

Written evidence from Ministry of Justice

Introduction

I am submitting evidence as the Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice. I am responsible for probation services, policy, reform and industrial relations.

The Model

Q1: What are your views on the decision to end the competition for Probation Delivery Partners, and bring those service back into NPS delivery?

COVID-19 has had significant operational impact and brought real uncertainty for the future. Probation services moved to operating under Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM) arrangements when the pandemic emerged. The restrictions these models have introduced have included reducing certain activities such as Unpaid Work, but supervision of offenders in the community continued, with resources focused on managing the high risk and very high risk of harm offenders.

Looking ahead, it is vital for public and judicial confidence that we have the flexibility to deliver a national response to any future challenges that COVID-19 presents. Ending the competition for Probation Delivery Partners, and bringing the associated services into NPS delivery, will give us a critical measure of control, resilience and flexibility with these services that we would not have were they delivered under 12 contracts with a number of organisations. This will put us in the best possible position to respond to any further disruption caused by COVID-19 and enable a smoother recovery out of exceptional delivery arrangements we have had to put in place. From June 2021, we can reassure the judiciary and the public that whatever lies ahead, offenders serving community sentences will be punished and make reparation to society.

Moreover, we had already announced in 2019 that we would be moving responsibility for supervision of all offenders to the NPS from next year. Bringing unpaid work placements and behaviour change programmes under the NPS too will allow us to focus resources on those offenders who pose the greatest risk to the public, and improve continuity of supervision by the same Probation Officer over the duration of a sentence. There is, of course, a long history of offender management being delivered by the public sector and I have every confidence in the NPS to deliver these services.

It is also the case that COVID-19 has provided us with an opportunity to review how we deliver our services and build back better for the future. The pandemic has shown us how well and quickly we can adapt to a crisis by being more flexible and deploying smarter ways of working. In recognition of the value of achieving a healthy work-life balance, we are launching a new Smarter Working Strategy for the NPS, which is based on the principle that staff will be able to work remotely up to 50% of the time, depending on their job role. Throughout COVID-19, staff have used their laptops to be work remotely in a more routine way. We have driven the use of MS Teams for operational teams to stay connected and collaborate virtually on a more regular basis.

In line with this, the pandemic has provided us with many more opportunities to work in partnership with health agencies at all levels. We are keen to capitalise on this and are therefore exploring ways to build on existing relationships with health partners in the

community. We are working with the NHS on their plans to invest £20 million in RECONNECT, a new service to support vulnerable people to engage with health services, including mental health, when they leave prison.

Q2: How were private sector providers involved in the decision to end competition?

- **What opportunity were providers given to make alternative proposals?**
- **What effect will this decision have on the future of private sector involvement in the criminal justice system?**

Current CRC providers were informed of our thinking on the impact of COVID-19 on the programme's plans ahead of the announcement on 11 June, and were given the opportunity to present their views. Ultimately, any decision on the future of a competitive process is for the department only.

The private sector remains an important partner in the criminal justice system. In probation, private sector organisations can bid for the contracts that will be let under the Probation Services Dynamic Framework; and there is a significant continued role in the build, delivery and maintenance of parts of the prison estate.

Q3: What are your views on the new model of probation?

- **What do you like about the new model?**
- **What do you dislike?**

The new model will allow us to strengthen supervision and support for offenders while providing a critical level of resilience and stability for core services. We will bring all offender management into the NPS by June 2021 and we are confident that this will allow us to strengthen our management of risk and support desistance from offending.

Further, bringing offender management, unpaid work placements and behavioural change programmes under the NPS will allow us to improve continuity of supervision by the same Probation Officer over the duration of a sentence. It will also give us control and flexibility in the face of potential future uncertainty. This is crucial because these interventions are critical to public and judicial confidence and are important for punishment and rehabilitation.

Our plans for a Dynamic Framework will allow the NPS (and other organisations) to directly commission rehabilitative services in a way that encourages the participation of a range of suppliers including smaller suppliers and is responsive to the needs of local areas. We need the talent and expertise of the private, voluntary and public sectors working together as effectively as possible to cut reoffending and protect the public.

Under the future system, Regional Probation Directors will oversee each region and be accountable for both NPS and contracted delivery. These individuals are all now in post. This will establish greater probation leadership, holding providers to account and enabling increased engagement between the NPS, service providers and the wider criminal justice system. As part of our measures to provide increased transparency, we will also publish an annual report detailing the performance of each region and an assessment of the effectiveness of provision.

