



PROBATION SERVICE PAY CLAIM 2026

RESTORE PROBATION PAY

1. Introduction

This 2026 pay claim is submitted by Napo, UNISON and GMB/SCOOP on behalf of members working for the Probation Service.

The context to this pay claim

The Probation Service trade union side is submitting this pay claim in the following context:

- Probation staff need a 60% pay rise to restore their pay to 2010 real terms levels.
- Probation is in crisis. Excessive workloads and inadequate staffing levels have led to a failing service. The erosion of real terms pay has contributed to the loss of experienced and highly skilled staff.
- The Prison capacity crisis/early release schemes have placed additional pressures on to the Probation Service. It's more important than ever to restore probation pay to stem the loss of experienced staff who are leaving due to unacceptable workloads and declining real terms pay.
- The implementation of the Sentencing Act with extended responsibilities and caseloads for Probation, as a result of increased community sentences, will place additional strain on an understaffed service.
- The historically high period of inflation of the past few years - the cost-of-living crisis - which coincided with a rigid three year pay settlement has led to a big drop in real terms pay for probation staff on top of the major pay erosion suffered since 2010.
- Probation pay has progressively fallen behind that of other employers in both the public and private sector. Experienced staff are leaving the careers they love in order to earn higher salaries elsewhere.

- The last 12 months have seen a huge spike in serious assaults on probation staff at work. Three staff have sustained serious injuries in separate incidents since July 2025. The day to day risk to staff has gone up, our members feel vulnerable and the Probation Service risks further staff attrition as a result. Whilst a decent pay award will not itself keep our members safe at work, it would be recognition of the changing risks associated with our members' work.

All of these elements will be looked at in more detail in this pay claim.

2. Synopsis

This claim is split into the following sections:

- The Claim
- The Dramatic Fall in Real -Terms Probation Pay
- Probation Pay Falling Behind Other Employers Since 2010
- Benchmarking Probation Officer Pay and Police Officer Pay
- Tackling Low Pay
- Probation in Crisis
- The Prison Capacity Crisis
- The 2026 Sentencing Act
- Conclusion

3. The Claim

We seek:

- A one year pay deal
- A 12% increase on all pay points
- A 12% increase on all cash allowances: London Weighting / Prison Supplement etc
- A minimum wage in the Probation Service of £15 per hour
- Regional Reward and Recognition funds to be the subject of collective bargaining

Please see **Appendix A** for an illustration of the impact of our claim on the Probation Service 2025 pay bands.

4. The Dramatic Fall in Real Terms of Probation Pay

Table 1 below shows the major fall in living standards suffered by Probation staff since 2010:

Table 1

	Probation pay-increases	Rise in cost of living (as measured by Retail Price Index) *
2010	0%	4.6%
2011	0%	5.2%
2012	0%	3.2%
2013	1%	3.0%
2014	0%	2.4%
2015	0%	1.0%
2016	0%	1.8%
2017	0%	3.6%
2018	0%	3.3%
2019	0%	2.6%
2020	0%	1.5%
2021	0%	4.1%
2022	3.2%	11.6%
2023	3.2%	9.7%
2024	3.2%	3.6%
2025	6%	4.1%

*Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, figure is for 12 months to January of respective year

The failure of probation pay to keep up with the rising cost of living has led to major cuts in living standards for Probation staff and their families since 2010.

While the cumulative value of total Probation staff pay rises from 2010 to 2025 has been 17.7%, the cost of living has risen by 88.6% over the same period.

For illustrative purposes we can model what this means for a notional probation salary of £30,000 in 2010. By applying the total value of Probation Service pay awards since 2010, a £30,000 salary would now be worth £35,310 per annum. If pay had kept up with the rising of cost of living, this salary would now be worth £56,580 per annum.

This represents a £21,270 cut in the real terms value of pay in this example.

In other words, to return pay back to its 2010 value, a 60% pay rise would be required.

These stark figures show the scale of loss of real terms earnings of probation staff since 2010.

Furthermore, the last decade and a half has seen enormous jumps in basic costs to our members (2010 – 2025)*:

- Mortgage Interest Payments up by 140%
- Bus and coach fares up by 108%
- Electricity up by 148%
- Gas up by 98%

* Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Tables, December 2010 and December 2025

4.1 The Rising Cost-of-Living

As can be seen in Table 1 above, by 2021 the erosion of the real terms value of Probation Service pay had already become a big problem as the result of an almost continuous pay freeze, other than the 1% increase in 2013. Over this period a 43% increase in pay would have been required just to keep pace with prices.

2022 and 2023 saw the steepest rises in living costs facing workers in over 40 years: 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023*.

