

MDA No.: 1429

Title: Probation Services in London

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Police and Crime Committee meetings on 22 June 2022 and 20 July 2022 the Committee resolved that:

Authority be delegated to the Chairman, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.

- 1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chairman agreed the Committee's report *Probation Services in London*, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

2. Decision

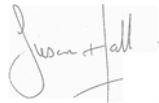
- 3.1 **That the Chairman agrees the Committee's report *Probation Services in London*, as attached at Appendix 1.**

Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Printed Name: Susan Hall AM, Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee

Date: 19/01/2023

3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chairman, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members and Deputy Chairs, under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the letter and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the letter to the Mayor will be formally noted at the Police and Crime Committee's next appropriate meeting.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): L. Harvey

Printed Name: Lauren Harvey, Senior Committee Officer

Date: 17/01/2023

Telephone Number: 07729 625571

Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.

Signature (Finance):

Printed Name:

Date:

Telephone Number:

Legal Implications:

The Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): 

Printed Name: Emma Strain, Monitoring Officer

Date: 17/01/2023

Telephone Number: 020 7983 6550

Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Unmesh Desai AM
- Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
- Caroline Russell AM

4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

Lead Officer / Author

Signature: J Roker


Printed Name: Janette Roker

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 17/01/20203

Telephone Number: 07511 213748

Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature: 

Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 19/01/2023

Telephone Number: 07729 108986

An aerial photograph of a city street, likely in London, with a green map overlay. The map shows a grid of streets and a central area that is slightly darker green. Several people are walking on the street, some in groups and some alone. The overall scene is busy and urban.

Probation Services in London

Police and Crime Committee

LONDONASSEMBLY

Police and Crime Committee



Susan Hall AM
(Chairman)
Conservatives



Unmesh Desai AM
(Deputy Chair)
Labour



Marina Ahmad AM
Labour



Tony Devenish AM
Conservatives



Neil Garratt AM
Conservatives



Sem Moema AM
Labour



Caroline Pidgeon MBE
AM
Liberal Democrats



Keith Prince AM
Conservatives



Caroline Russell AM
Greens



Dr Onkar Sahota AM
Labour

The London Assembly Police and Crime Committee is responsible for examining the work of the Mayor and his Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), to make sure that he is delivering on his promises to Londoners. It also investigates other issues relating to policing and crime in the capital, and routinely publishes the findings and recommendations from its investigations.

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Foreword



Susan Hall AM

Chair of the Police and Crime Committee

The London Probation Service oversees the punishment of people who have caused significant harm to others, while also helping them to rebuild their lives and contribute to society once again.

With a caseload of over 38,000 people, probation staff in London have a hugely demanding and complex job. To add to their daily pressures, they have also had to work through several years of major structural reform to probation services.

In 2015, probation services were split between the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies as part of the government’s ‘transforming rehabilitation’ reforms. The split created a fractured service, which hindered efforts to keep the public safe and let down those on probation.

To address these issues, probation services were reunified in June 2021 and the London Probation Service was established. This was accompanied again by further large-scale changes including a new leadership team, operating model and IT systems.

The London Assembly Police and Crime Committee launched an investigation to assess how probation services are working for Londoners, more than one year on from these major changes.

There is clearly a great deal of optimism about the creation of the London Probation Service and the ambitions of the new model. We heard how reunification has helped to create a simpler probation system. The new system has improved cooperation particularly between the Metropolitan Police Service and the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to manage those that pose the highest risk to the public.

However, guests warned us that a staffing crisis threatens to derail this progress. Probation staff deal with excessive caseloads, which leaves them unable to provide a basic level of service to people in the community. Similarly, recent inspections by His Majesty’s

Inspectorate of Probation found that some probation teams in London are working with less than 50 per cent of the practitioners they need.¹

I am pleased to see that His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, as part of its response to recent inspections, has worked with the London Probation Service to implement a recruitment and retention strategy.² Given the scale of the challenge, this strategy must be ambitious and backed with sufficient resource.

I would like to thank everyone who generously shared their expertise with the Committee. I hope the London Probation Service can work together with relevant agencies to address the concerns raised in this report and implement its recommendations. A properly resourced and well-run probation service is one of the most effective tools we have to reduce crime. It is therefore in all our interests that the London Probation Service succeeds.

¹ HMIP, [Regional review letter: Probation Service – London region](#), 24 November 2022

² HMPPS, [London Probation Service Action Plan](#), 5 January 2023

Executive summary

From June 2021, the newly formed London Probation Service became responsible for the delivery of probation services in London. This was part of a major programme by the government to reunify probation across England and Wales under a single Probation Service, after the decision to bring to an end the Transforming Rehabilitation model.

One year on from the creation of the London Probation Service, the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee launched an investigation to see how these reforms have impacted the delivery of services in London.

The Committee held two evidence sessions to inform the investigation; and conducted a call for evidence to allow for others in London to share their views.³ The Committee would like to thank all those who so generously shared their expertise to inform this investigation.

The Committee was impressed by the work of statutory partners to implement the major reform to probation services under challenging circumstances. It was also delighted to hear a real sense of optimism from guests that the Probation Service is on much stronger footing following reunification.

However, the London Probation Service is still in its infancy and faces many challenges over the coming months and years to make its target delivery model operational. This report sets out several key findings from the Committee's investigation. It highlights areas for further focus in order to realise the opportunities of the new model for probation:

- The London Probation Service is facing a crisis in staffing at all levels that threatens the future viability of the reunified service. Challenges to recruitment and retention are stark and will require creative solutions to address.
- Pressures on capacity mean probation staff are struggling to provide full and considered advice to courts, which limits magistrates' abilities to make appropriate and effective sentencing decisions.
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people face significant and specific challenges on probation, and the Committee is not confident that the London Probation Service is doing enough to ensure equitable treatment and outcomes for people in this cohort.
- MOPAC has taken an innovative approach to supporting women on probation, through both the delivery of its co-commissioned pan-London service for female offenders, and its blueprint for female offenders. With both programmes due to be renewed this year, further investment and improvements will be needed to realise positive outcomes from these programmes.

³ A full list of guests and respondents to the call for evidence is included in the appendix to this report.

- People are still leaving prison without access to basic amenities and services, with no clear signs that pre-release and resettlement support has improved under the reunified model. This is a major gap in the new delivery model that requires attention from both prisons and the London Probation Service.
- The barriers to accessing safe and stable accommodation are insurmountable for some people on probation. Recent investment from the government in community accommodation will reduce the number of people leaving prison and entering homelessness; but the London Probation Service and London boroughs need to do more to help people on probation find stable long-term accommodation.
- The commissioning model for the probation service is too complex and bureaucratic, which has excluded smaller and more specialist organisations from delivering services.
- MOPAC, the London Probation Service leadership and front-line probation staff do not know what community services are available and how these services can support statutory agencies to reduce reoffending. This means statutory agencies are not making the most of community specialist services that can have a real impact on reducing reoffending.

The Committee makes 13 recommendations, which are set out below.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

MOPAC should meet with the London Probation Service before the end of March 2023 to discuss how it can support a large-scale recruitment campaign for probation staff in London.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should work with the Regional Probation Director for London and regional representatives of Napo to deliver a proposal to HMPPS for the payment of either: a) market forces supplements to all people working in roles within the London Probation Service that are subject to high vacancy levels or low retention rates; or b) an uplift in London weighting for all roles within the London Probation Service.