Through the Probation Workforce Programme we will ensure the wider structural changes happening in probation go hand-in-hand with positive changes for our workforce. We will

clarify and codify the practice standards and expectations that are incumbent on our workforce, setting the standards for effective probation delivery in the new operating model and ensuring staff are held accountable. We will also invest in learning and development to enhance the professional skills needed to address criminogenic needs, and ensure our staff can adapt to future changes in the nature of offending and wider sentencing policy. These changes will enable Probation Officers to work with offenders based on the latest available evidence, leading to more effective outcomes and increased sentencer confidence in community sentences.

Q4: Does the new model address the issue of confidence in community sentence options?

- **If yes, how?**
- **If no, why not?**

Yes - the new model will deliver a stronger, better organised probation system that will protect the public, tackle reoffending and support victims of crime. Stabilising the probation system is a prerequisite to deliver the more robust framework for community sentences the Government would like to see. By streamlining the system we will strengthen processes for managing the risks offenders pose to the public, providing sentencing advice, keeping victims informed and enforcing license conditions such as curfews. The investment we are making in extra Probation Officers and improvements in risk management and sentence planning meaning that staff will in time have smaller caseloads and more time to focus on their service users.

We are improving the array of community sentence options which will be available to sentencers. We are investing in unpaid work placements and bringing the best of the innovation from CRCs in this area into the NPS. This will ensure consistency across the country, with a focus on engaging local bodies and the public on properly reparative work that makes a difference to local communities. We are also investing in Accredited Programmes and structured interventions so we have an evidence-led, consistently delivered set of NPS interventions with extra capacity to deliver an increased number of places. Finally, we are ensuring through the Dynamic Framework that there will be a wide range of specialist services to meet rehabilitative needs as part of Rehabilitation Activity Requirements.

We are also committed to improving both the quantity and quality of pre-sentence reports (PSRs) to ensure more sentencing decisions accurately identify an offenders' risks and needs, as well as highlighting suitable community interventions and treatment requirements that facilitate reduced reoffending. To achieve this, we will increase NPS capacity to prepare PSRs on more recorded disposals, and deliver an enhanced volume of fast delivery reports, including an increase in fuller reports for BAME and women offenders.

In parallel, we will expand the presence of NPS staff at court to effectively resource these changes, as well as increase the ability of the NPS to meaningfully engage with sentencers directly and operate strategically with wider partners, in particular HMCTS and the defence community.

The Government will set out a detailed vision for more robust community sentences in due course.

Q5: The new model aims to strengthen integration between prisons and probation by integrating through-the-gate roles, processes and products with sentence management. What is your view on this? Do you anticipate any gaps/challenges?

The new resettlement model is rightly ambitious, and is based on lessons learned from the Through the Gate model as well as feedback from practitioners, service-users, and voluntary and community sector providers.

The key theme running through the new model is that the individual being released from prison needs both their criminogenic and their risk management needs attended to, in order to reduce their risk of re-offending. The new resettlement model therefore recognises that joined up planning needs to start early, needs to be flexible and needs practitioners and providers working collaboratively. This includes central coordination between NPS community offender managers and providers of resettlement support commissioned through the Probation Services Dynamic Framework. If these principles are adhered to, the new resettlement model will provide a real opportunity for service users to have a consistent and integrated pre and post release service.

Transitioning current services towards the new resettlement model is dependent on having sufficient and fully trained staff. We intend to offer CRC staff providing Through the Gate the opportunity to become community offender managers. While there will be differences in culture and work practices between those who previously worked at different organisations, this gives us the opportunity to create a new organisation which harnesses the strengths of both current CRCs and the NPS.

We also recognise that the boundaries between prison and the community need to be more permeable, with practitioners working both inside prisons and in community offices. Prison Group Directors and Regional Probation Directors will need to work flexibly and collaboratively with each other to commission services and staffing requirements.

Q6: What progress has been made in implementing the probation reforms in Wales?

- **What lessons have been learnt so far and how are these being shared?**

On 1st December 2019, circa 300 Wales CRC offender management staff moved to the NPS, bringing all offender sentence planning and management in Wales (circa 8,000 cases) under the remit of the NPS. Implementing this transfer effectively required a particular focus on digital solutions and offender data management, estates alignment, HR data including staff terms and conditions, stakeholder management and staff training.