RPI Inflation is still running at 3%** . Behind that figure are some big increases in essential goods in the year up to April 2026:***

- Petrol and Oil up by 23.4%
- Vehicle Tax and Insurance up by 9.7%
- Water Charges up by 7.4%
- Phone Charges up by 6%
- Council Tax / Rates up by 5.1%
- Mortgage Interest Payments up by 4.8%
- Food and catering up by 4.1%

*Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, figure is for 12 months to January of respective year

**Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, April 2026 annual inflation (published May 2026)

***Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, April 2026

4.2 Inflation Forecast

The Treasury average of independent forecasts states that **RPI inflation will average 4.3% over 2026 and 3.9% over 2027***. These annual rates show the rate at which pay rises would be needed for wages just to maintain their current value.

*HM Treasury, Forecast for the UK Economy May 2026

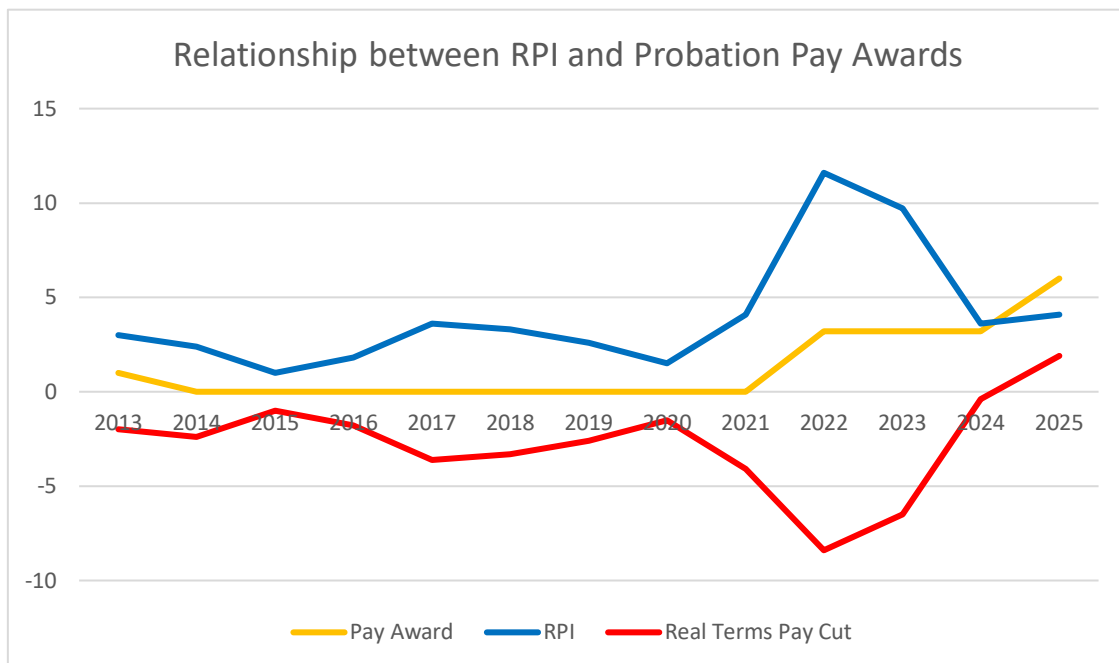
Forecasts are partly being fed by an anticipated significant increase in energy bills hitting UK households caused by the US attack on Iran. According to analysis by energy consultancy Cornwall Insight, a typical gas and electricity bill is forecast to reach £1,929 a year from July under OFGEM's quarterly price cap. This would represent an increase of up £290, or 18%, from the current cap.

Relationship between RPI and Probation Service Pay Awards (2010 – 2025)

Graph 1 below shows the relationship between the Probation Service pay awards and RPI inflation since 2010. RPI inflation is shown in blue, the Probation Service pay awards in yellow and the disparity between the two in red.

The Probation Service pay award has been lower than RPI inflation for most of the period in question.

Graph 1



As can be seen in this graph, probation staff suffered real terms pay cuts in every year since 2010 save for 2025. It would take, approximately, 30 years of pay awards of two per cent above RPI inflation, to restore probation pay to 2010 purchasing power.

This is a stark illustration of how far probation pay has fallen behind living cost rises since 2010.

4.3 Restore Probation Pay

The historically high inflation figures of the past few years, which threaten to rise yet again due to ongoing conflict in the middle east, have turned growing unhappiness from our members at becoming poorer over their careers in probation, to a full-on cost of living crisis that demands an urgent response by HMPPS.

The three year pay settlement of 2022/2023/2024, which gave an average cost of living increase of 3.2% in each year, can now be seen clearly in the context of historically exceptional UK price inflation. For the 12 months to October 2022 RPI reached 14.2% - a level of inflation not seen for 42 years and a level that was not predicted at the time the three year pay offer was agreed by members of the probation trade unions.