Recommendation 3

His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service, the Magistrates Association and the London Probation Service should establish a joint mechanism to record and report on the quality of pre-sentence reports provided to sentencers in London Magistrates' Courts. This information should be used by the London Probation Service to drive improvements in the advice it provides to courts.

Recommendation 4

MOPAC should update the London Blueprint for a Whole System Approach to Women in Contact with the Criminal Justice System to include substantive commitments on how statutory agencies will work together operationally to reduce gaps between services.

Recommendation 5

MOPAC should establish a London blueprint for Black men and boys in contact with the criminal justice system, which brings together prisons, the London Probation Service and Black-led organisations to agree a set of actions to improve the support provided to Black men and boys under probation supervision.

Recommendation 6

The London Probation Service should publish an annual review of its work to support the HMPPS Race Action Plan.

Recommendation 7

Recognising the staffing crisis in probation, including the chronic shortage of resettlement staff, the London Probation Service should work with the London Prisons Group Director to

empower key workers in prisons to make referrals to contracted probation providers prior to someone's release.

Recommendation 8

The London Probation Service should work with prisons, MOPAC, local NHS providers and London Councils to establish improved referral pathways for prison leavers into community mental health services.

Recommendation 9

MOPAC should work with the London Probation Service, the London Prison Group Director and London Councils to ensure all London boroughs make it possible for people to submit housing applications from prison, rather than only after release. This should include providing people in prison with better access to computers and telephones to contact London boroughs prior to release.

Recommendation 10

MOPAC should work with the London Probation Service and London Councils to ensure all contracted providers of probation services are able to make referrals to local authorities under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Recommendation 11

MOPAC should coordinate a new joint protocol which will set out how to maximise the opportunities presented by Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) to secure long-term sustainable accommodation for people on probation. This work should involve:

- the successful CAS3 provider
- the London Probation Service
- the London Prisons Group
- London Councils
- all 32 London boroughs
- the contracted provider of accommodation services to people on probation (currently St Mungo's)
- G15 Housing Associations.

Recommendation 12

The London Probation Service should work alongside MOPAC to lead a programme of engagement with probation staff, people on probation, and voluntary and community groups, to identify gaps and needs in each London borough. This should inform how the London Probation Service allocates grant funding through the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund, and future grant-making decisions.

Recommendation 13

MOPAC and the London Probation Service should conduct a review of local voluntary and community sector services in London that work with people on probation. This joint mapping exercise should result in a London Services for People on Probation database. The London Probation Service should host and maintain this database, and make it available to all probation staff via its intranet.

Reunification one year on: successes, challenges and opportunities

Reunification has placed probation services on a stronger footing

From 2013, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) implemented a major reform of probation services in England and Wales known as ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’. Under these reforms, the former probation service was split into 12 National Probation Service (NPS) areas responsible for managing more serious offenders in the community, and 21 privately operated Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) responsible for the majority of lower-risk offenders. Contracts awarded to CRCs were initially intended to run until 2022.⁴

This model proved to be deeply flawed. There were serious concerns over the performance of probation services in many areas, including London,⁵ and several CRCs were impacted by administration or collapse by 2019.⁶ In response to these challenges, the UK government decided to end CRC contracts early; and to reunify probation services under a single Probation Service from June 2021. This was welcomed by the Mayor of London.⁷

A new London Probation Service was therefore established from June 2021 to deliver services across London as part of these national reforms. It is led by a regional Probation Director, who oversees a central team and the delivery of services through 17 Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) across London.⁸ The structure of the new model is set out in a target operating model.⁹

The evidence received by the Committee was overwhelmingly positive about the decision to reunify probation services, and the Committee was pleased to see such a sense of optimism. Most of those who engaged with the Committee indicated that Transforming Rehabilitation simply did not work; and that the reunified London Probation Service is a more effective model for delivering probation services in London.

⁴ MTCNovo was awarded the London CRC contract, with a projected value of over £462 million, to run from 2015 to 2022, with a possible extension to 2025. This made it the largest CRC by contract value in England and Wales.

⁵ HMIP, [An inspection of London Community Rehabilitation Company](#), August 2019; HMIP, [An inspection of London division of the National Probation Service](#), 22 May 2019

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this report to detail the structural flaws in the ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ model, but these have been extensively documented elsewhere by the [House of Commons Justice Committee](#), June 2018; [Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation](#); March 2019; and the [National Audit Office](#), March 2019.

⁷ Mayor’s Question Time, [Probation reform](#), 13 September 2018

⁸ Barking, Dagenham and Havering; Brent; Camden and Islington; Croydon; Ealing and Hillingdon; Enfield and Haringey; Greenwich and Bexley; Hackney and City; Harrow and Barnet; Kingston, Richmond and Hounslow; Lambeth; Lewisham and Bromley; Newham; Redbridge and Waltham Forest; Southwark; Tower Hamlets; and Wandsworth, Merton and Sutton.

⁹ HMPPS, [The Target Operating Model for probation services in England and Wales](#), February 2021

The Committee heard that reunification has already helped to improve cooperation between statutory agencies. Guests from the Metropolitan Police Service (the Met), MOPAC and the London Probation Service all said that reunification of probation services had simplified structures and facilitated easier collaboration across statutory agencies. The Committee welcomes this development.

“It is fair to say that since the changes we have seen and continue to see significant improvement in the working relationships between the Probation Service and the [Met] ... we are starting to see that greater engagement because it is unified under one service as opposed to having two places to go.”¹⁰

Commander Nick John, Head of Criminal Justice

The Met

This collaboration helped to strengthen arrangements for the management of prolific offenders and those who present a high risk of harm to others in the community. Napo – the trade union and professional association for probation and family court staff – told the Committee that probation staff have seen the benefits of reunification on Integrated Offender Management (IOM) in London. It said that rather than working with two different probation organisations, reunification has enabled IOM to become ‘properly integrated’.¹¹ MOPAC also suggested reunification has strengthened the ability of the London Probation Service to participate in several multi-agency programmes.

“The big difference is improving the role that the London Probation Service can play in multiagency work, particularly the capacity to involve stakeholders. Post-unification we have seen that move on dramatically. I think about things like Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference; Community Safety Partnerships; IOM; a lot of the violence reduction work that we are convening at MOPAC, but also in terms of data sharing. Just having one organisation to be able to do that makes a huge difference.”¹²

Will Balakrishnan, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships

MOPAC

¹⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

The London Probation Service is still in its infancy

Despite optimism amongst guests, the reunification of probation services continues to be a major undertaking. The new model was implemented in the context of COVID-19 and London is the largest and most complex probation region in which to implement such reform. The Committee is impressed with the delivery of this programme of reform in such challenging circumstances. However, it recognises there are many challenges to delivering further aspects of the reform programme.

