



Welsh Affairs Committee

Monday, 8 December 2025

Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation
HM Inspectorate of Probation

Dear Martin,

Thank you for participating in my committee's inquiry into *prisons, probation and rehabilitation in Wales*.

During the session, we were unable to cover all of the questions my committee had intended to ask you. As such, I would be grateful if you could provide answers and clarifications to the following:

- The Labour Party's 2024 General Election manifesto committed to conducting a strategic review of probation governance. Do you have any updates on the progress of this review, and what recommendations would you like to see arise from it?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of having a unified prison and probation service, and should the organisational separation of probation from the prison service be considered as part of the review?
- Is there sufficient co-location of services alongside probation services, and if not, which services ought to be prioritised to be brought alongside probation?
- During the evidence session, you mentioned a particular example of good practice in which the Probation Service in Wales was joining up with other services, including those commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales, to meet the needs of people within the criminal justice system. Could you share more information about this?

I would be very appreciative if you could also fill in the survey linked below to provide your experience regarding giving evidence.

The survey should take no longer than five minutes to complete and neither Committee staff nor Members of Parliament are able to see individual responses, and answers are not linked with individual evidence. Further information about how we look after personal data is available the privacy notice in the survey.

The survey does also contain optional diversity monitoring questions, which allow us to understand whether different groups have different experiences when giving evidence, so that we can improve the way we work. It also ensures we are aware of the diverse range of voices that provide evidence.

I would therefore be very grateful if you could spare the time to fill in the below survey:



Welsh Affairs Committee

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=nt3mHDeziEC-Xo277ASzSh02a84io6BGIXcJV5Do4e1UOE01SIBZOVpESIAxOTNKOUNSVzIFUjI5TyQIQCN0PWcu>

Thanks again for your contribution to my committee's inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Jones MP
Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee



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Date: 22/12/2025

Ruth Jones MP
Chair of Welsh Affairs Committee
[via email]

Dear Ruth,

Thank you for your letter of 8th December.

I have not had any formal update on the progress of the review of probation governance, but my understanding is that the primary focus at present is on ensuring probation readiness for the sentencing reforms. I will feed in my considered views when the review commences. At this stage, my assessment is that there is a strong case for devolution of control of probation to a local level to ensure decision making is closer to the communities they serve. We need to empower and hold accountable local leaders to improve performance at a local level, and work with partners to meet the needs of local communities. There are promising models in Greater Manchester where we have seen benefits from better local join up where integrated services can be better than the sum of their parts.

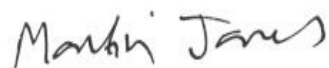
In terms of drawbacks, my only reservation, is that the current challenges facing probation can be traced back to the impact of reorganisation and change since 2014. There is good evidence that change has a detrimental impact on organisations and we need to ensure that any further change is carefully thought through to ensure the service can cope.

You also asked about the drawbacks of unifying prisons and probation. I can fully understand the rationale for unifying the services. Many people who go to prison will have served community sentences before leaving prison and the overwhelming majority of people who go to prison will be released at some point into the supervision of the probation service. Those in prison and on probation have similar needs (e.g. drugs/ alcohol/ mental health/ problems with education and employment). Effective release from prison requires effective planning by prisons and probation.

However, I fear that there are drawbacks. In my experience the vital work of probation, which has a caseload of 244,000, nearly three times the number of people in prison, can at times get lost given the potential for crises within our prisons and its finite capacity. I do therefore think there would be merit in exploring the case for clearer separation.

As I mentioned at the Committee, I have seen a number of good examples of joined up services and innovation in Wales. I attach an annex of examples. We are due to publish reports covering these in the coming weeks and I am happy to share copies once published.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Martin Jones'.

Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Examples of Good and Effective Practice in Wales

Organisational arrangements and activity

Example of effectiveness: The Human Factors model

In 2022, Probation Service Wales introduced the learning organisation approachⁱⁱ. This is a model designed to support a shift towards an inclusive, open learning culture and improve safety. Built on an evidence base called Human Factors, it introduces new tools and ways of working to help mitigate bias and disproportionality in decision-making, improve communication and collaboration across teams, create time and space for reflection and learning, and support staff autonomy while maintaining accountability.

Human Factors applications:

- **SBAR (situation, background, assessment, recommendation):** A structured communication tool that helps to provide clarity, promote autonomy and supported more considered decision-making.
- **Protected hour (time):** Dedicated time for managers and their staff to engage in reflective discussions, prioritise tasks, and manage workload effectively.
- **Team briefings (checklist):** Co-designed by managers and staff to identify stressors, risks, and errors, enabling timely problem-solving, escalation, and feedback.
- **Monthly meeting (feedback, reflection, and learning):** A direct line of communication from frontline staff to senior leaders to share successes and learn lessons through root cause analysis.

Senior leaders in Wales recognised the pressures on staff following significant national policy changes and that the learning organisation approach had helped to create a supportive culture that prioritised staff wellbeing, reflective practice, and decision-making. Managers reported that conversations were more focused and productive, enabling clearer decision-making. Practitioners felt empowered to take ownership of their work, and felt increasingly confident in solving problems independently. Protected time improved wellbeing by reducing stress and anxiety, allowing teams to function more effectively. Risk management was strengthened through increased reporting of risks and near-misses, supported by robust feedback loops. Importantly, the approach had driven a culture shift, reducing hierarchy and giving all staff a voice, and fostering collaboration and shared responsibility. Human Factors created a transparent, supportive environment that balanced autonomy with accountability. By embedding structured tools like SBAR and protected time, Wales Probation Service was driving a cultural reset that improved decision-making, wellbeing, and service quality.

Example of effectiveness: Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to reduce administrative tasks and improve engagement

As part of the HMPPS digital transformation strategy, Wales Probation Service had piloted several AI-powered transcription and summarisation tools designed to reduce administrative tasks and improve efficiency. The initiative aimed to free up practitioners' time for meaningful engagement with people on probation while improving the quality and timeliness of case records.

The tools transcribed and summarised supervision meetings and frontline interactions, producing accurate summaries within minutes.

The pilots formed part of a wider strategy to reduce the administrative burden for probation practitioners (PPs), improve the quality and timeliness of records through automated transcription and enhance accessibility for staff with neurodivergent conditions or other needs by reducing cognitive load.

Pilots ran for 10–20 weeks, focusing on sentence management teams and key interactions such as induction appointments, sentence planning interviews, and supervision meetings. Implementation involved onboarding, training, and structured feedback loops.

Impact and benefits

The evaluation of one of the tools, 'Minute', highlighted significant gains:

- Tasks that previously took two hours were completed in 30 minutes, with the time spent on writing contact logs reduced by an average of 73 per cent.
- 96 per cent of practitioners reported that the quality of records had improved.
- 83 per cent of practitioners noted better engagement with people on probation during sessions, as they could maintain eye contact with them and actively listen.
- Pilot probation practitioners (N=24) rated AI-generated supervision summaries: Accuracy 4.27/5, Coherence 4.68/5, Fairness 4.55/5 (mid-pilot survey). In-app feedback from the same users showed 94 per cent satisfaction and +70 NPS.
- Over 3,000 frontline meetings were summarised during the evaluation window.
- Qualitative feedback from neurodivergent and disabled staff shows the tool reduced cognitive load by easing note-taking, supporting dictation, and freeing attention during sessions.

Practitioners described the tools as "*fantastic – summaries are clear and accurate*" and valued the ability to focus on listening rather than note-taking. They said this improved engagement with people on probation and freed up time for risk assessment and professional curiosity.

Sustainability and next steps

Following the pilots, Justice Transcribe was rolled out to all sentence management teams in Wales and KSS. It has additionally expanded to areas of London and plans are in place for scaling across all Probation Regions. To date, over 50,000 meetings have been transcribed. A full evaluation led by the Justice AI Unit will consider its impact on the service and its wider application.