The continual erosion of real terms pay for a decade and a half until 2025, coupled with the recent surge in prices for essentials such as energy, food and housing, mean that many probation staff are really struggling to find the money to get through each month.

We look to HMPPS to demonstrate that they value Probation Service staff and recognise that it is now essential to build on the 2025 pay award and go further to reverse the real terms cuts to pay and living standards that we have seen since 2010.

5. Probation Pay Falling Behind Other Employers Since 2010

5.1 Pay Movements Elsewhere in the Public Sector and the Wider Economy

The table below shows the latest average settlements over the last year across a variety of sectors.

Table 2

Sector	Average pay settlements
Across economy	3.3%
Private sector	3.3%
Public sector	3.5%
Not for profit	3%
<i>Source: Income Data Research, settlements year to May 2026</i>	

The Bank of England Decision Maker Panel indicates that its latest survey shows that companies are expecting a 3.4% increase in wages over the next year.*

* Bank of England, Decision Maker Panel, April 2026

A longer-term perspective, shown in Table 3 below, reflects the huge cumulative impact of probation staff pay settlements lagging behind average pay settlements across the economy from 2010 to 2025. **This shows how average pay settlements across the economy have resulted in 55.5% growth since 2010 compared to 17.7% for probation staff.**

This cumulative gap in earnings growth since 2010 will not be closed without significant investment.

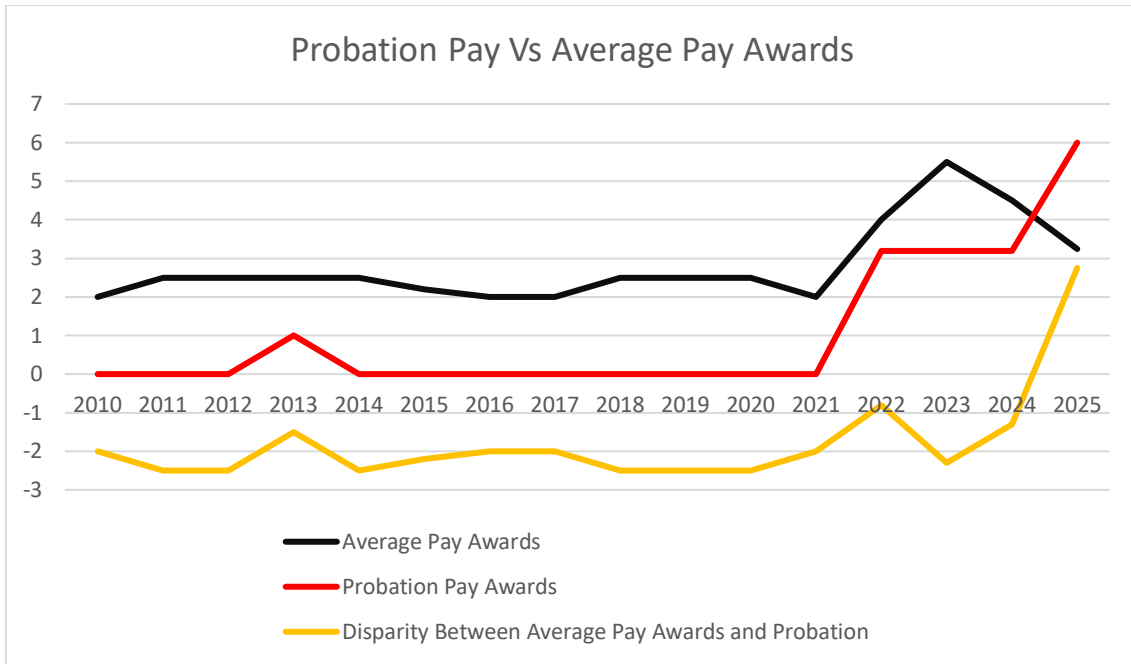
Table 3

Year	Average pay settlements*	Probation Staff pay increases
2010	2%	0%
2011	2.5%	0%
2012	2.5%	0%
2013	2.5%	1%
2014	2.5%	0%
2015	2.2%	0%
2016	2.0%	0%
2017	2.0%	0%
2018	2.5%	0%
2019	2.5%	0%
2020	2.5%	0%
2021	2.0%	0%
2022	4%	3.2%
2023	5.5%	3.2%
2024	4.5%	3.2%
2025	3.25%	6%
TOTAL	55.5%	17.7%

* Source: Incomes Data Research.

Graph 2, below, shows very clearly how probation pay has fallen behind average pay every year since 2010.