Our learning from this time, which has been shared with the Probation Reform Programme, included the importance of enhancing pre-transfer communications with CRCs and a timelier sharing of staff data.

HMPPS Wales's plan for bringing staff into the NPS has been primarily focussed on the training of staff to be able to hold combined caseloads of offenders, enabling them to work safely and effectively across all offender groups; moving away from the risk-based distinction that was in place (and still is in England regions) between the NPS and CRC caseloads. This is being completed in Wales in three phases:

- Phase 1 (December 2019 – March 2020): critical operational training to enable Offender Managers to safely work with high-risk cases, and to enable combined caseloads to be rolled out. Phase 1 also included mandatory Civil Service onboarding training and induction materials.
- Phase 2 (April 2020 – October 2020): further essential training across all grades of OMs to ensure parity with legacy NPS colleagues is underway. Following the onset

of COVID-19, several training events were reformatted for delivery by e-Learning or via Microsoft Teams. As a result, it is expected that Phase 2 will conclude within its allotted timescales.

- Phase 3 (Business as Usual): any additional training needs to be managed internally through standard training procedures.

Other aspects of the Probation Reform Programme (PRP) design are also being tested and evaluated in Wales. The first of these areas will be the Short-Term Sentence Teams which were introduced in Wales in early August 2020. These are being developed to encourage a more focused model of practice for a cohort of service users with historically high rates of recall and reoffending. Offender Managers within Short-Term Sentence Teams will deploy an intensive approach, including increased levels of weekly contact with service users and increased frequency of OASys completion. Other areas will include the court Bail Information Officer, adopted early across all regions and Wales as a response to COVID-19, but now part of a formal evaluation, which will also consider the efficacy of this role in reducing unnecessary remands in custody.

Q7: How will the National Probation Service ensure that it maintains the innovation and best practice achieved during the Transforming Rehabilitation Reforms?

HMPPS is taking a number of steps to ensure that it carries forward the innovation and best practice achieved during the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms. Reviews of the practices of individual CRCs have been carried out to ensure that the future delivery of probation services is informed by CRC experiences and ways of working. Reports were signed-off by each CRC CEO. Additionally, the Probation Reform Programme is developing local transition plans for every region, which will help to ensure that community-level innovations can be maintained where this is appropriate. The open recruitment process for Regional Probation Directors and Transition Managers resulted in a number of people with direct experience of working in CRCs being hired into senior leadership positions. This will help us lock in the leadership knowledge, experience and expertise of the CRCs into future services. We recognise that staff that transfer into NPS from the CRCs will bring knowledge and expertise, which we will use and look to learn from. We will also continue to give careful consideration to the findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, which has produced a number of thematic reports on the effectiveness of different elements of the current probation system.

To build on this work, the Government has commissioned an internal review of the opportunities presented by the Probation Reform Programme to realise efficiencies in probation delivery. This review is specifically designed to ensure that the future delivery of probation services learns from the experiences and innovations of the current probation system, and the Exceptional Delivery Model that was developed in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. This review is due to report to me in mid-August.

Commissioning: Dynamic Framework

Q8: Does the new model offer a level playing field for small and specialist voluntary and third sector organisations in regard to the commissioning? Given the challenges in the previous model, how will a new national service secure input from smaller providers?

- **What impact has Covid-19 had on this, if any?**

Voluntary and specialist organisations have a strong track record of working with offenders to turn their lives around and we remain committed to increasing the role they can play in probation service delivery through these reforms. Our plans for a Dynamic Framework will allow the National Probation Service to directly commission rehabilitative services in a way that encourages the participation of a range of suppliers including smaller suppliers and is responsive to the needs of local areas. We have worked closely on these plans with Clinks, the umbrella group for third sector organisations in criminal justice, as well as with the Crown Representative for the voluntary sector. Specific design choices intended to reduce barriers for entry to the voluntary sector include:

- Simplified qualification process requiring only short descriptions of services and case studies in addition to standard organisational information;
- Majority of day one contracts (in terms of contract value) are at a Police Force rather than regional level to facilitate participation by organisations with a smaller footprint;
- Bids will be evaluated in part based on the organisation's evidence of locally responsive service delivery;
- Flexibility on information assurance accreditation, with IASME Governance (designed for smaller organisations) acceptable in addition to ISO27001;
- We are providing a digital solution for sharing data about service users and reporting on services provided, so organisations do not need to develop their own;
- Organisations bidding for a smaller value of contracts (in aggregate) are only required to self-certify their financial health (under £100,000) or provide a credit score report (£100,000 - £1m) instead of completing a full Financial Viability Risk Assessment.