The Committee heard that embedding former CRC employees into the new probation service has been challenging. The London Probation Service suggested that it has taken former CRC employees six to seven months to get up to speed with new IT systems.¹³ Napo and the Probation Institute – an organisation promoting best practice amongst probation practitioners – said that former staff from both the NPS and CRCs had also found it difficult to adapt to the new model, as they had previously specialised in managing either lower or higher-risk individuals, but were now expected to work with a mixed caseload.¹⁴ Katie Lomas, National Chair of Napo, said:

“Those staff were transplanted into an organisation that worked very, very differently. There is clearly going to be a period of adjustment. There are always going to be things that people need to learn, new ways of working, systems, which [...] will be new and different.”¹⁵

The London Probation Service and Napo said that embedding former CRC staff into the organisation was made significantly more difficult during COVID-19. This was because more staff worked remotely, and had less opportunity to work alongside and learn from more experienced staff in probation offices.¹⁶ Napo had been told by members that the standard of learning and development – which could help staff adapt to new roles and ways of working – is poor. Katie Lomas said:

“The feedback we have had from members about their learning is that it has been quite poor, ‘boring’ has been used quite a lot, frustrating, and not giving them what they need, the tools that they need to do their work.”¹⁷

Voluntary organisations told the Committee that they had also observed probation staff struggling to adapt to the new model. Organisations suggested there was still a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities under the new model. Switchback – a charity providing mentoring to young prison-leavers in London – said this continued period of adjustment has meant several more aspirational aspects of the operational model are yet to be implemented in London.

¹³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022; Probation Institute, [written evidence](#), July 2022

¹⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

“When we saw that model, the operational model, we were really hopeful about key working and motivational interviewing and training for probation officers. But I do not think that has been realised yet.”¹⁸

**Monique Williams, Head of Delivery
Switchback**

The London Probation Service told the Committee that it recognised the issues highlighted by guests and expected these challenges to be picked up by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) in its first inspection reports.¹⁹ The Committee is confident that the leadership of the London Probation Service understands the scale of the work required to fully implement and embed the reformed probation model; and looks forward to tracking its progress over the coming months and years.

Members of the Police and Crime Committee commit to follow up and review progress made in implementing the new model of probation in London, to assess the performance of the London Probation Service in reducing reoffending and review progress against the Committee’s recommendations.

A staffing crisis threatens the success of the reunified model

The London Probation Service has a chronic shortage of staff

A significant challenge facing the success of the London Probation Service is a crisis in staffing. The Probation Institute told the Committee that this was a major cause of the London Probation Service being unable to fully deliver the target operating model one year on from reunification.

“The aspirations of the target operating model 2021, for sentence planning and interventions are excellent. Delay in meeting the target operating model is attributable to staff shortages, excessive workloads and the lack of effective partnership.”²⁰

Probation Institute

At the Committee’s meeting with seven voluntary-sector guests held in June 2022, not a single guest agreed that the London Probation Service is sufficiently staffed.²¹ This was echoed across written evidence received by the Committee, with staffing shortages being

¹⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

¹⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

²⁰ Probation Institute, [written evidence](#), July 2022

²¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

described as ‘chronic’ and a ‘crisis’.²² As of August 2022, the London Probation Service confirmed it had 755 vacancies right across the organisation.²³

Vacancy role	Current outstanding posts
Receptionists – Band 1 and 2	15
Case Administrators, including LCS Band 2 185	185
Band 3 Unpaid Work Supervisors, MAPPA Administrators and Senior Administration Officers	151
Band 3 Probation Service Officers	217
Band 4 Probation Officers	141
Senior Probation Officers	46

These vacancies are coming at a cost. In April 2022 alone, the London Probation Service spent £367,628 on agency staff – more than double the agency staff spend of any other probation region.²⁴

The London Probation Service said that vacancies were attributable in part to inherited vacancies from the former CRC, and in part to an increase in the overall target staffing figure for the reunified service, following an internal review to determine the level of staff that was needed to fully deliver the target operating model.²⁵ It also said that it was conducting a major recruitment drive, which had improved the recruitment pipeline of probation officers. In a letter sent to the Committee in August 2022, the London Probation Service confirmed that it currently had over 200 trainee probation officers in the service, with another 170 due to start in April 2023.²⁶

The Committee is concerned that the London Probation Service will still face shortages in probation officers and case administrators for the foreseeable future. Advance – a charity that supports women in contact with the criminal justice system – told the Committee that it is also facing challenges in recruiting for roles, suggesting these challenges are not unique to the London Probation Service.²⁷

Staff shortages are having a significant detrimental impact on services

Evidence provided to the Committee shows that staff shortages have led to unacceptably high caseloads. Revolving Doors – a research, policy and advocacy charity focussed on people who have repeat contact with the criminal justice system – told the Committee that probation staff could be supervising as many as 92 people.²⁸ Working Chance – an employment charity supporting women with convictions – said that caseloads were often 80

²² Magistrates Association, [written evidence](#), July 2022; St Mungo’s, [written evidence](#) July 2022

²³ London Probation Service, [Letter to the Police and Crime Committee](#), 11 August 2022

²⁴ UK parliament, [Probation Service: agency workers](#), 6 June 2022

²⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

²⁶ London Probation Service, [Letter to the Police and Crime Committee](#), 11 August 2022

²⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

²⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

– 100 per probation officer.²⁹ Research published by HMIP suggests caseloads above 50 impair the quality of probation work.³⁰ The London Probation Service told the Committee that probation staff were working at 150 per cent capacity in some London PDUs, while Napo said officers were often delivering twice their usual workload.³¹

The Committee heard from several guests detailing the impacts that such high caseloads are having across probation services. Switchback said that high caseloads mean probation officers do not have the time to either gain a thorough understanding of the specific risk factors or rehabilitative needs for everyone in their caseload or build trust-based relationships.

“There are a lot of brilliant probation officers, I want to say that, but the system as it is, the pressure that is put on them, the size of their caseloads, means that they are just trying to get by, and they do not even have the time to put people forward for the things that they might need.”³²

**Monique Williams, Head of Delivery
Switchback**

Working Chance described the following unacceptable scenarios:

“One client’s probation worker left their role, and was not replaced for months. The client was anxious she would breach her licence conditions but did not have anyone to contact. Another client received a letter saying that probation would be in touch once an officer had been allocated. She never heard from them again.”³³

Revolving Doors said that probation staff were prioritising those deemed to be in ‘crisis’ due to pressures on their capacity.³⁴ The London Probation Service itself said probation officers were having to prioritise seeing people with higher levels of need:

“We are doing what is called prioritising probation at the moment, which is in essence a bit like accident and emergency triaging. We are putting resources following risk and we have to think about our high-risk cases and our complex cases [...] We are looking at innovative ways of doing things differently for those lower risk cases”.³⁵

Staff shortages, and the resultant high caseloads, threaten the success of the new probation model and contribute to challenges at all stages of the probation service. The London Probation Service’s Reducing Reoffending Plan 2022-25 makes only a limited commitment to “develop our approach to recruitment to enable us to recruit through online testing,

²⁹ Working Chance, [written evidence](#), July 2022

³⁰ HMIP, [Caseloads, workloads and staffing levels in probation services](#), March 2021

³¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

³² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

³³ Working Chance, [written evidence](#), July 2022

³⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

³⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

candidate engagement at the earliest opportunity, shorter application forms and candidate webinars”.³⁶

This is an urgent crisis that requires a much bigger response, similar to resource that was fed into the Police Uplift Programme which was praised last year by the National Audit Office.³⁷ MOPAC has significant convening powers in this area to bring together relevant services and representatives to help make the case for both a large-scale recruitment campaign and action to address retention challenges in London.

Recommendation 1: MOPAC should meet with the London Probation Service before the end of March 2023 to discuss how it can support a large-scale recruitment campaign for probation staff in London.