Graph 2



5.2 How Probation Pay Awards Compare with Competitor Organisation Awards

The following table below, helps explain why Probation Service staff may be tempted to take their skills elsewhere. Here is an historical comparison of probation pay point revalorisation (compound) since 2010 compared with the pay point revalorisation (compound) received by police staff, local government staff, health workers and prison officers. All figures are exclusive of incremental progression.

Table 4

	Probation	Police Staff	Local Government	Health	Prison Officers
2010	0%	2.58%	0%	0%	1%
2011	0%	0%	0%	0%	1.2%*
2012	0%	0%	0%	0%	1.2%*
2013	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
2014	0%	1.1%	1.1%	0%	1%
2015	0%	1.1%	1.1%	1%	1.8%
2016	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
2017	0%	1%	1%	1%	1.7%**
2018	0%	2%	2%	3%	2.75%
2019	0%	2.5%	2%	1.7%	2.2%
2020	0%	2.5%	2.75%	1.67%	2.5%
2021	0%	0%	1.75%	3%	1.1%***
2022	3.2%	7.1%	7%	4.75%	4%
2023	3.2%	7%	6.4%	5%	7%
2024	3.2%	4.75%	4.03%****	5.5%	5%
2025	6%	4.2%	3.2%	3.6%	4%
TOTAL	17.7%	44.8%	40%	37.5%	45.9%

* £250 for those below £21,000 – equivalent of 1.2% for a £20,000 salary

**Source: Hansard: Lord Chancellor December 2017

*** £250 for those below £24,000 – equivalent of 1.1% for a £22,000 salary

**** Average across NJC pay bands

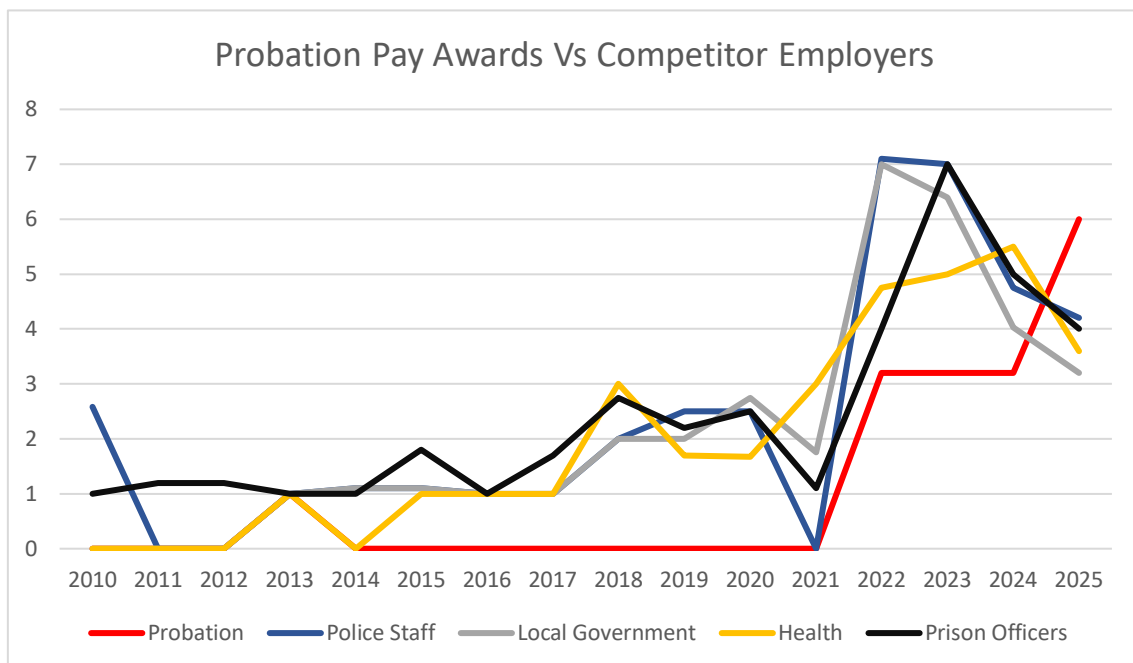
During the period from 2022, as inflation soared and the cost of living rocketed, probation staff fell further and further behind other public sector workers. Between 2022 and 2025 prices, as measured by RPI, increased by 32%. Over these 3 years, public sector competitor employers awarded their staff the following cumulative pay increases:

- Police: 25%
- Health: 20.2%
- Local Government: 22.2%
- Prison Officers: 21.5%

By comparison the Probation Service awarded its staff only 16.5%

These figures show just how far probation has fallen behind other public sector employers in responding to the cost-of-living crisis through pay awards to staff.