By using AI technology, Wales Probation Service demonstrated how innovation can transform operational practice, creating capacity, improving service quality, and supporting a more person-centred approach. This aligns with the broader Probation Service strategy of embedding technology to improve outcomes for people on probation and as part of the 'Our Future Probation Service' programme to create a future-ready probation service by driving digital transformation, improving operational efficiency, and reducing probation workload to enhance service delivery and sustainability.

Example of effectiveness: The Centralised, Operational, Resettlement, Referral and Evaluation (CORRE) Hub

The CORRE Hub was a key component of Wales Probation Service's unified model. It acted as a central interface between PPs and the interventions landscape, which spanned public, private, and third-sector providers. Unlike in English regions, where digital solutions primarily support referrals to Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS), the CORRE Hub in Wales managed a broader range of interventions, while incorporating the refer and monitor tool (intervention digital service).

Purpose

CORRE assisted PPs by:

- identifying **suitable interventions**
- **enhancing the quality of assessment and sentence planning**
- completing referrals **quickly and accurately**.

By removing time-consuming administrative tasks, the CORRE Hub enabled PPs to focus on supervision and engagement, leading to better outcomes for people on probation. During inspection, 77 per cent of reviewed cases had plans that focused sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance, with some PDUs achieving even higher levels of sufficiency.

Key functions included:

- **referral management:** triaged, prioritised, and monitored referrals across internal interventions, CRS services, and community provision
- **strategic influence:** tracked referral volumes, identified gaps, and informed commissioning activity

- **quality assurance:** used quality assurance tools and reflective feedback loops to maintain high-quality work that met HM Inspectorate of Probation's standards
- **prompting:** actively progressed accredited programme and UPW requirements, ensuring these were well sequenced.

In 2024, the CORRE Hub supported 9,036 sentence plans and processed 8,122 CRS referrals. Referrals were 50 per cent faster than the national average. The Wales assessment tool (WAT) report (July 2024) confirmed that CORRE sentence plans are more likely to engage individuals and reduce reoffending. Additionally, the Hub's quality assurance activity continues to drive improvements in sentence planning and referral processes.

CORRE probation services officers (PSOs) maintained a Wales-wide directory of services. This made them a point of contact when expert knowledge was required, and enabled practitioners to offer tailored interventions, such as brain injury and autism support. The region reported good communication between PDUs and CRS suppliers, ensuring smooth delivery. Monthly CORRE reports tracked performance and informed continuous improvement.

The CORRE Hub created economies of scale, transferred the administrative burden from PPs to dedicated teams, and embedded strategic priorities into sentence planning. This approach ensured quality, consistency, and timeliness; it supported the 'start right, end right' agenda of the region and improved outcomes for people on probation.

Effective local integration: Grand Avenues project Cardiff

In response to rates of deprivation and reoffending in Ely and Caerau, leaders co-located probation staff within the Grand Avenues project, supervising 130 individuals with access to local services, third sector support and unpaid work opportunities. Backed by 10 years of funding, the project was being evaluated by the University of South Wales, with several positive outcomes identified. Practitioners reported improved engagement and compliance. Inspectors heard from people on probation about their positive experiences at Grand Avenues, highlighting the value of localised approaches to community reintegration.

Effective Youth Justice Services in Wales: Bridgend

Across our inspection programme Youth Justice Services tend to be rated better than probation. In our assessment positive results are driven by a model in which there is focused local leadership and strong strategic partnerships, feeding through into strong delivery by motivated teams able to understand the needs of the children they are working with. Importantly there is a commitment to improve where there are problems.

Our recent inspection of Bridgend (awaiting publication) has illustrated that through focused leadership a service can transform from a service that was rated inadequate 7-8 years ago, to one that produced very impressive results for both children and victims in our most recent inspection. I will share a copy of the report on publication.

