

Press Statement

2 December 2014, 4.30pm

Secretary of State tells parliament he will proceed to a decision on selling the probation service despite being unaware of serious safety concerns

The Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, was questioned by the Justice Select Committee (JSC) this morning about the safety of his proposal to sell off parts of the probation service to private companies – a decision he is due to make tomorrow.

Having spent £15million on private consultants, Mr Grayling insisted that he would proceed to make the decision tomorrow, before the High Court considers the safety of the proposal (at a hearing on 10-12 December 2014) and despite serious risks to public safety raised by Napo (including two recent murders committed whilst offenders were inadequately supervised).

Napo, the Union for Probation Officers, has four important concerns about Mr Grayling's evidence to the JSC.

First, Mr Grayling told MPs on the JSC that he had only just heard of the two murder cases, even though Napo sent him the details on 20 October 2014, again on 22 October 2014, and again on 6 November 2014.

Second, in making his decision tomorrow, Mr Grayling plans to rely on the unpublished report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation, Paul McDowell. Mr Grayling plans to do this even though he recognised before the JSC that Mr McDowell is married to the managing director of Sodexo Justice Services, which stands to be awarded 6 of the 21 probation contracts. Napo considers that it is wrong for Mr Grayling to rely on confidential evidence produced by the husband of the Managing Director of a company which stands to make hundreds of millions of pounds from the sale.

Third, Mr Grayling has sought to keep secret the evidence collected by the Ministry of Justice. He has obtained a confidentiality order which prevents the test results from being published. Napo has applied to the High Court to lift the confidentiality order.

Fourth, the Government's tests – insofar as they are in the public domain - clearly show that the new system is unsafe. For example, the Government's evidence shows that:

- There is a serious shortfall in the number of qualified Probation Officers, with significant vacancies across every region of the UK. This means that the supervision of dangerous offenders is being allocated to under-qualified staff with unmanageable workloads.

- The Government's new probation computer system is not working. Because of data protection concerns, probation officers working for the new companies will not routinely receive risk assessments for high risk offenders and sex offenders. This puts probation officers and the public in serious danger. For example, Napo has notified Mr Grayling of a female Probation Officer who was recently seriously sexually assaulted when she met alone with an offender. Computer records identified that offender as someone who should not be left alone with women, but she was prevented from accessing that record and did not receive the warning. She has suffered serious ongoing psychological harm.

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For more information call:

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