

## Press Statement

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### **Probation Union Anger as Justice Secretary Ignores Safety Concerns and Signs Probation Outsourcing Contracts**

Napo the Trade Union and Professional Association for Probation and Family Court Staff are angry at the Justice Secretary Chris Grayling as he presses ahead with his Probation Service outsourcing despite evidence that it is unsafe to do so. The Union, which has been campaigning against the Governments reforms since 2013, have documented evidence provided by the Ministry of Justice that there are still significant failures with the new system that they believe seriously undermine service delivery and public safety. But despite this contracts for the 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies have been signed by the new providers and Grayling, tying the government and future governments to 10 years.

Ian Lawrence General Secretary said “the service is still in utter chaos with IT systems failing again this week, significant staff shortages and excessive workloads. All of these issues are a risk to public safety. To sign off 10 year contracts when the system is not running effectively is highly irresponsible.”

Last week Napo discontinued its legal challenge against the Secretary of State as he had made assurances that all the problems will be fixed by the time the contracts are mobilised in February 2015 but Napo believe that he should have fixed the problems before signing contracts. Despite these assurances the MOJ still refuse to publish all the evidence that the system is safe and have maintained a confidentiality Court order against the union effectively gagging them.

Ian Lawrence said “If they believe it is safe to sign contracts then they should publish the evidence that supports that. The only reason we are still bound by a confidentiality order is because the MOJ doesn’t want us to publish the evidence. Their own documents highlight acknowledges serious failings in the new probation system that echoes our concerns.”

Napo’s concerns were further supported this week when the Chief Inspector for Probation published his report that contained 68 recommendations and said that “issues raised by staff about IT require serious attention”. He also said “There is no doubt at all that there remains much more to do.”

The contracts themselves contain “poison pill clauses” that mean future governments will be liable to pay 10 years’ worth of profits to the providers should they terminate them. Some of the providers already have a chequered history with public sector contracts. The highly criticised Sodexo, have won bids for the majority of the North of England, and have recently been accused of institutional racism, also run HMP Northumberland.

The Justice Select Committee raised the issue of a conflict of interest as they will receive larger payments for people going to prison than those that stay out. Seetec have previously been investigated for fraud on the DW programme. Only eight bidders were successful for the 21 contracts creating what critics have called a “monopoly of corporate giants” taking over the justice system.

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