We know that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on many third sector organisations and that some may have limited capacity to participate in competitive processes. However, our engagement with the sector in recent months makes us believe there is real benefit in launching call-off competitions via the Dynamic Framework now to provide potential future opportunities for the market. We will continue to work with the sector to overcome potential difficulties and remain open to any specific suggestions on how best to support voluntary organisations in participating.

Q9: What is the anticipated effect of procuring resettlement and rehabilitative services using a dynamic framework?

- **Do you foresee any problems with this model?**

The Dynamic Framework is a hybrid of a Framework Agreement and a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). This is permissible as the services to be procured are listed within Schedule 3 of the Public Contracts Regulations (PCR) 2015. This will enable us to put in place more flexible arrangements at a regional and local level for accessing specialist rehabilitative and resettlement services, by running call-off competitions and contracting for services such as accommodation or employment support services. It is also intended to help create a clearer role in probation delivery for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and smaller providers, including local and specialist services to reflect the wider strategic ambitions of HMPPS. The Dynamic Framework will allow the Regional Probation Director to procure interventions available as part of Rehabilitation Activity Requirements activity

days and for those on licence that can be tailored to local need and create or take advantage of emerging local opportunities, such as opportunities for co-commissioning.

Q10: What progress has been made so far in the commissioning of services through the dynamic framework?

We launched the Probation Services Dynamic Framework on 11 June, and since then over 300 organisations have registered an interest in joining and over 60 have already submitted a qualification response. The first call-off competition for day one services, for Education, Training and Employment, will launch in early September.

Transition

Q11: CRCs and NPS staff are being brought back together under the new model. How is this transition being managed?

- **What support is available to staff during this time?**
- **How are service users being supported through this transition?**

Our priority is to manage transition to the Unified Model in a way that protects continuity of service, and minimises the change for staff and users wherever we can. At the point at which CRC responsibilities are handed back to the NPS in June 2021, many aspects of the way in which NPS and CRC staff do their jobs currently will stay the same. Changes to fully integrate all aspects of their work will take place safely in the months following this handover point.

Wherever changes are necessary which impact the way staff will do their jobs, staff will be informed of any such changes early, and be given support in terms of guidance and training. They will also have access to staff forums and change champions' in their local offices through which they can raise questions about anything that is happening to them or to find out more information. The programme retains a small but dedicated change management team that are developing these requirements now and working with local NPS and CRC leaders to do so.

It is our intention that service users feel as little impact or change as possible. For the vast majority, their probation officer and reporting office will remain the same, and if service users are midway through a programme or accessing other support services at the point of June handover, this will continue as-is until its conclusion.

Q12: CRCs currently use several different operating systems – how easy will it be to merge these into one model? Do you foresee any challenges?

A consequence of the innovation we sought from the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme is a diversity of CRC operating models in place, and this does increase the complexity of transition to some degree. We will smooth that complexity by taking over the CRC services and responsibilities intact at the point of handover and take steps to integrate over a longer period once the transfer of responsibilities is safely achieved, and services are in our control. We want to ensure aspects of effective practice that CRCs have promoted are retained wherever possible, and there will be room for flexibility in regional delivery models, within the parameters of consistent national standards of operations, especially where that flexibility is targeted at better meeting local need.

One of the main challenges will be dealing with the bespoke ICT systems that some CRCs use in their work and ensuring that staff can still do their jobs as closely to the way they do today as possible, while using NPS systems. In some cases this will require some adaptation to make this happen, but we have identified where such issues exist and have in train a

mature plan for how the system and data migration will take place. We will of course be continuing to test and refine this over the coming months with local input from the CRC staff.

Q13: What impact is the transition having on the voluntary/third sector organisations already providing probation services?

Increasing the opportunities for voluntary/third sector provision is a key programme aim. We know that for many of these types of services this sector are the best placed providers, which is why we have retained the opportunities for this sector to be able to compete to provide interventions services in the dynamic framework competition.