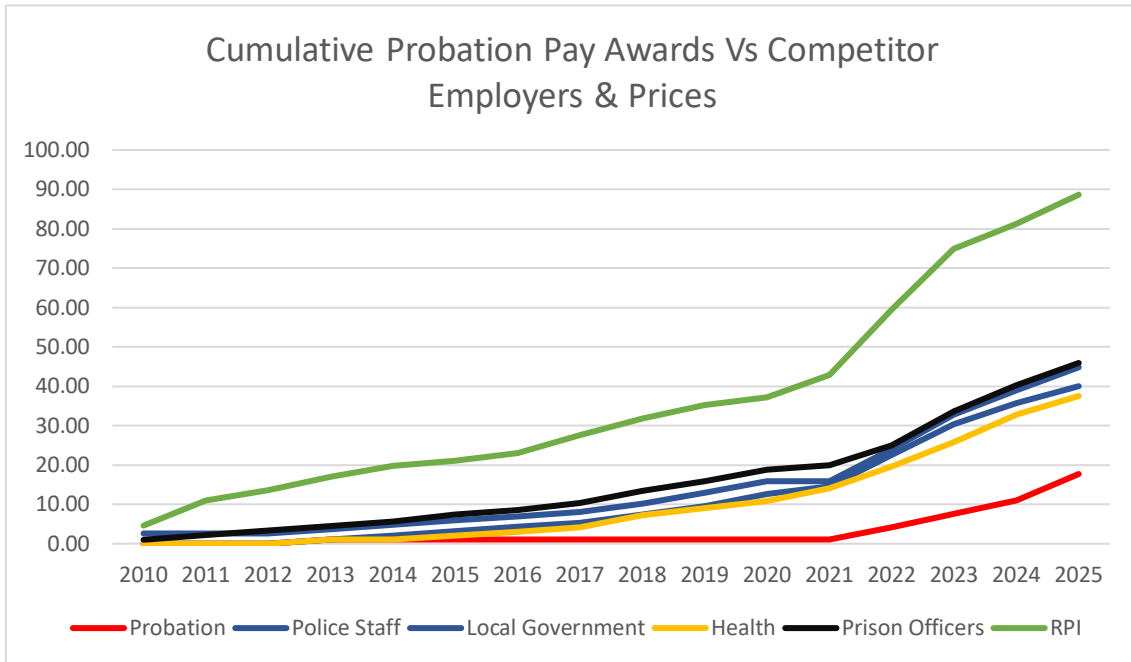
Graph 3



Graph 3 shows the annual pay awards for probation since 2010 in comparison with other competitor public sector employers. It shows that during that period, in every single year, other than 2025, probation staff either received the lowest or, occasionally, the joint lowest pay award.

Graph 4 shows the same information as the cumulative values of pay awards since 2010. It also includes the rising prices with the inclusion of RPI. This gives a very clear visual representation of how probation pay has fallen further and further behind public sector competitor employer pay as well as the rising cost of living.