Retention of staff is difficult

In addition to struggling to recruit for vacancies, the London Probation Service has the highest leaving rate of probation officers (13 per cent) in the country.³⁸ Both Napo and the London Probation Service suggested that low salaries for front-line probation roles was hindering retention, as people could earn more in other public sector roles.³⁹ This is particularly true in London where operational staff may also be attracted to central roles at the MoJ or His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). Guests also told the Committee that the cost-of-living crisis has compounded these pressures.

“The retention is a lot harder – I cannot deny that – because it is London and there are more opportunities. We have trained people who have gone off to be police officers and we have trained people who have gone off to work in the MoJ or our different departments, so that is a tough one. It becomes a vicious circle. If we get those 600 people in situ, the work will get easier because everybody’s workloads will be distributed fairly, but it is trying to hold people.”⁴⁰

**Kilvinder Vigurs, Regional Director for London
London Probation Service**

Napo told the Committee that probation staff have had only one cost-of-living pay rise in 12 years, in the context of extensive cuts to the criminal justice system.⁴¹ Napo is currently negotiating a pay settlement for 2022-23.

Both the Magistrates Association – a national charity that acts as an independent voice of the magistracy – and Napo also suggested that a regional pay settlement for London would

³⁶ HMPPS, [Reducing reoffending plan](#), 28 July 2022

³⁷ NAO, [Police uplift programme](#), March 2022

³⁸ HMPPS, [Workforce quarterly: September 2022](#), February 2022

³⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁴⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁴¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

be needed to address recruitment and retention challenges.⁴² This could be delivered either through an uplift to London weighting, or by introducing an additional market forces supplement payment for all positions that the London Probation Service is struggling to fill. Market forces supplements can be applied where probation services have otherwise been unable to recruit or retain suitably qualified or experienced employees at the normal salary for a specific post. The Committee believes there is a clear justification, on these terms, for an additional payment to help fill vacancies and retain staff.

Recommendation 2: The Mayor should work with the Regional Probation Director for London and regional representatives of Napo to deliver a proposal to HMPPS for the payment of either: a) market forces supplements to all people working in roles within the London Probation Service that are subject to high vacancy levels or low retention rates; or b) an uplift in London weighting for all roles within the London Probation Service.

⁴² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022; Magistrates Association, written evidence, July 2022

The delivery of probation services in London

Magistrates are not being provided with the advice they need to make appropriate sentencing decisions

The London Probation Service works in all 27 criminal courts across the capital. Probation staff lead on producing pre-sentence reports (PSRs), which provide assessments of risk and any underlying factors that have contributed to a person's offending. PSRs should support magistrates to understand the range of sentencing options and community-based interventions that can be delivered as part of a sentence.

The number of PSRs recorded in magistrates' courts nationally fell by more than half between 2009 and 2019 – from 156,659 to 75,900.⁴³ In its Reducing Reoffending Plan published in 2021, the London Probation Service committed to 'increase the quality and quantity of PSRs, ensuring that we are effectively targeting priority groups and facilitating improved sentence management plans'. Its revised 2022-25 plan makes a broader commitment 'to prepare additional court reports to reduce the use of custody where appropriate'.⁴⁴

The Committee heard that there has not been an improvement in the quality of advice provided to magistrates by probation staff since reunification. The Magistrates Association indicated that there is a perception amongst magistrates that the London Probation Service has deprioritised its court work in the context of its staffing crisis.⁴⁵ This has led to situations where no probation staff are available in court on a particular day, and PSRs are not being delivered. For example, a representative from the Magistrates Association told the Committee:

"I have sat in an all-day sentencing court twice in the last two weeks. There were a significant number – maybe a quarter – of non-reports – not because the defendant hadn't turned up, but because either there had been no probation officer to see them, or no appointment had been made in the first place because there were no staff available to do the report."⁴⁶

Even when advice is provided to magistrates, guests suggested it is rarely in the form of a full written report and is often missing crucial information that can help magistrates to make effective and appropriate sentencing decisions. The Magistrates Association provided evidence from a magistrate in Westminster who said that there were instances where probation staff had 'failed to analyse the sentencing guidelines correctly, and had suggested

⁴³ MoJ, [A Smarter Approach to Sentencing](#), 16 September 2020

⁴⁴ HMPPS, [Reducing reoffending plan](#), 28 July 2022

⁴⁵ Magistrates Association, [written evidence](#), July 2022

⁴⁶ Magistrates Association, [written evidence](#), July 2022

inappropriate community orders'.⁴⁷ Voluntary-sector guests, including Women in Prison – a charity that supports women in contact with the criminal justice system – and Revolving Doors, also expressed concern that magistrates are not sufficiently supported by probation staff.

"I think magistrates are not supported enough in their role to carry out, to have that full information about everything that is going on for an individual... I would say the system and the PSRs are really failing magistrates to do what they want to do, which is to get people into support."⁴⁸

**Dr Philip Mullen, Research Manager
Revolving Doors**

Voluntary organisations told the Committee that poor advice provided to magistrates can disproportionately impact certain cohorts of people who may be more likely to have mitigating factors that have impacted their offending behaviour, or that require a tailored sentencing response. Organisations such as Advance, Women in Prison, Revolving Doors and Action for Race Equality – a charity delivering several projects to support young Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in London – suggested that women, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, and young people, were particularly disadvantaged by the absence of full written PSRs.⁴⁹

A national pilot was rolled out in May 2021 to test an alternative delivery model for PSRs, with a particular focus on increasing the delivery and quality of PSRs for: women; adults aged between 18 and 24; and people deemed to be at risk of custody. Magistrates' courts in Bow, Bexley, Bromley, Croydon and Willesden participated. According to the original timeline, a full evaluation of the pilot should currently be under way before decisions are made to roll out the alternative delivery model more widely.⁵⁰ Both Revolving Doors and Action for Race Equality welcomed the pilots and the London Probation Service said it hoped to see learning from these pilots rolled out across London.⁵¹

Recommendation 3: His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service, the Magistrates Association and the London Probation Service should establish a joint mechanism to record and report on the quality of pre-sentence reports provided to sentencers in London Magistrates' Courts. This information should be used by the London Probation Service to drive improvements in the advice it provides to courts.

⁴⁷ Magistrates Association, [written evidence](#), July 2022

⁴⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁴⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁵⁰ MoJ, [Pre-sentence report pilot in 15 magistrates' courts](#), 19 May 2021

⁵¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

There are opportunities to achieve better outcomes for women on probation

London has taken an innovative approach to how it structures and delivers services to women on probation. MOPAC has funded services for women in contact with the criminal justice system since 2018. Since June 2021, these have been co-commissioned with the MoJ as the pan-London service for female offenders, delivered by a consortium of organisations led by Women in Prison and Advance.

The model provides a holistic and specialist support package for women on probation, rather than expecting each different service provider to adapt their services for women. A similar model has now been adopted nationally by the Probation Service, which has commissioned specific ‘women’s lots’ in each probation area across England and Wales. Advance suggested that London pre-empted this national move, and MOPAC told the Committee that it is ‘really proud’ of the model.⁵²

While Advance and Women in Prison praised the model, they told the Committee that contracts tend to prioritise key performance indicators over longer term outcomes. This effectively incentivises providers to target those who are the easiest to support, rather than those that are hardest to engage.⁵³

“It is really important that in London in particular we focus on what works and not what the national contract seems to focus on, which is easy things to measure, rather than the outcomes that we are all seeking, which is to help people to rebuild their lives and to stop reoffending.”⁵⁴

**Kate Paradine, Chief Executive Officer
Women in Prison**

Advance said that such ‘short-termism’ does not allow providers to address trauma.⁵⁵ It said that contracted providers are expected to first meet a set of standard needs (i.e. employability, accommodation, finance and debt) but are not expected to provide support that addresses trauma or experiences of gender-based violence. Advance told the Committee that services for women needed to be designed with an acknowledgement of the necessity of work to address trauma and experiences of gender-based violence:

“The system is not designed to meet the primary need of what drives women’s behaviours and women’s circumstances, which is their experience of violence and abuse because of their gender and there is a massive gap in that.”⁵⁶

⁵² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁵³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁵⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁵⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁵⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

Advance said there have been very positive models of probation staff providing specialist support to women on probation, which was then reinforced by voluntary-sector partners through effective partnership working.⁵⁷ However, these models were negatively impacted by the reunification of services.