We have had regular consultation with the sector through Clinks around how the transition plans will affect these organisations. We have also consulted on our plans and the design of the dynamic framework competition to ensure that we are not inadvertently creating barriers that hinder this sector from competing.

The staff in the organisations that deliver services which are transferring to NPS or new providers will be planned for in the same way as CRC staff, and will be subject to the same industry standard HR protocols and protections that will apply to CRC directly employed staff. As many of these organisations are delivering services under contract to the CRCs, we are working closely with CRCs to ensure the relevant and appropriate information reaches these organisations and staff around the transition.

Q14: The Ministry of Justice made the decision to end the competition for Probation Delivery Partners and bring these services into the NPS. These services are to go live in June 2021; is there sufficient time to transition probation over to the new model?

- **If anything, what needs to be taken into consideration during this time?**

We are confident there is sufficient time to make this transition. The ceasing of the Probation Delivery Partner competition has simplified a number of aspects of transition, as it has removed the need to manage the split and transfer of staff and services out of the CRCs to a third set of providers - in addition to the transfer to the NPS and the Dynamic Framework providers. The staff delivering the unpaid work placements and behaviour change programmes will transfer to the NPS and, in line with our overall approach to enact a safe transfer, we will look to keep the delivery of these services intact as far as possible at the point of handover in June.

Workforce

Q15: Does the new model address workload issues, e.g. high caseloads, recruitment/retention?

We recognise that under the current system too many Probation Officers are managing high caseloads, impacting their ability to deliver frontline services effectively. Under the new model for probation services, we are planning a range of changes aimed specifically at raising the quality of offender supervision by resourcing better assessments of risk and need, and strengthening the relationships between offenders and Probation Officers. To support this, we expect to see a reduction in average caseloads, meaning we can realise more contact time for offenders supervised in the community.

We are focussing on recruiting and training increased numbers of probation officers to support the service and caseloads, and this is a fundamental tenet of our recently published Probation Workforce Strategy. In 2020/21 we plan to recruit at least 1,000 trainee probation officers across the NPS and CRCs in addition to over 500 already in training. We recognise

that there are significant local and regional employment market challenges in some areas where it is harder to recruit.

During our latest recruitment round, we attracted more applicants than ever before. We exceeded our targets to increase diversity of applications. We delivered 27.4% BAME applications, above our 22% target, and 26.3% male applications, above our 26% target. We are considering what incentives could be made available to recruit in “hard to fill” sites, in both the short and long term. This includes running targeted marketing campaigns in those areas to attract more trainee probation officers which we have done for the most recent campaign. We are also considering the effectiveness of marketing to ensure it accounts for more “hard to fill” locations.

We are also reviewing staffing numbers for probation officers over the next 5-10 years, alongside the Probation Reform Programme, to ensure that we are accurately planning for the capacity we need both now and in the future.

Q16: What progress has been made towards probation being recognised as a “skilled profession”?

The skills and expertise of Probation staff are at the core of a safe and effective probation service who must have the skills and support they need to deliver a high quality service. That is why we have committed to consulting our probation staff on developing new practice standards to ensure everyone has the relevant qualifications and capability within the probation service and on creating an internal professional register for probation qualified practitioners.

We will also bring in a new learning and development delivery model by 2020/21, to provide comprehensive and modernised learning opportunities for probation staff. This will enable the NPS to meet increasing L&D demand and deliver the professionalisation agenda, providing access to high quality, practical learning resources that address staff concerns, support day-to-day work and contribute towards their continuous professional development. This will support individuals throughout their career in a role at the heart of the Criminal Justice System.

We want the probation service to be a rich, fulfilling and rewarding place to work that attracts great people who want to stay within the service. The recently published Probation Workforce Strategy outlines our commitment to creating a positive, inclusive and diverse workforce and the steps we are going to take to deliver this. The workforce has adapted to and absorbed a very different way of working to keep staff and service users safe from COVID-19. Our aim is to absorb the best aspects of these new ways of working into our everyday working practices and, in doing so, create more compelling reasons to attract and retain talented staff. Specifically, we have committed to enhancing qualification routes by improving the existing Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) and testing an accelerated progression pathway from Probation Services Officer to Probation Officer launching in 2020/21.

Covid-19

Q17: What impact has Covid-19 had on the probation service?

