

Embargo – 00.01 Wednesday 22nd January

Napo welcomes Justice Committee Report

The Justice Committee today published its report that scrutinises the Offender Rehabilitation Bill and the Secretary of State's plans to privatise 70% of the Probation Service. The report highlights concerns that Napo itself has been raising with the Government since its announcement last year for radical reforms to Probation.

Napo welcomes concerns that the Justice Committee raises about the government's aggressive timetable for the reforms.

The report says: 'witnesses to the inquiry, including those supportive of the changes, had major concerns about the scale, architecture, detail and consequences of the reforms.' The report adds: 'much of which has not been tested and the pace at which the government is seeking to implement them.'

Napo has been warning the government for months about these issues. On Friday 17 January Chris Grayling announced that the closure of the current Probation trusts will be postponed until the 1 June. This is another indicator that the timetable he has set is unrealistic and unachievable. The infrastructure is just not there and this will lead to real risks to the public as offenders will not be supervised adequately during the transition period.

The issue of risks to performance and to public safety were also raised during the inquiry. Sir Alan Beith MP, Chair of the Committee, concluded: 'there is a lack of information both about risks they might encounter during implementation and the steps they will take to mitigate those risks. They also do not appear to have devised a contingency plan if the competition fails to yield a viable new provider for a particular area or a new provider subsequently fails'

Napo supports the Committee's conclusion that whilst welcoming the plans to work with those receiving under 12 months 'any gains made in reducing re-offending must not come at the expense of the supervision of offenders on other sentences, and must not diminish the value of community sentences'.

Ian Lawrence, General Secretary of Napo, said: 'these plans are ill thought out, are untried and untested and as yet have not been thoroughly costed. We strongly urge the government to scrap these plans or at the very least to pilot them before rolling them out nationally so that glitches can be addressed and the impact they have on reducing re-offending can be properly evaluated to evidence that they work'.

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