

Press release: Justice Secretary announces new model for probation

- up to £280 million to be made available for voluntary and private sectors to deliver innovative rehabilitation services
- part of holistic reforms to cut reoffending and reduce crime

Justice Secretary David Gauke has today (16 May 2019) set out his blueprint for the future of probation – bringing all offender management under the National Probation Service (NPS) and building on existing work to bring down reoffending.

These reforms are designed to build on the successful elements of the existing system, Transforming Rehabilitation, which led to 40,000 additional offenders being supervised every year, along with the introduction of fresh ideas and innovative new rehabilitative services from private and voluntary providers.

The reforms will enhance the work of NPS, while maximising the skills of the private and voluntary sectors, and will provide up to £280 million a year for probation interventions from the private and voluntary sectors.

Under the new model, each NPS region will have a dedicated, private or voluntary sector ‘Innovation Partner’ – responsible for direct provision of unpaid work and accredited programmes. This will support NPS to identify, encourage and deliver greater innovation for vital services, including substance misuse programmes, training courses, community payback and housing support.

The new model will also give local criminal justice partners a direct role in commissioning services together with NPS.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

Delivering a stronger probation system, which commands the confidence of the courts and better protects the public, is a pillar of our reforms to focus on rehabilitation and cut reoffending.

I want a smarter justice system that reduces repeat crime by providing robust community alternatives to ineffective short prison sentences – supporting offenders to turn away from crime for good.

The model we are announcing today will harness the skills of private and voluntary providers and draw on the expertise of the NPS to boost rehabilitation, improve standards and ultimately increase public safety.

This work builds on a package of reforms being driven forward to move away from short custodial sentences, which evidence shows are often ineffective. Recent figures show offenders serving sentences of less than 12 months had a reoffending rate of nearly 65% – laying bare the need for robust community alternatives.

By having one consistent service delivering end-to-end offender management, sentencers can feel confident that alternatives to ineffective short custodial sentences will be delivered robustly. The new model will simplify this system by introducing eleven new probation regions in England and Wales, to ensure effective coordination – right from pre-sentence reports in the courts through the criminal justice system and to release into the community.

The proposed reforms will also transform the use of technology in probation, investing in a digital and data strategy that will replace existing systems and better utilise technology, data and information to inform professional judgement.

Transforming Rehabilitation showed that real partnership working between public and private sectors can drive innovation. The new model will make it easier for a range of voluntary and community organisations to get in to the market by cutting bureaucracy. A fund of £20 million a year will be set aside for particularly innovative new approaches.

Plans to bring forward legislation to implement a statutory regulatory framework that will hold probation officers to the same professional standards as doctors and lawyers, will also ensure that probation staff feel respected and empowered to deliver this important service.

It is now vital to take time to finalise these proposals, in order to get the changes right, and the Department will work closely with providers, stakeholders and staff to finalise these proposals, ready for the new model to come in to effect in Spring 2021.

Notes to editors

- The Ministry of Justice will now run a period of market and stakeholder engagement to finalise these proposals, including on how services will be tendered to providers.
- A commercial competition will launch later this year for providers to bid for to source the necessary rehabilitative services.
- Offender management in Wales will be integrated on a quicker timescale, by the end of 2019.
- Three launch events to discuss the reforms in more depth will be held week commencing 27 May in London, Cardiff and Manchester and will be open to stakeholders.