>

Tuesday 22 April 2025 – JQs: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-04-22/debates/14843522-36B0-4691-BB95-AB89DC8DB070/Justice>

Tuesday 22 April 2025 – Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill Second Reading:
[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-04-22/debates/9288061F-1755-42F8-8F45-E66E9AC0CAA8/SentencingGuidelines\(Pre-SentenceReports\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-04-22/debates/9288061F-1755-42F8-8F45-E66E9AC0CAA8/SentencingGuidelines(Pre-SentenceReports)Bill)

Wednesday 30 April 2025 – Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill Remaining Stages:
[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-04-30/debates/5DA02656-E022-4529-BD45-B793FFF4CB08/SentencingGuidelines\(Pre-SentenceReports\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-04-30/debates/5DA02656-E022-4529-BD45-B793FFF4CB08/SentencingGuidelines(Pre-SentenceReports)Bill)

Wednesday 7 May 2025 – Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill Lords Second Reading: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-05-07/debates/3FEFCC10-E51F-473B-B4EE-7D04089F1081/SentencingGuidelines\(Pre-SentenceReports\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-05-07/debates/3FEFCC10-E51F-473B-B4EE-7D04089F1081/SentencingGuidelines(Pre-SentenceReports)Bill)

Tuesday 13 May 2025 – OQ on Police, Prison and Probation Officers:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-05-13/debates/A974D0D1-95C0-4843-8825-53E929989257/PolicePrisonAndProbationOfficers>

Thursday 15 May 2025 – OQ on Ex-offenders: Reintegration:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-05-15/debates/0ECF6CA4-0CDF-4B4D-B913-451BE57FCF2D/Ex-OffendersReintegration>

Thursday 15 May 2025 – UQ on Recalled Offenders: Sentencing Limits:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-05-15/debates/C8476B69-1ADA-4730-B4B1-E6D4BE78D7B3/RecalledOffendersSentencingLimits>

Monday 19 May 2025 – Lords UQ on Recalled Offenders: Sentencing Limits:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-05-19/debates/8A7D7E93-7F1C-4A8F-802A-8E22B81FD05F/RecalledOffendersSentencingLimits>

Monday 19 May 2025 – Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill Lords Committee Stage: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-05-19/debates/2BBF0300-40D2-44BE-961E-A250BC4CE61D/SentencingGuidelines\(Pre-SentenceReports\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-05-19/debates/2BBF0300-40D2-44BE-961E-A250BC4CE61D/SentencingGuidelines(Pre-SentenceReports)Bill)

Wednesday 21 May 2025 – Welsh Affairs Committee session with Su McConnel, Napo Cymru:
<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15967/html/>

Thursday 22 May 2025 – Commons statement on Independent Sentencing Review:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-05-22/debates/A8FD73FC-8365-4C86-9486-F22F6C175877/IndependentSentencingReview>

Monday 2 June 2025 – Lords statement on Independent Sentencing Review:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-06-02/debates/1BF100C1-186E-474D-BD66-234CF3686725/IndependentSentencingReview>

Tuesday 3 June 2025 – JQs: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-06-03/debates/CF94A629-FE86-4C15-81A8-9EE2429496F0/Justice>

Wednesday 4 June 2025 – Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill Report Stage:
[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-06-04/debates/6011A0A7-8DDB-4B29-8224-316A533ACA86/SentencingGuidelines\(Pre-SentenceReports\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-06-04/debates/6011A0A7-8DDB-4B29-8224-316A533ACA86/SentencingGuidelines(Pre-SentenceReports)Bill)

Tuesday 10 June 2025 – Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill Third Reading:
[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-06-10/debates/1D1549DB-731B-44F1-823D-3548DAC0BDD7/SentencingGuidelines\(Pre-SentenceReports\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-06-10/debates/1D1549DB-731B-44F1-823D-3548DAC0BDD7/SentencingGuidelines(Pre-SentenceReports)Bill)

Tuesday 17 June 2025 – Justice Committee with David Gauke:
<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/16140/html/>

Wednesday 25 June 2025 – Estimates Day Debate: Criminal Justice:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-06-25/debates/4328F5CE-EC40-4668-BCFF-2A434293CEE4/CriminalJustice>

Monday 30 June 2025 –Draft Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Suitability for Fixed Term Recall) Order 2025: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-06-30/debates/2eddddf7-4fcd-4260-97cf-76c2dcc15bf5/DraftCriminalJusticeAct2003\(SuitabilityForFixedTermRecall\)Order2025](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-06-30/debates/2eddddf7-4fcd-4260-97cf-76c2dcc15bf5/DraftCriminalJusticeAct2003(SuitabilityForFixedTermRecall)Order2025)

Tuesday 1 July 2025 – Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Suitability for Fixed Term Recall) Order 2025:
[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-07-01/debates/F8CC10EA-D03D-42AD-A12A-AEE4D00C5E74/CriminalJusticeAct2003\(SuitabilityForFixedTermRecall\)Order2025](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-07-01/debates/F8CC10EA-D03D-42AD-A12A-AEE4D00C5E74/CriminalJusticeAct2003(SuitabilityForFixedTermRecall)Order2025)

Tuesday 8 July 2025 – JQs: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-07-08/debates/46443436-931D-4C6F-8EB2-47693886455B/Justice>

Wednesday 9 July 2025 – OQ on Prisons: Early Release:
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2025-07-09/debates/BB319E25-CAB0-4D2E-8106-C3913AB49B19/PrisonsEarlyRelease>

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