- **the immediate impact and/or**
- **the anticipated long-term impact**

Probation had to respond swiftly to overcome the extraordinary challenges faced as a service and significantly adapt ways of working due to COVID-19. Probation services moved to operating under Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM) arrangements when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. The restrictions these models have introduced have been necessary to maximise staff and service user safety whilst continuing to deliver critical front-line services and especially public protection. For instance we issued circa 2,500 mobile phones to service users to conduct telephone interviews, which has allowed us to continue key contact with our service users through this time.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the delivery of some community sentence requirements. Social distancing guidelines meant that offenders undertaking their community order requirements in groups could no longer do so. In the short term, this mostly impacted the delivery of Unpaid Work placements and Accredited Programmes. During the last few months, probation providers were delivering these requirements in alternative formats as much possible within the social distancing guidelines. Probation providers are now increasing the delivery of these requirements in line with the relaxation of some distancing restrictions. Alternative approaches for delivery however will remain limited until after social distancing guidelines are removed.

We continue to work under EDM arrangements and our plan to recovery is set out in the COVID-19 Probation Roadmap to Recovery which was published on 2 June. It set out a three-step approach to recovery for probation. Step Two of this plan started on 6 July. This included reducing the use of doorstep visits and replacing them with more face-to-face contact, which we have facilitated by reopening some offices and extending the opening hours of others.

We prioritised probation services in line with the Government's social distancing policy and facilitated a continued service, despite the pressures stemming from the pandemic, by adapting probation delivery practices. As a result, certain activities were reduced, but supervision of offenders in the community continued, with resources focused on managing the high risk and very high risk of harm offenders. Offender management practices were adjusted in line with the Government's social distancing policy. The majority of offenders were supervised remotely via telephone, or video conference facilities. Where technology was used to supervise, the frequency of such contact was doubled.

In addition to these divisional and CRC plans, national subject specific Exceptional Delivery Models were developed for specific parts of probation practice; for example, for electronic monitoring, approved premises, offender management of extremist offenders, management of serious further offences, and for the management of COVID-19 related Releases on Temporary Licence and associated Through the Gate work.

At a recent meeting of the HMPPS Recovery Independent Advisory Forum, Justin Russell (Chief Inspector, HMI Probation) gave positive early informal feedback from the inspectorate's recovery thematic report, including on management of risk of serious harm, service users' experiences and the visibility of probation senior leaders. In addition, the Operational System Assurance Group have assessed 6,800 cases across probation since the start of the pandemic and improvements have been seen in compliance levels with the EDMs.

We are working towards EDPs setting out the detail of moving to Step 3 later in August, which, as set out in the Roadmap to Recovery, may include continuing to increase face to face contact and office openings and further increasing unpaid work as well as other increases in services. However, the steps that we are taking to recover the service are gradual – balancing the importance of delivery with the imperative of protecting staff and service users

from the risks associated with COVID-19. Whilst we are focusing on moving forward, we are also making sure we have plans in place should we need to move back a step if there are further outbreaks either locally or nationally.

Our long-term aim is to work towards a more resilient system that delivers improved outcomes in business as usual, and better prepares us for future emergencies.

Therefore, in probation, our aim is to use recovery work not simply to return to business as usual as quickly as possible, but to transition to a reformed, unified model of probation. Our Recovery Programme will ensure that everything we do pulls together to deliver the probation system we want for the future and that we have a consistent approach to achieving this which maintains continuity of essential service delivery and minimises disruption to front line delivery. This presents opportunities of learning and innovation for potentially new ways of working, and to build a more resilient service which is better prepared for any future emergencies.

Q18: What lessons have been learnt from this period of Exceptional Delivery, that should be taken forward into the new model of probation delivery?

- **How are lessons learnt being shared with probation practitioners?**

Answer:

We have a programme of work helping us capture and share learning as we respond to COVID-19. This is a collaborative effort, pulling together learning activity taking place across HMPPS. We are reaching out to our partners and welcome and utilise feedback from scrutiny bodies and partner agencies such as UserVoice and Revolving Doors Agency.

Our approach draws together and shares the experience of staff and service users, performance data, assurance and scrutiny. We are applying a set of evidence and quality criteria to ensure learning will add value, informs planning and practice and helps us build back better on both an organisational and human level.