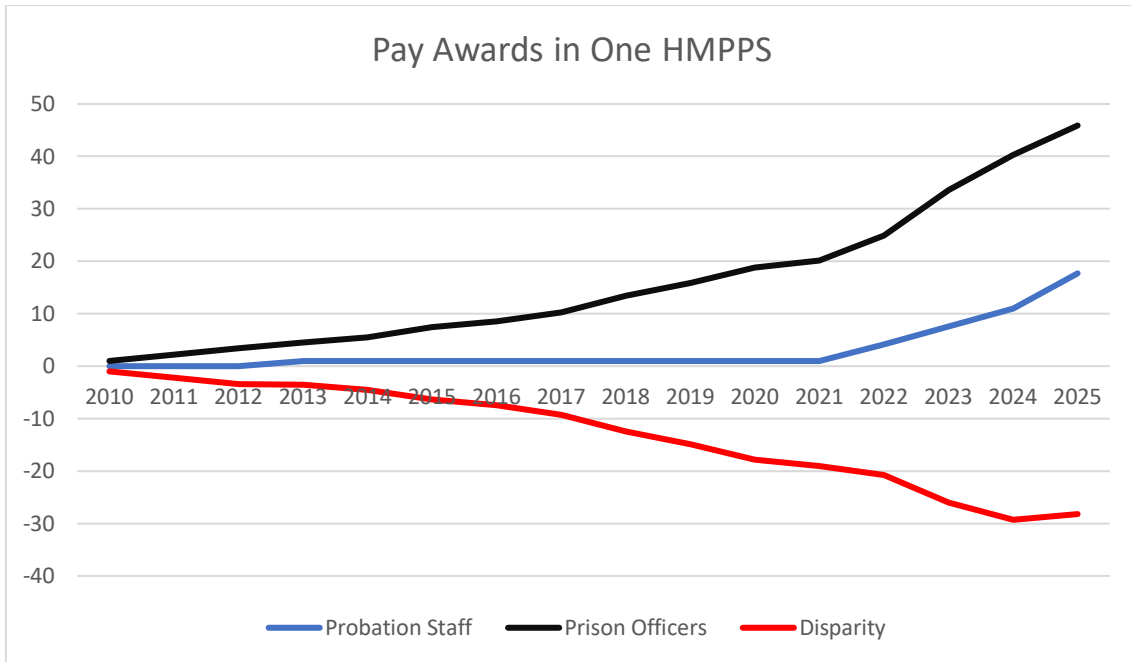
Graph 4



5.3 One HMPPS? Not When It Comes To Pay!

Probation staff have consistently suffered from poorer annual pay settlements than their colleagues in the Prison Service. It is hard to take the rhetoric of One HMPPS seriously when there is such disparity. The 2025 Probation Service award made a small step in closing that gap but only by less than 1% to the cumulative gap. This gap remains extremely wide. Graph 5 below shows this relationship.

Graph 5



It should be noted that Prison Officers also retained a system of geographical enhanced payments when geographical allowances were removed from the Probation Service as part of the price for the less generous three year pay award of 2022, 2023 and 2024.

6. Benchmarking Probation Pay with the Police

Following respective pay rises for 2025, the top salary of a police constable is £50,256, compared with the top salary of a probation officer which is £44,520. That's a shortfall of £5,736, or 11.4%, and a telling measure of just how far probation pay has fallen behind that of comparable professions.

A similar comparison can be made between the top salary of police sergeant, which stands at £56,208, and the top salary of senior probation officer, which is £48,760. This amounts to a shortfall of £7,448, or 13.2%.

The justification for our claim for a 12% pay rise can be seen very clearly in these shortfalls.

Appendix B shows the 2025 police constable and police sergeant pay points alongside those of their probation comparators.

The pay market for the Probation Service is obviously affected by these comparisons. HMPPS has previously failed to acknowledge the disparity between its pay and that of external employers. The unions are determined that this should be properly examined and addressed in the context of the 2026 pay talks.

7. Tackling Low Pay

The unions will not be able to recommend any pay offer this year which does not address low pay in the Probation Service once and for all.

In 2023, 2024 and 2025 the Probation Service stood by and watched the lowest pay point of pay band 2 overtaken by the National Living Wage. This is nothing short of a disgrace.

On 1 April 2026, the lowest probation pay point in pay band 2 was once again leapfrogged by the National Living Wage, while we were waiting for the 2025 pay award to be implemented. This was only just rectified when staff on the lowest pay point received their 6% pay rise in their May 2026 salaries.

The current value of pay points in pay band 2 are as follows:

£24,645

£25,679

£26,723

The National Minimum Wage, with effect from 1 April 2026, is £12.71/hour, or £24,519/year. The lowest pay point in pay band 2, even with a 6% pay rise having been implemented, is only fractionally above the NMW at £24,645/year or £12.77/hour.

The outcome of this continual leap-frogging of the lowest probation pay point by the National Living Wage has led to administrative staff feeling undervalued and the Probation Service unable to recruit and retain the staff who are essential to the work of the Service.

The recently agreed Home Office three year pay deal will mean that by July 2027, the lowest-paid staff will earn at least £15 per hour, with the national Admin Assistant rate rising to £29,050.

During the negotiations for the 2025 pay award HMPPS made an initial offer to the unions in January 2026 which included a proposal to delete pay points 1 & 2 of pay band 2 and to increase pay point 3 of pay band 2 to £26,118 to create a spot point salary.

This part of the original offer would have gone some way to addressing low pay. However, when HMPPS increased the headline pay offer from 4% to 6% in March 2026, the measures to address low pay were only back on the table if their costs were deducted from the increased headline offer, which was not acceptable to the unions.

Another proposal for a spot point salary for pay band 2 would not be acceptable to the unions. Why should pay band 2 staff not benefit from incremental progression like their higher paid colleagues? We want to see progress on tackling low pay, with a minimum rate of £15/hour in the context of continued incremental progression for pay band 2 staff.

We understand that this outcome could potentially create some pay compression issues between pay bands 2 and 3. This year's civil service pay

remit guidance from the Cabinet Office contains an option for employers to access a specific Pay Compression Framework.

This framework is funded outside of the main pay remit, provided it is adopted voluntarily in return for specified reform. This is available to allow employers to deal with pay compression issues arising from measures to alleviate low pay.