“We had probation practitioners who were very dedicated to women’s caseloads and understood and were specialists. That specialism has disappeared, and it is difficult to be found.”⁵⁸

Niki Scordi, Chief Executive Officer

Advance

In addition to the pan-London service, MOPAC has also led the implementation of the Blueprint for a Whole System Approach to Women in Contact with the criminal justice system, which was published in July 2019.⁵⁹ In its Police and Crime Plan 2022-25, MOPAC recommitted to continuing to work with the Met and the London Probation Service, alongside several statutory and voluntary agencies, to deliver the blueprint.⁶⁰ Advance and Women in Prison agreed with MOPAC that the women’s blueprint is extremely positive and should provide a model for other areas to adopt across the country. Advance described it as ‘a real beacon for the way that a system should come together’ and praised MOPAC for its ‘innovative’ approach.⁶¹

To make the blueprint most effective, guests agreed that MOPAC needs to move beyond building strategic relationships, to helping to establish more substantive joined-up working at the operational level between partner agencies to reduce gaps in the system. This may require MOPAC and partner agencies to allocate further resource to the blueprint.

“The challenge is now not only bringing those local authorities, the NHS, the housing teams, the GLA and so on to the table; it is about making them work, all of us joining up and working together in a substantive way.”⁶²

Niki Scordi, Chief Executive Officer

Advance

Recommendation 4: MOPAC should update the London Blueprint for a Whole System Approach to Women in Contact with the Criminal Justice System to include substantive commitments on how statutory agencies will work together operationally to reduce gaps between services.

⁵⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁵⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁵⁹ GLA, [Deputy Mayor sets out plan to reduce female offending](#), 17 July 2019

⁶⁰ MOPAC, [Police and Crime Plan 2022-25](#), 24 March 2022

⁶¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁶² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

More needs to be done to ensure equitable treatment and outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people on probation

Recent reporting asserts that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people have faced disproportionate experiences and outcomes at all stages of the criminal justice system, including probation.⁶³ The Committee heard from several guests that probation services are still not doing enough to ensure equitable treatment for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people on probation in London.

Action for Race Equality told the Committee that some young people in London felt that they were under continued suspicion on probation, and that criminal justice agencies expected them to fail. Maithreyi Rajeshkumar, Head of Policy, said:

“They talk about feeling that they have not really been seen to do their time; that they are continuing to be punished, continuing in their community and their interaction with Probation Service staff.”⁶⁴

A serving Senior Probation Officer who provided written evidence to the Committee said that ‘new frontline staff lack knowledge, experience and expertise in working with ethnic groups’.⁶⁵ They suggested new recruits were not representative of the people they are supporting. Action for Race Equality also said that there is little evidence that probation staff are aware of and discuss how racial discrimination impacts peoples experience of the criminal justice system.

“There are some really excellent Probation staff and we do see some really, really good practice, but that is often individual Probation staff who really understand the issues. That probably leads on to us needing much, much better, effective anti-racist training for Probation staff, not just understanding cultural competency and specific issues but really understanding what drives discrimination and how this impacts on groups as well.”⁶⁶

Maithreyi Rajeshkumar, Head of Policy
Action for Race Equality

Women in Prison suggested to the Committee that the London Blueprint for Women should be replicated for Black men and boys who are drawn into the criminal justice system, to take a whole-system look at how to prevent Black men and boys coming into contact with the criminal justice system.⁶⁷ This should be action-focused and be delivered in partnership with Black-led organisations.

⁶³ David Lammy, [Lammy review: final report](#), 8 September 2017

⁶⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁶⁵ Anonymised, [written evidence](#), July 2022

⁶⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁶⁷ Women in Prison, [written evidence](#), July 2022

Recommendation 5: MOPAC should establish a London blueprint for Black men and boys in contact with the criminal justice system, which brings together prisons, the London Probation Service and Black-led organisations to agree a set of actions to improve the support provided to Black men and boys under probation supervision.

Napo said that ‘leadership on issues around race has been lacking’ and that ‘there are things we need to improve if we are to offer that specific, specialised service’.⁶⁸ However, it suggested that positive changes had been enacted and highlighted ‘a renewed focus on race and on the experiences of both staff and people on probation of the system.’ Napo also said that it supports the ‘ambitious’ HMPPS Race Action Plan⁶⁹ and that it has been working to raise awareness amongst probation staff on issues related to race through roadshows with their members across England and Wales.

The Committee was encouraged to hear that 11 out of 18 Heads of Service at the London Probation Service are from Black or Asian communities; over 50 per cent of staff are from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds; and over 30 per cent of middle management are from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic populations.⁷⁰ The London Probation Service said that it has also commissioned Equality Works to work with the leadership and management teams on cultural competence, and have also had a business case approved from HMPPS for funding for an equalities team.

Recommendation 6: The London Probation Service should publish an annual review of its work to support the HMPPS Race Action Plan.

⁶⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁶⁹ HMPPS, [Race Equality in Probation Action Plan](#), May 2021

⁷⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

Supporting people on release from prison

Not enough is being done to provide a steady base for people leaving prison

Resettlement services are not functioning properly

Most voluntary-sector guests told the Committee that there had been no improvement in the pre-release and resettlement support offered to people leaving prison post-reunification, and some indicated that the situation has been made worse.⁷¹ Women in Prison said that voluntary-sector organisations had raised concerns prior to reunification that the new model for probation services lacked clarity on how prisons and probation would coordinate support to people leaving prison.⁷² It said these concerns have been borne out.

“With all these changes, prisons were left out. The interface between the Probation Service and prisons was really overlooked.”⁷³

**Dr Kate Paradine, Chief Executive Officer
Women in Prison**

Switchback said that prison staff seemed unsure of their roles and responsibilities in respect of resettlement post-reunification.⁷⁴ It said people are leaving prison without very basic documents to support their resettlement, a view also confirmed by St Mungo’s – the contracted provider of housing support for people on probation.⁷⁵

“People are not being provided with what they need to start off their move into the community on the right foot. They do not have access to identification (ID), bank accounts, housing, all of that stuff is not sorted pre-release. Therefore, they are coming out into chaos and disorganisation and the likelihood of them getting sucked back into their previous lifestyles is high.”⁷⁶

**Monique Williams, Head of Delivery
Switchback**

⁷¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁷² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁷³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁷⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁷⁵ St Mungo’s, [written evidence](#), August 2022

⁷⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

With statutory agencies struggling to deliver effective resettlement services, charities can play a vital role in supporting people leaving prison. However, Catch22 – the contracted provider of services related to personal wellbeing, finance benefit and debt, and dependency and recovery, for people on probation in London – told the Committee that continued restrictions in prisons, designed to control the spread of COVID-19, has severely limited the ability of charities to access people in prison.⁷⁷ It said that it has had to push back on referrals as it cannot arrange to meet people in prison in the run-up to release.