We are currently focusing our learning activity in the following priority areas:

- Staff and service user experiences of remote supervision and alternative models of delivery of accredited programmes.
- How remote working has been experienced by staff and how we can best support them.
- Staff and service user experiences of remote pre-sentence interviews and how this has affected proposals to Court.
- How the special payment scheme, designed to mitigate the risk of staff absence, has been experienced by staff.

We have feedback from staff and service users about their experiences in the early stages of COVID-19. This needs to be explored in greater depth, and with a broader number of staff and service users. At this stage we can provide some initial insights:

Remote supervision

- The use of technology has been crucial in delivering services and protecting the public, and staff have become adept at using it. Service users vary in their response to remote supervision.

- As time passes, some staff have concerns that the quality of supervision is deteriorating and staff understanding of the purpose of remote supervision is inconsistent. EDM audit information suggests that overall risk management has been satisfactory and resettlement needs are being met. Although doorstep visits have helped practitioners find out about home circumstances and to support those who are feeling isolated, there has been some lack of clarity about the purpose of visits.
- There have been many reports of enhanced partnership working between agencies. The recognition of everyone being 'in it together' has resulted in less bureaucratic and more flexible responses. The crisis has provided an opportunity to reflect and review partnership arrangements to learn for the future.

Remote working impact on staff

- We have commissioned work to better understand the impact of changes to probation supervision for both our staff and service users. Some of the staff who took part in the evaluation mentioned how smoothly the transition to working from home had been and felt that COVID-19 had been the catalyst for a welcome culture change in the probation service around remote working.
- However, remote working has impacted on different staff members in different ways. For some, working from home has afforded some flexibility and an improved work/life balance, particularly for those with caring responsibilities. Others have struggled emotionally and physically.
- Some staff are reporting difficulty detaching from work at home. This is particularly difficult for those completing complex risk assessments or offence focussed work when there are children/others at home. The blurred lines that now exist between personal and professional life for those working at home can be challenging to manage.
- COVID-19, and the subsequent restrictions, has impacted on individuals in different ways depending on their protected characteristics and personal circumstances. Staff may be reluctant to disclose that they are struggling to cope.
- Many staff have felt that workload pressures have increased due to the pandemic, although a large proportion felt the flexibility of remote working had helped them to accommodate this pressure.
- Staff have also reported that they are missing their peer network and the camaraderie associated with working in the office
- Staff sickness levels for non COVID-19 related illnesses in the probation service have significantly reduced during the EDM period. We do not know with certainty why this is. It may be that remote work has helped people's resilience and social distancing has reduced transmission of other infections, resulting in less sickness generally. However, if it is the case that dedicated staff are continuing to work at home when they feel unwell, we need to ensure that it does not become detrimental to their wellbeing or contribute to potential burnout.

Learning from COVID-19 will be a continuous process which drives adaptation and improvement as the organisation recovers. We embed diversity and inclusion in this activity, seeking to listen to a wide range of staff and service user voices and to understand different experiences of change and innovation.

Sharing lessons, evidence and effective practice with practitioners is part of our approach to recovery. We will support continuation of the practices introduced through the COVID-19

response period which have been beneficial to staff and service users and move away from those which have been unhelpful. As we introduce ‘smarter working’ we can build on the benefits of new ways of working including the increased use of technology to support probation practice.

Some examples of early lessons learned shared with practitioners include:

- A video summarising what the evidence tells us about how to protect the psychological health of probation staff. This has been disseminated to NPS London staff through a series of webinars and we have plans to launch this nationally in early September.
- Series of one-page or bite-sized products for managers and staff providing evidence-based tips on a variety of issues linked to better psychological health. These comprise:
 - Top evidence-based tips for managers and supervisors on how to protect the psychological health of staff
 - How to spot if someone may be struggling to maintain boundaries with their caseloads
 - How to detach from work
 - Staff well-being checklist to structure well-being calls
 - Bringing procedural justice into communications – a checklist
 - Examples of procedural justice in probation work
- Evidence summary on how to protect the psychological health of probation staff accompanied by a blog post, video and other resources, all of which are available on HMPPS MyLearning and some of which are on the COVID-19 staff well-being page.

Other

Q19: Are there any other areas relating to the Probation Reform Programme that you would like to brief the Committee on, that are not already covered by the Terms of Reference above? (If yes, please provide information)