



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

Rt. Hon Sir Alan Beith MP
Chair, Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA

4 October 2013

Dear Sir Alan,

I am writing to you as Chair of the Justice Select Committee to request that you consider an urgent inquiry into the Government's plans for the future of the Probation Service.

As you are no doubt aware, the plans involve the abolition of Probation Trusts, commissioning of services direct from Whitehall, introduction of a payment by results mechanism and the expansion of provision to cover those on sentences of less than 12 months. All of this is to be achieved over a very compressed timescale, without any piloting or independent evaluation.

Fragmenting the work of our Probation Service on the basis of an individual's risk level will, I believe, introduce dangerous and artificial barriers between providers, and takes no account of how risk levels fluctuate in up to a quarter of cases. And breaking up the service goes against the grain of all that is known about what works best in supervising offenders – partnership working, sharing intelligence and consistent day-to-day case management by experienced probation staff.

According to reports in the Guardian, the Ministry of Justice's own internal risk register raises major concerns about the deliverability of the proposals. I am further alarmed that very little of what is being proposed has been subjected to Parliamentary scrutiny, with the Government instead utilising the Offender Management Act 2007 to deliver the necessary changes. I believe this is a misuse of a piece of legislation designed for very different purposes and is being done solely to avoid bringing the plans before Parliament.

Added to this, the recent spate of Ministry of Justice private sector contracts under investigation by the Serious Fraud Office, the Police and the National Audit Office calls into question the merits of handing over £800million worth of contracts to potentially the same companies, particularly given the lack of Parliamentary scrutiny.

This is a potentially toxic combination of proposals that the Government is trying to sneak through on the quiet. It will, I believe, put public safety at risk, and undermine confidence in the ability of our justice system to protect communities up and down the country. I am not arguing for the status quo – I am on record stating that much more needs to be done to reduce re-offending – but I have said that any changes need to be rooted in an evidence base, and be properly piloted and evaluated before being rolled out. The Government has instead recklessly opted for a big bang of untested, untried and potentially dangerous proposals.

I therefore believe that the Justice Select Committee, with its expertise and responsibility, is perfectly placed to undertake an urgent inquiry into what is being proposed.

Yours sincerely

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