



Rt Hon Sadiq Khan MP
Shadow Lord Chancellor and
Shadow Secretary of State for Justice
(with responsibility for political and constitutional reform)

Rt. Hon Margaret Hodge MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA

9 October 2013

Dear Margaret,

As you are no doubt aware, the Government is proposing to privatise the Probation Service. Their plans would see the abolition of local Probation Trusts, the fragmentation of provision based on the risk level of offenders, and services commissioned directly from Whitehall on behalf of local areas. At the same time, supervision will be extended to those on sentences of under 12 months, and a payment by results model will be imposed on providers. Over 200,000 offenders, many of which have committed serious and violent crimes, will be supervised by private companies of the like of G4S and Serco. All of this will happen over very compressed timescales – Chris Grayling wants all of this in place by Autumn 2014.

I am deeply concerned at the proposals for a number of reasons. Firstly, I believe the model proposed risks public safety as it is untested and untried. No piloting has taken place and there has been no independent evaluation of any evidence. It is also likely that the same companies will be involved that have repeatedly let down the taxpayer on the Olympic security, electronic tagging, prisoner transport and, most recently, at Oakwood Prison. Chris Grayling has refused to rule out these companies from picking up contracts.

Secondly, there is no robust assessment of how much all of this will cost. The Government's impact assessment for the Offender Rehabilitation Bill states that the cost of extending supervision to over 50,000 offenders on sentences of under 12 months "will be dependent on the outcome of competition" (p2). I do not believe that it is right to ask Parliament to support such a vague spending commitment, without basis in evidence. In addition, without any piloting having taken place, there is no evidence of whether the plans will work and what the likely costs will be. All of this is made worse by the Ministry of Justice's recent poor record at commissioning private companies, most notably in the court interpreters case.

Therefore, I believe that all the ingredients are in place for these proposals to be poorly implemented, leading to the taxpayer getting poor value for money and putting community safety at risk. It is also important to note that Chris Grayling is the architect of these plans, and was also the architect of the failing Work Programme. Many of the same characteristics of the Work Programme are being imported into the plans for probation, thus increasing the chances of failure.

I believe that, as a matter of urgency, the expertise of the Public Accounts Committee should be brought to bear in investigating the Government plans for probation to make sure all processes are robust and public money is not being wasted on half-baked proposals.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course

Yours sincerely

Sadiq

Rt. Hon Sadiq Khan MP
Shadow Secretary of State for Justice