The London Probation Service recognised some of these challenges and said it had lost ‘a lot of the resettlement staff on unification’ which had led to a ‘huge gap in our resources’ to support pre-release work.⁷⁸ It said that it was working on several programmes to improve release processes for people from prison, including working to make sure people have ID before they leave prison. The London Probation Service said reunification would enable services to come together to resolve these issues.

MOPAC said that it is using its convening powers to bring agencies around the table to better support prison leavers, for example through the London Crime Reduction Board and the London Criminal Justice Board.⁷⁹ MOPAC is also working with prisons and probation services to support the continuation of the prison Pathfinder programme, which provides interventions designed to prevent people leaving prison from committing further violent offences. MOPAC also said it is creating a new role that will specifically be tasked with helping to forge better links between agencies for people being released from prison.

Recommendation 7: Recognising the staffing crisis in probation, including the chronic shortage of resettlement staff, the London Probation Service should work with the London Prisons Group Director to empower key workers in prisons to make referrals to contracted probation providers prior to someone’s release.

Women face specific challenges leaving prison

In July 2018, the Committee published ‘A long way from home’, following an investigation into women in the criminal justice system.⁸⁰ The investigation found that crimes typically committed by women are ‘low-level’,⁸¹ and that the use of short prison sentences in response to such crimes can be counterproductive to preventing reoffending. It was disappointing, therefore, for the Committee to hear from Advance and Women in Prison that women are still being sent to prison to serve short prison sentences, with damaging impacts.⁸²

⁷⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁷⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁷⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁸⁰ London Assembly, [A long way from home](#), 24 July 2018

⁸¹ The Committee defined ‘low-level’ offences to include criminal damage, theft, common assault and TV licence evasion.

⁸² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

“Women go into prison for very short periods of time for very low-level offences, much more so than men do. Therefore, there is a much harsher punishment to women and prison is punishment. It is disruptive to their life. It is disruptive to their children. Not only do they lose their flat, but they then lose their children.”⁸³

Niki Scordi, Chief Executive Officer

Advance

Both organisations also said that women are still leaving prison without basic provisions in place. Women in Prison, Advance and London Prisons Mission – an organisation working to support multi-faith Prison Chaplaincy teams – highlighted specific challenges at HMP Bronzefield, where 90 per cent of women residents are expected to return to London post-release.⁸⁴ They pointed to a recent report by HMIP which criticised the resettlement support provided to women.⁸⁵ Dr Kate Paradine, Chief Executive Officer, Women in Prison, told the Committee:

“HMP Bronzefield, which is the biggest women’s prison in the country, and the one that mostly links to London, is releasing over 60 per cent of women who do not have safe and stable accommodation when they leave prison.”⁸⁶

Working Chance reported that women who have been in prison during COVID-19 are presenting with even more complex needs on release from prison but are receiving less support from overstretched probation staff.⁸⁷ In the absence of wider support, these factors can lead to some women returning to unsafe relationships or environments. Advance said that it can spend ‘months on end, sometimes years’ going from ‘borough to borough to borough’ to advocate on behalf of women who are told they are not entitled to statutory support in the community after being released from prison.⁸⁸

“Women come out of prison with no phone sometimes, no knowledge of who to contact, and really have a choice between going back to often an unsafe relationship or an unsafe environment or sleeping on the street.”⁸⁹

Niki Scordi, Chief Executive Officer

Advance

London Prisons Mission said a draft women's release protocol has been agreed in principle with the Blueprint Delivery Group; and this was endorsed by a Motion of the Assembly

⁸³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁸⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022; London Prisons Mission, [written evidence](#), July 2022

⁸⁵ HMIP, [HMP/YOI Bronzefield](#), 11 May 2022

⁸⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁸⁷ Working Chance, [written evidence](#), July 2022

⁸⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁸⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

earlier this year.⁹⁰ The London Prisons Mission told the Committee that they want to see this implemented and backed with resource from partner agencies.

Referral pathways for community-based services are still not working

Several guests – including Switchback, Action for Race Equality and Women in Prison – highlighted the lack of support provided to people on probation suffering from poor mental health.⁹¹ Guests described the lack of information passed on by prisons to the community about mental health conditions and medication; how over-stretched probation staff did not have enough time to get to know individuals and thereby spot signs of mental health deterioration; and that diagnoses are not followed up with support.

“There is the disjointedness from their sentence to the community. People might be diagnosed and might be prescribed with medication and then that gets lost in the shuffle of release ... We have had guys who have been on medication in prison and we were not aware of it because it was not documented. It was not handed over to us and then they have come off their medication, which is terrible – it is so detrimental – and spiralled, which could mean that they go back to prison.”⁹²

**Monique Williams, Head of Delivery
Switchback**

Advance and Revolving Doors also highlighted to the Committee the specific challenge around people with dual diagnoses accessing treatment.⁹³ These are people with coexisting substance misuse and mental health issues, who are denied access to treatment for one until they have addressed the other. Napo said the training available to probation staff is not sufficient to enable staff to fully support people with complex needs.⁹⁴

“There is a significant issue, particularly in the revolving door group, the issue of dual diagnosis where people have a co-occurring mental health need and issues with drugs and alcohol. They can be denied access to both because they do not meet different thresholds or they say, ‘You need to address one issue before we can help you with one’. That can drive entry in the criminal justice system when those are unaddressed.”⁹⁵

**Dr Philip Mullen, Research Manager
Revolving Doors Agency**

⁹⁰ London Assembly, [Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#), 3 March 2022

⁹¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁹² London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁹³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

⁹⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁹⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

Statutory and voluntary-sector guests told the Committee that access to mental health support in the community was very limited for people on probation. The London Probation Service said it does not commission mental health services itself, and therefore relies on creating effective referral pathways into community-based care.⁹⁶ Guests suggested, however, that referral pathways from prison are not operating effectively and waiting lists for community health services are very high. In this context, there can be extremely high thresholds required for people to access services.

“There is not enough access to services for people in the community, whatever group they belong to. What we see is increasing restriction on services to those at the highest levels of need, which means that you cannot get intervention at the lower levels of need and, inevitably, that leads to escalation.”⁹⁷

**Katie Lomas, National Chair
Napó**

MOPAC and Napó both said waiting lists for community mental health services affected everybody, not just people in contact with the criminal justice system.⁹⁸ MOPAC said it was considering whether to co-commission a health advocate with the NHS, as part of the women’s probation service, to work to encourage better join-up between prison, probation and health services.

“We know there are significant mental health waiting lists for everybody in the community, regardless of whether they are offenders ... Specifically for female offending, as part of the new service we are thinking we are going to have a dedicated health advocate, who can work on both sides of the gate and that may help.”⁹⁹

**Will Balakrishnan, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships
MOPAC**

The London Probation Service itself accepted that it had not yet achieved its commitment in the Regional Reducing Reoffending Plan to simplify referral pathways for people with multiple needs. However, it suggested it had begun several workstreams that should improve processes for referrals.

