

Press Statement

12 December 2014

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NAPO GAGGED ON SAFETY CONCERNS AND AMENDMENTS TO OPERATION OF NEW PROBATION SERVICE

Napo – the probation officers' union and professional association – was today forced to stay silent on the safety concerns and proposed amendments to the privatised probation service that were revealed by its court proceedings against the Ministry of Justice.

Although an earlier High Court hearing had ordered Chris Grayling to hand over his safety evidence and proposals to Napo, the court today refused to allow Napo to share any of that evidence with its members or the public. Instead, Mr Grayling has been allowed to keep bidders and the public in the dark about the dangers that exist in the system and the steps he has said he is taking to resolve them.

Napo is deeply concerned that Chris Grayling wants to thwart public debate on the privatisation of the probation service and withhold from the public crucial information about their safety once staff in privatised Community Rehabilitation Companies lose 'dual access' to the risk records on offenders and are asked to take on more clients. He is also trying to keep figures on staff shortages and soaring sickness rates out of the public domain.

Ian Lawrence, General Secretary said "If the Ministry of Justice is confident that the steps they plan to take will adequately address the existing safety concerns in the system, Napo can see no reason for reluctance to tell the public about those steps. Mr Grayling's insistence on secrecy raises grave concerns about whether he can deliver on his claims that the system will be safe before it is sold off to private management."

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Napo is the Trade Union and Professional Association for Probation and Family Court Staff. It currently has around 8,000 members working in the Probation Service.
2. In November 2014, Napo commenced a claim for judicial review of the Secretary of State's plan to sell 70% of the probation service into private ownership, raising numerous safety concerns about the structure of the new system. On 26 November 2014, the High Court forced the Secretary of State to hand over the safety evidence he had been trying to keep secret. On 4 December 2014, the Secretary of State handed over further documents that set out for the first time the steps that he would take to make the system safer. As a result, Napo concluded its judicial review. Unfortunately, it is still prevented from sharing publicly any of those steps that the Secretary of State has said he will have.
3. Contracts with private providers of probation services are due to be signed on 18 December 2014.

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