

Criminal Justice Alliance Guest Speaker

Glenys Stacey HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Dame Glenys outlined her original background in criminal justice, in particular within courts. Having spent the last five years in education she felt as if she had returned home taking on her new position.

HMI Probation's role is to hold up a mirror to what they see and, just as in life, there's not always a happy reflection staring back, particularly when taken by surprise. The three areas of work they now focus on are setting standards, driving up improvement and holding institutions to account for their performance.

There is a troubling picture of probation at the moment. There have been seismic changes over the last year and those changes are still struggling to become embedded. The National Probation Service (NPS) is generally in a better position than Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). The NPS had not had to deal with the same level of transformation.

The quality of work in CRCs is extremely variable. There is little innovation although some seeds are beginning to be planted. There are some new delivery models, in particular the hub model. There has been initial investment in some infrastructure areas – such as IT, case management systems, telephony – that was desperately needed and previously neglected. Realistically, the old probation trusts would not have implemented these changes. However, it is taking time to get sign off from the MoJ to implement these new changes, because of data security etc. As a result progress remains slow.

Expectations of what Transforming Rehabilitation would achieve were very high; more return for the same amount of money, reduced reoffending and greater creativity and innovation. There have been some service innovations but they are few and far between, so far as we have seen. There is still a place for the tried and tested interventions that have proven to work, though these are being deployed less frequently than in the past.

When investigating an area inspectors speak to staff. Morale at the moment is very mixed; the recent changes have hurt. Jobs and values have been at risk which people find troubling. The cultural join between private organisations and probation, an area that is in many ways similar to social work, is very interesting. The leaders of CRCs, generally coming from probation, are responsible for bridging the gap between the values and expectations of the two.

Going out on investigations and seeing people who have changed their lives around, who are willing to work in low paid, sometimes menial, jobs in order to stay away from offending, is a humbling experience. It's similar seeing such a large number of extremely able professionals who are passionate about their work.

There is a need for HMI Probation to develop clarity about what expected standards in probation should be and what good looks like. Should they be based on commercial contracts, international best practice, quality assurance performance etc? Contracts at the moment are based primarily on the number of tasks completed, not on the quality of delivery. For example, contract requirements for CRCs for through the gate work

consists of creating resettlement plans and then reviewing them. But how do you judge standards on this work?

Does an inspectorate ever drive improvement? At the moment HMIP are inspecting by PCC areas as opposed to CRC area. This is a difficult decision. Should they be inspecting by CRC area, or possibly by organisation, as a few own multiple CRC contract areas.

Q&A

Q. What's the link like between judges and probation at present?

A. HMIP is carrying out a thematic report on courts, involving magistrates and district judges. What we know already from Q&I inspections is that they don't always know what's on offer locally and tend to be frustrated by rehabilitation activity requirements. The effectiveness of managers tends to determine the links between CRCs/NPS and courts.

Q. Has there been any investigation into the relationship between the NPS and victims of serious crime, something they are responsible for?

A. We haven't shone a light on this yet but it is something we should do in the future.

Q. Do you have any idea where several millions of pounds of apparent under-spend in relation to Weighted Annual Volume payments are going and should HMIP be involved in looking at this?

A. Work types are lower than predicted, varying from six to 36 per cent in different areas. Payment by results only makes up a small proportion of contract payments and as far as we can see it isn't really having an impact – not acting as enough of an incentive. Most money is coming from completing tasks. HMIP welcomes the current Probation Services review and the opportunity to revisit contractual terms.

Q. Should the MoJ be more transparent about what is expected of CRCs?

A. I'm not sure it's at the top of their agenda at the moment, given so many other priorities, but ideally they should. HMIP should play a role in filling the gap.

Q. What impact have the changes had on service users? What have they thought?

A. They aren't reporting much change so far as we can see in the inspections we've conducted so far. This is interesting because it's at odds with what the Inspectorate is seeing on the ground.

Q. The MoJ criticised the methodology used in the recent HMIP report on services for women. Was that fair?

A. The remark was in relation to our sample size. Generally, the bigger a sample size you have the better but inspection is expensive and, of course, having a sample size three times bigger than at the moment inevitably will cost three times the amount. If there are consistent, similar responses coming from the range of people interviewed by inspectors and a consistent picture from case report reviews you have to make a decision when to stop. In any event, case review outcomes are triangulated with other data and information. We will always keep our sample sizes under review.

Q. Has there been an issue with a waste of resources from lack of referrals.

A. We are trying better to understand third sector involvement and whether CRCs have engaged enough in this and are referring as many clients across as they promised they would.