⁹⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁹⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁹⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

⁹⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

“We are employing Social Health and Justice Coordinators to make sure that we do that continuity of care so if somebody is in a prison, be it a substance misuse issue or a mental health issue, that continuity of care carries on when they are in the community ... We are kind of at the start or at the middle of lots of exciting pieces of work being done and we just need to keep that momentum, keep our staff and keep people having the hope that we will get there.”¹⁰⁰

**Kilvinder Vigurs, Regional Director for London,
HMPPS**

Recommendation 8: The London Probation Service should work with prisons, MOPAC, local NHS providers and London Councils to establish improved referral pathways for prison leavers into community mental health services.

People on probation are still not able to access accommodation

Barriers to access accommodation can be insurmountable for people on probation

The Committee heard that accessing safe and stable accommodation for people on probation in London can be extremely difficult. Advance said prisons, probation and local authorities remain too disconnected to properly coordinate accommodation for people leaving prison.¹⁰¹ A senior probation officer, responding to the Committee’s written call for evidence, said sourcing accommodation for homeless people on probation was a regular challenge for probation staff:

“Housing support is non-existent and is totally dependent upon local authorities. This is not fit for purpose and presents regular headaches for frontline staff attempting to source accommodation for homeless people on probation of which there are a substantial number.”¹⁰²

The London Probation Service is not a housing provider; and according to St Mungo’s, there continues to be an ‘extreme’ lack of appropriate accommodation for people on probation across London.¹⁰³ Spark2Life – a charity supporting young people at risk of, and in contact with, the criminal justice system in London – said that people leaving prison are at the bottom of the pile when it comes to social housing, as London boroughs and housing associations are unlikely to prioritise them over others that are eligible for housing.¹⁰⁴ It said

¹⁰⁰ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹⁰¹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

¹⁰² Anonymised, [written evidence](#), July 2022

¹⁰³ St Mungo’s, [written evidence](#), July 2022

¹⁰⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

that people on probation, probation practitioners and the charities supporting them do not have the required expertise in housing law in order to push back and advocate for the rights of their clients to access housing.

“Housing works in siloes, whether that is housing associations or local authorities, and if they have an individual that comes with – and I use this generally – some baggage, they do not necessarily want to give them a flat or housing in their area, even if they were once living there, especially if they do not have a duty of care to. They will just push them back.”¹⁰⁵

**Dez Brown, Chief Executive Officer
Spark2Life**

St Mungo’s echoed this and said it had a variable experience of working with London boroughs. It also said London boroughs do not make it possible for people to submit housing applications from prison.

“Local authorities and housing providers will not assess someone for accommodation pre-release and instead ask the person to make an approach on their day of release. This causes people who have in some cases been in prison for a long time still walk out of the gate with no address to go to.”¹⁰⁶

St Mungo’s

Recommendation 9: MOPAC should work with the London Probation Service, the London Prison Group Director and London Councils to ensure all London boroughs make it possible for people to submit housing applications from prison, rather than only after release. This should include providing people in prison with better access to computers and telephones to contact London boroughs prior to release.

St Mungo’s said that under the stipulations of its contract, it is not permitted to make referrals under the Duty to Refer provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, as only probation practitioners can do so.¹⁰⁷ This has resulted in poor-quality referrals being made to London boroughs. The London Probation Service told the Committee that a subgroup of the MOPAC Pan-London Rough Sleepers Steering Group is aiming to ensure criminal justice agencies are using Duty to Refer.

¹⁰⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

¹⁰⁶ St Mungo’s, [written evidence](#), August 2022

¹⁰⁷ St Mungo’s, [written evidence](#), August 2022; The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 included a duty on specified public authorities to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to local authority homelessness/housing options teams. More information can be found [here](#).

Recommendation 10: MOPAC should work with the London Probation Service and London Councils to ensure all contracted providers of probation services are able to make referrals to local authorities under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

In the absence of a specific housing provision for prison leavers or access to social housing, some people are forced to find housing in the private rented sector. However, St Mungo's said private landlords ask for significant payments of rent and deposit upfront, which is unaffordable for people on probation.¹⁰⁸ Both St Mungo's and Revolving Doors individuals are exposed to additional risk factors in the private rented sector.

*"Landlords are asking for a year in advance as well as a deposit and incentives, meaning our service users cannot compete for available properties. What accommodation is affordable is often very poor quality or substandard, and there are high number of rogue landlords."*¹⁰⁹

St Mungo's

Services must seize the opportunity presented by new investment

St Mungo's is commissioned by the London Probation Service to provide housing support services to people on probation in London. However, in written evidence to the Committee, it set out several challenges it has faced in delivering the service, including being inundated with demand. It said it had received 'more than three times the number of referrals that had been indicated in the contract'.¹¹⁰

Even prior to working with service users, it takes significant time to process referrals and agree an action plan with the probation officer. Many of these referrals will also be ineligible, but it still takes significant resource to determine someone's eligibility for support. St Mungo's also said that it is receiving many referrals for people currently in prisons outside London, but who will be resettling into London. St Mungo's cannot always access such people prior to release, due to limited remote access routes, and would 'not be able to security-clear all our staff to access all prisons across the country anyway'.¹¹¹

The contract also stipulates that St Mungo's is only able to accept referrals from probation staff through a probation-owned system called 'refer and monitor'. It cannot accept referrals from people in prison directly or other charities working in prison. This has led to many referrals not being made until someone has left custody, which increases the likelihood of someone leaving prison without accommodation.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ St Mungo's, [written evidence](#), August 2022

¹⁰⁹ St Mungo's, [written evidence](#), August 2022

¹¹⁰ St Mungo's, [written evidence](#), August 2022

¹¹¹ St Mungo's, [written evidence](#), August 2022

¹¹² St Mungo's, [written evidence](#), August 2022

The London Probation Service said that one of the unforeseen consequences of COVID-19 was the national roll-out of Homeless Prevention Teams, which fostered effective working between probation, local authorities and the private sector to get rough sleepers off the street.¹¹³ The MoJ has since developed this into the Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3), which is currently being commissioned in London, and will provide temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and those moving on from approved premises or from the Bail Accommodation and Support Service.

St Mungo's said that CAS3 is a positive step to address the immediate accommodation needs of prison leavers. However, it stressed that CAS3 will not address the problems people face in securing longer-term accommodation.

“Without investment into support for move-on and without support for funding rent deposits, rent in advance etc, move-on from CAS3 in London will be problematic and we envisage bed blocking very quickly.”¹¹⁴

St Mungo's

Recommendation 11: MOPAC should coordinate a new joint protocol that will set out how to maximise the opportunities presented by Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) to secure long-term sustainable accommodation for people on probation. This work should involve:

- the successful CAS3 provider
- the London Probation Service
- the London Prisons Group
- London Councils
- all 32 London boroughs
- the contracted provider of accommodation services to people on probation (currently St Mungo's)
- G15 Housing Associations.

¹¹³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹¹⁴ St Mungo's, [written evidence](#), August 2022

The voluntary and community sector

The probation commissioning model is too complex

The Committee heard from several voluntary organisations that the platform used to commission services under the reunified model – the Probation Service Dynamic Framework (DF) – was extremely challenging for organisations to engage with.¹¹⁵ Organisations said that the complex commissioning model meant that smaller and more specialist organisations were shut out from bidding for services, resulting in large providers securing all the contracts. These smaller organisations are still providing valuable services, though only through alternative funding streams.

