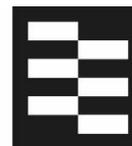


OFFICIAL



HM Prison &
Probation Service

Probation
Service



London

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17 March 2023

Dear Susan,

Re: Probation Services in London Report by the London Assembly

Thank you for sending your report on Probation Services in London based on the evidence given by several parties and individuals, including myself in June 2022. It has taken a little longer to respond than expected, please accept my apologies.

It is encouraging to read your support for reunification and partnerships. We have a shared ambition to make London safer and reduce reoffending within our communities. As one of the most diverse cities, it is essential that we do that in partnership with third sector organisations reflective of our communities. To achieve this, I am pleased to say that we work closely with MOPAC, GLA and London Councils on a strategic level to achieve this in addition to organisations like Clinks, who have supported us in reaching out to smaller third sector organisations in boroughs.

Additionally, we recognise some of the challenges identified in the report, especially on recruitment and retention of staff and although we have made some positive strides in this area of work, we welcome further collaboration to improve our staffing.

You will, no doubt, be aware that since providing evidence to the committee we have published an action plan for London that targets several of the areas that your report identified.

[London Probation Service HMIP Action Plan December 2022.pdf](#)
(publishing.service.gov.uk)

Regarding the specific recommendations given in the report, I am able to give the following detail in response:

Recruitment and Retention: (Recommendations 1, 2, 7)

Since giving evidence, we have made considerable progress in these areas. We have welcomed a considerable number of new colleagues and value the breadth of skills and experience they have brought. We recognise that integration at such scale takes time and we have put in place training plans to support individuals and continue in our efforts to embed a shared culture, where we are open to learn and seek continuous improvement in everything we do.

We recognise that shortages of probation staff in pre-release teams in prisons and in the community have had an impact on the delivery of sentence management. The Ministry of Justice has supported us in national recruitment campaigns aimed at recruiting roles across the service, with some initiatives being focused on front line practitioners including Probation Service Officers and ongoing new intakes of Professional Qualification in Probation (PQUiPs). You may have recently heard some of the campaigns on the local radio. We anticipate that the overall staffing position will improve steadily.

National resettlement teams are working closely with colleagues in London to explore ways in which the current sentence management model can be made more flexible to ensure immediate release and resettlement needs are met. Whilst it is not the role of prison officers to refer individuals to contracted probation services, there may be scope to expand the group of staff who are able to make referrals for a limited period.

Where we have pre-release teams, they will continue to support prisoners with immediate resettlement and pre-release needs, making referrals to support services in custody (prison employment leads, DWP/Universal Credit, ID Banking/opening bank accounts) and supporting community probation practitioners where possible.

Members of my immediate team and I, work very closely with MOPAC. As a member of both the London Crime Reduction Board (chaired by the Mayor) and London Criminal Justice Board (chaired by the deputy Mayor), I am able to assure you that they have offered Probation support in our recruitment campaigns and promote the service. This is in addition to the Local Authorities and Health Service.

I discuss Probation performance and wider issues routinely when I meet with the Deputy Mayor, Sophie Linden and I will discuss any further opportunities, MOPAC may be able to support us with.

Prison Leavers (Recommendations 8, 9, 10,11)

Prison Strategic Housing Specialists (SHS) and a Probation Homelessness Prevention Team (HPT) are now in place in the London Region. They are implementing Resettlement Panels with the London Boroughs with the aim of identifying, at the earliest stage, individuals who are likely to be released from prison without accommodation.

The London Probation service is governed by the national HMPPS policy position which currently requires probation practitioners either in the community or in prisons to complete 'Duty to Refer' referrals under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. At this time of writing, the national Duty to Refer Policy Framework is actively being reviewed, which includes recent legal clarification that the duty can in principle be outsourced, although provision for this arrangement is not yet within the remit of the current Accommodation Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS).

Female Offenders (Recommendation 4)

London Probation continues to work with regional partners MOPAC, NHS England and Lambeth Council who have co-commissioned a new Women's CRS, which went live on 1st December 2022. This is an innovative 'whole system' service, which draws together health, probation, and local authority service delivery, including service provision for 'unsentenced' women on remand. A key driver for this new partnership arrangement was to improve joined up delivery across different service pathways.

Ethnic Disparities: (Recommendations 5,6)

Diversity and Inclusion has been noted by HM Inspectorate of Probation as particular strengths in London Probation. Overall, the profile of London's probation staff is 52 per cent identifying as Black, Asian or minority ethnic. Our 'golden thread' campaign focuses on ensuring the quality and accuracy of data relating to the diversity of people on probation and supporting appropriate specialist services via commissioned contracts for those who are disproportionately represented.

London Probation was instrumental in influencing the development of the first national Probation Grants programme to provide specialist services to People on Probation from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is aligned with our strategic 'Golden Thread' campaign, which aims to enhance service delivery for minority and priority cohorts. As part of this London Probation has led strong market engagement activity with the elements of the London voluntary and community sector, including smaller and lived experience minority ethnic organisations who specialise in this specific cohort service delivery. Consequently, the London grant programme received a very healthy level of applications to provide new services to Black and other minority people on probation, however the programme is yet to complete.

An annual review of our work to support the HMPPS Race Action Plan will be presented to the Equalities Board by April 2023. Additionally, I am pleased to say that the profile of London's management and leadership teams demonstrates good representation of the communities they serve,

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector: (Recommendations 12, 13)

London Probation has engaged with a range of regional partners and staff to understand the needs of people on probation and to identify gaps in service delivery across London, this includes via local Community Safety Partnerships. We continue to refine our approach and welcome the contribution of regional and borough-based partners. The Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund budget has yet to be finalised beyond the current financial year and therefore the extent of future grant-based opportunities is yet unknown.

London has an extensive network of VCSE providers who offer service delivery to people on probation and the wider criminal justice system. There are due diligence and data sharing issues linked with the 'promotion' of VCSE providers via an HMPPS platform, for example, completion of Data Protection Impact Assessments and development data sharing agreements to support referral pathways. London will continue to work with Clinks who provide us a gateway to third sector organisations.

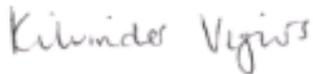
Pre-Sentencing Reports (PSRs) (Recommendation 3)

We are working in partnership with all Criminal Justice agencies, through the London Criminal Justice Board, to focus on the reduction of backlogs of work in the Crown Courts. Our focus in this respect is on the reduction of adjournment times requested for the preparation of pre-sentence reports to enable improved delivery times for sentencing.

A review of our approach to PSRs is being completed by the HMPPS internal assurance function, which is independent of London Probation. The findings of this will inform our future plans to improve the quality of reports and timely performance. The HMPPS assurance team provides additional support to regions by providing audits for services delivered by Probation.

I hope that this response makes clear how seriously we take the issues identified in your report, and that work is ongoing to improve the outcomes for people on probation in London. I welcome the interest the London Assembly have shown on this important public service, and I look forward to working together to make London safer

Yours sincerely



Kilvinder Vigurs
Regional Probation Director, London