Successful applications to the Framework will not be included in the usual limitation of Increase to Remuneration Costs (IRC). The unions are interested in discussing the application of this separate funding stream, outside the IRC, to the Probation Service pay and grading system as part of this year's pay talks.

This year we need real action on low pay, and not at a cost to other elements in the pay offer. The Probation Service is now lagging behind comparator employers when it comes to salaries for administrative staff. This is damaging for lower paid staff and their families, and it is damaging to the ability of the Probation Service to recruit and retain the administrative staff who are so essential to the work of the service.

8. Probation In Crisis

On February 4, 2026, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee published its 'Efficiency and Resilience of the Probation Service'. When, as part its investigations the committee asked why the performance of the Probation Service has worsened over the last few years it reported that "*The Ministry of Justice explained that workforce shortages, exacerbated by high staff turnover, were the main reason for poor performance*"

8.1 Vacancy Rates Remain Stubbornly High.

The Public Accounts Committee found that the "*vacancy rate for probation officers increased from 14% in September 2021 to 21% in March 2025.*" By April 2026, according to HMPPS data, the overall probation officer vacancy rate across England and Wales had risen again to 24%.

A regional break down of PO vacancy rates in April of this year shows:

- London at 36%,
- Greater Manchester and Kent Surrey Sussex at 31%,
- North West at 28%
- East of England at 27%.

The same is true for administrative staff, with an overall vacancy rate of 21% for England and Wales in April 2026. This figure disguises some very serious admin staff shortfalls in the North East which hit a 32% admin staff vacancy rate in April this year.

There is a 36% shortfall in the number of Programme Facilitators needed, with staggering vacancy rates of 49% in East Midlands, 47% in South Central and 45% in Kent Surrey Sussex.

UPW Supervisors have an overall vacancy rate of 36%, with the following recruitment and retention red sites:

- South Central at 54%
- London at 51%
- East of England at 48%
- North East at 41%

These vacancy rates are not sustainable for an organisation committed to improving its performance and looking after its staff. Put simply, the Probation Service is not paying its staff enough to recruit or retain them. This has to change if the organisation is going to rise to the challenge of implementing the Sentencing Act.

The HMPPS Workforce Quarterly published on 21 May 2026 found that from 31 March 2025 to 31 March 2026 there was a 1.5% decrease in Band 4 probation officers. The leaving rate for Band 3 probation services officers to year end in March 2026 remains stubbornly high at 10.1% and for other roles at pay bands 1-3, 12%.

With workloads so high it is not surprising that the same Workforce Quarterly found that the average per worker sickness level in the Probation Service was 14 annual working days lost in the year up to 31 March 2026. An increase of 0.8 days on the previous year. For probation officers, a deeply worrying 60.2% of working days lost were a result of mental ill health.

This starkly illustrates the huge challenge facing the Probation Service, now and in coming years, and the overriding priority to retain as many experienced staff as possible. The statements by the employer support the repeated representations made by the Probation trade unions over recent years, in relation to the retention crisis facing numerous roles across regions and functions.

In recognition of the serious problems in the Probation Service, the government has committed to increase probation funding by £700 million, or 45%, by 2028/29. With the Ministry of Justice identifying staff shortages and high staff turnover as the main drivers of the worsening performance of the service, the probation unions assert that this makes the case for urgent extra funding being used to invest in staff, address low pay and reverse the substantial cut in real terms pay of probation staff since 2010.

Meeting our pay claim would enable the employer to address the lack of supply of incoming staff and also take steps to meet the demands of existing staff in relation to pay. Pay has been a consistent key driver of attrition and wider dissatisfaction in the workforce. The Probation Service is in a dire state in this regard, and there remains a clear risk for this to become catastrophic in the very near future if action is not taken.

Whilst the Civil Service Pay Remit Guidance for 2026/27 has now been published, with the 'pay envelope' set 3.5%, it is the position of the trade unions

that the current state of the Probation Service clearly indicates that a flex case must be made deliver the necessary additional funding to address the exceptional circumstances set out in our claim.

We strongly argue that restoring pay for probation staff is a crucial element of addressing this retention problem and the staffing crisis the service is suffering right now.

9. Prison Capacity Crisis

The present government inherited a prison system in crisis, running out of available prison spaces. Its new early release scheme, following on from the Conservative government's earlier ECSL scheme, has according to Ministry of Justice figures resulted in 38,042 prisoners released early between September 2024 and June 2025.* All of these early releases place additional workload pressure on a probation service already at breaking point.

*BBC News 30 October 2025

These measures have prioritised the prison crisis over the probation crisis. We strongly argue that urgent investment in the Probation Service is vital in order that it can adequately cope with the additional demands it faces. Investment in pay in order to retain skilled and experienced staff is a central element of that ambition.