“The resources, the call on finances and administrative time to get on to the [Probation Service] Dynamic Framework was just too much for us as a small organisation ... Whether or not it is better or worse than it was before, no, I have not been close enough to that to know, but I know that it has definitely been difficult recently.”¹¹⁶

**Monique Williams, Head of Delivery
Switchback**

An independent review of the DF, commissioned in January 2021 by the then Prisons Minister, Lucy Frazer KC MP, was published in August 2021. The author of that report, Richard Oldfield, told the Committee that the DF was far too complex and bureaucratic for most voluntary and community sector organisations to be able to engage with, leading to limited competition for the contracts and a narrow list of eventual providers.¹¹⁷

“The design and processes of the DF made it extremely difficult for most of the voluntary sector. A standard contract with over 900 pages was used – a contract design intended for contracts of more than £20 million, of which in the DF there were none. The schedule of definitions alone had 71 pages.”¹¹⁸

Richard Oldfield

Richard Oldfield, Women in Prison and the Probation Institute all suggested to the Committee that the best way to simplify the commissioning of probation services, and to reduce bureaucracy, is to make greater use of grants rather than contracts.

¹¹⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

¹¹⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

¹¹⁷ Richard Oldfield, [written evidence](#), July 2022

¹¹⁸ Richard Oldfield, [written evidence](#), July 2022

“We have to bring back grants on a large scale; they work and they are trust-based. In London with the amount of provision you have around contract management, you could save so much money by trust-based grant giving to establish newer charities and create a really diverse provision that works.”¹¹⁹

**Dr Kate Paradine, Chief Executive Officer
Women in Prison**

The London Probation Service referred to work under way centrally by the MoJ to both simplify the DF¹²⁰ and increase the use of grants.¹²¹ The London Probation Service also said that resources are there, but attracting organisations on a local level, across the 32 boroughs (rather than at a pan-London level) takes time, and it can be challenging to conduct due diligence on a large number of smaller organisations.

The Committee appreciates that work is being conducted centrally within MoJ and HMPPS to address some of these concerns for future commissioning, but in the meantime, it is important that work is done to channel resources into areas that have missed out due to a clunky and bureaucratic commissioning model.

Recommendation 12: The London Probation Service should work alongside MOPAC to lead a programme of engagement with probation staff, people on probation, and voluntary and community groups, to identify gaps and needs in each London borough. This should inform how the London Probation Service allocates grant funding through the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund and future grant-making decisions.¹²²

Probation and partner agencies lack knowledge of available voluntary and community sector services

Both Working Chance and Spark2Life provided evidence to the Committee suggesting that the London Probation Service has a very limited knowledge of voluntary and community sector services available to them, outside those that are directly commissioned. Dez Brown, Chief Executive Officer, said:

“Prisons often do not know what voluntary sector services exist that can help. That is the same with the Probation Service, even in the local areas ... There needs to be some mapping of that across London, especially for specialist services.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

¹²⁰ Clinks, [Probation Service commissioning – how HMPPS is responding to voluntary sector feedback](#), 28 April 2022

¹²¹ Clinks, [What does the launch of grants for probation services mean for the voluntary sector?](#), 28 July 2022

¹²² The Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund is a pot of funding designed to help regions channel funding to additional activity that may reduce reoffending in their area, but is outside the delivery of the order of the court. It was first proposed in the [Target Operating Model for the Probation Service](#).

¹²³ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 22 June 2022

Napo, the London Probation Service and MOPAC all accepted that they did not have a good understanding of the full range of voluntary and community-sector services available across London.¹²⁴

Napo suggested that this lack of knowledge was in part due to Transforming Rehabilitation, which damaged the strength of partnerships with specialist services. It suggested these relationships would take time to rebuild. MOPAC suggested it could see the value in a mapping exercise of voluntary and community-sector organisations in London, though added that this would require significant resources to produce and maintain. Napo said that anything to help probation staff understand the range of services available to their service users would be a great help.

“In terms of the totality of service mapping, when I have done that in previous lives it has been an enormous undertaking, and keeping it up to date is an enormous undertaking. If there was a real reason to do it, it might be a useful thing to do.”¹²⁵

**Will Balakrishnan, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships
MOPAC**

“If I am a probation officer struggling to find it in my team while there are ten, 20, 30, 40, 50 other probation officers struggling to find the same information, often we are repeating the same things. We are all doing the same things to try to find the same single piece of information. Anything that can be done to improve that access for probation staff through partnership arrangements to other resources in the communities that we serve is valuable.”¹²⁶

**Katie Lomas, National Chair
Napo**

The London Probation Service has set up a community integration and contracts team and has engaged with 15 voluntary-sector organisations over the past year, including Clinks and Action for Race Equality, to better connect with and understand the offer from voluntary groups.¹²⁷ It said it would also work, through the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund, to understand what services are needed in different areas and attempt to direct additional resource into those areas.

The London Probation Service and MOPAC told the Committee that they are also looking at more co-commissioning opportunities.¹²⁸ They gave examples of successful initiatives, such as funding the Osmani Trust in Tower Hamlets; Ark Resettlement Services in Haringey; and the Irish Chaplaincy to work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

¹²⁴ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹²⁵ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹²⁶ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹²⁷ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

¹²⁸ London Assembly, [Police and Crime Committee transcript](#), 20 July 2022

While there have clearly been instances of excellent work and collaboration between the London Probation Service and voluntary organisations since reunification, the Committee is concerned that neither MOPAC nor the London Probation Service have any real idea of what community services are available and how they can support statutory agencies to reduce reoffending. This is a huge waste of potential to tap into excellent specialist services that could have a real impact on reducing reoffending.

Recommendation 13: MOPAC and the London Probation Service should conduct a review of local voluntary and community sector services in London that work with people on probation. This joint mapping exercise should result in a London Services for People on Probation database. The London Probation Service should host and maintain this database, and make it available to all probation staff via its intranet.

Appendix 1: List of evidence received by the Committee

London Assembly Police and Crime Committee – Wednesday 22 June 2022 meeting – list of guests¹²⁹

- Dez Brown, Chief Executive, Spark2Life
- Ana Caldeira, Senior Operations Manager, Catch22
- Dr Kate Paradine, Chief Executive, Women in Prison¹³⁰
- Niki Scordi, Chief Executive, Advance
- Dr Philip Mullen, Research Manager, Revolving Doors
- Monique Williams, Head of Delivery, Switchback
- Maithreyi Rajeshkumar, Head of Policy, EQUAL

London Assembly Police and Crime Committee – Wednesday 20 July 2022 meeting – list of guests¹³¹

- Kilvinder Vigurs, Regional Director for the London Probation Service, HMPPS
- Will Balakrishnan, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships, MOPAC
- Commander Nick John, Head of Criminal Justice for the Met
- Katie Lomas, National Chair, Napo¹³²

Written evidence received – responses to call for evidence

- Working Chance
- Probation Institute
- Transition to Adulthood
- London Prisons Mission
- Magistrates Association
- A senior Probation Officer working for the London Probation Service
- Richard Oldfield
- Women in Prison (additional written evidence following appearance at the Police and Crime Committee)
- St Mungo's (written responses to questions in lieu of attendance at the Police and Crime Committee meeting)

¹²⁹ Meeting information including transcript can be found [here](#).

¹³⁰ Dr Kate Paradine has since left her position at Women in Prison.

¹³¹ Meeting information including transcript can be found [here](#).

¹³² Katie Lomas has since reached the end of her term as Chair of Napo.

Other formats and languages

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Chinese

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Greek

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Hindi

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Arabic

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العنوان البريدي العادي أو عنوان البريدي
الإلكتروني أعلاه.

Gujarati

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