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Probation Privatisation Flawed and Dangerous

The government's plans to privatise probation are flawed, dangerous, expensive and will put the public at risk. Napo has drafted over 70 questions for politicians which remain unanswered about the proposed model; yet ministers want the private contract signed off and shares sold by the late autumn. This is an impossible timetable.

The problems include:

- Blank sections of the tender documents;
- Hundreds of staff vacancies;
- Several thousand outstanding grievances from probation staff;
- No integrated IT system; and
- Insufficient staff to write court reports.

All of this suggests the model will not work, the structure will be chaotic and the quality of offender supervision will quickly deteriorate.

The contracts themselves pose high financial risks for all potential bidders. The profit margins are very tight – using the contracts as a loss leader is not an option as there is no other work round the corner. The increasing levels of bureaucracy needed to make the flawed model work means that it will cost more than the current operation if the privatisation goes ahead. In addition the risk of further serious reoffending and failure to deliver supervision vastly increases the likelihood of reputational damage for the private companies.

In addition the decision to split Probation into two organisations rather than to sell it off as one package is bound to seriously increase costs because of the need to set up duplicate structures to liaise with each other and the rest of the criminal justice system.

Ian Lawrence, General Secretary of Napo, said: "These plans are ill thought through, are proceeding to an impossible timetable and they are dangerous. They will increase costs and will lead to communication breakdown between probation workers. In addition it is scandalous that these proposals are being pursued when every probation trust has consistently met or exceeded all their targets which were set by the Ministry of Justice."

Harry Fletcher, Criminal Justice Expert and adviser to Napo, said: "These plans are being rushed through without proper parliamentary scrutiny. There has been no primary legislation and therefore no vote and no debate in parliament. There is a total lack of accountability and transparency. The structure itself is flawed; with the State keeping high risk offenders, and the subsequent risk of staff burn out, whilst the private sector takes the rest and misses changes in offender behaviour therefore putting the public at risk."

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