10. The Sentencing Act 2026

In response to the rising prison population in England and Wales (it has doubled over the past 30 years), together with the failure of the number of prison places to match this expanding prison population, the government commissioned an Independent Review of Sentencing, chaired by former Justice Secretary, David Gauke. The result of enacting the majority of David Gauke's recommendations is the 2026 Sentencing Act.

Key measures of the Act include a legal presumption to suspend custodial sentences of 12 months or less, extended maximum suspended custodial sentences from two to three years and amendments to bail rules that will extend the use of bail rather than remand.

The implementation of the act will place considerable additional workload demands on the Probation Service and its staff. It is vital that additional investment in staff is made immediately to strengthen recruitment and, critically, retention. This implementation of this pay claim would support this aim

11. Conclusion

This claim has laid out very clearly the challenges facing probation pay and its role in the understaffing and workloads crisis the service faces. Investment in staff pay, addressing the ability to both recruit talented and committed people

whilst retaining skilled and experienced staff, is vital in order to be able to rebuild the effectiveness and capacity of the service. Only then will probation be able to play the central role in delivering the government's plans for ambitious change for the justice system in England and Wales.

To restore real terms probation pay to 2010 levels requires a **60% pay increase**. This pay claim for a 12% increase to pay points and cash allowances is modest by comparison, but would be an important step in restoring probation pay.

The existence of poverty pay in probation, exemplified by the national minimum wage overtaking the lowest pay point in 2023, 2024, and 2025 pending the pay award, is unacceptable in a modern public service delivered by a progressive government. Our claim for a £15 an hour minimum wage in the Probation Service makes sense morally as well as in terms of motivation and productivity.

Over the past 15 years, probation pay has fallen further and further behind rising prices and the pay of comparable public sector workers. We have a government that states it understands the need for an effective Probation Service to deliver on its ambitions for the judicial system. It is essential that the government builds on the 6% (above-inflation) pay award of 2025 to continue the process of restoring probation staff pay.

Appendix A – The Impact of the TU Side Pay Claim on the Probation Pay Bands

Pay Band	Pay Point	Probation Pay Band Values 01/04/2025	Plus 12% Per Annum & £15 per hour minimum (in yellow boxes)
2	1	£24,645	£28,938
	2	£25,679	£28,938
	3	£26,723	£29,930
3	1	£28,064	£31,432
	2	£29,330	£32,850
	3	£30,687	£34,369
	4	£32,102	£35,954
	5	£33,549	£37,575
4	1	£37,238	£41,707
	2	£38,950	£43,624
	3	£40,741	£45,630

	4	£42,575	£47,684
	5	£44,520	£49,862
5	1	£46,746	£52,356
	2	£47,403	£53,091
	3	£48,066	£53,834
	4	£48,760	£54,611
6	1	£51,203	£57,347
	2	£52,783	£59,117
	3	£54,590	£61,141
	4	£56,111	£62,844
A	1	£58,952	£66,026
	2	£60,308	£67,545
	3	£61,750	£69,160
B	1	£64,983	£72,781
	2	£67,453	£75,547
	3	£70,016	£78,418
	4	£72,610	£81,323
C	1	£76,241	£85,390
	2	£78,146	£87,524
	3	£80,100	£89,712
	4	£82,145	£92,002
D	1	£86,263	£96,615
	2	£90,576	£101,445
	3	£94,924	£106,315
	4	£99,449	£111,383

**Appendix B – Probation Pay Bands at 01/04/2025 in
Comparison to Police Constable and Police Sergeant Pay at
01/09/2025**

Pay Band	Pay Point	Probation Pay Band Values 01/04/2025	Police Constable Pay Points at 01/09/2025	Police Sergeant Pay points at 01/09/2025
2	1	£24,645		
	2	£25,679		
	3	£26,723		
3	1	£28,064		
	2	£29,330		
	3	£30,687		
	4	£32,102	£31,164	
	5	£33,549	£32,472	
4	1	£37,238	£33,789	
	2	£38,950	£35,106	
	3	£40,741	£37,737	
	4	£42,575	£43,038	
	5	£44,520	£50,256	
5	1	£46,746		
	2	£47,403		£53,568
	3	£48,066		£54,660
	4	£48,760		£56,208
6	1	£51,203		
	2	£52,783		
	3	£54,590		
	4	£56,111		
A	1	£58,952		
	2	£60,308		
	3	£61,750		
B	1	£64,983		
	2	£67,453		
	3	£70,016		
	4	£72,610		
C	1	£76,241		
	2	£78,146		

	3	£80,100		
	4	£82,145		
D	1	£86,263		
	2	£90,576		
	3	£94,924		
	4	£99,449		