



# Accounting Officer Memorandum

## Probation Workforce Programme (PWP)

The recommendation from this assessment has been endorsed by the Permanent Secretary in February 2022.

From April 2017, the government committed to making a summary of the key points from assessments available to Parliament when an Accounting Officer has conducted an assessment of a project or programme within the Government's Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

### Background and Context

In mid-2019 the Director General Probation, Wales and Youth set out their ambition for the formal professional recognition of Probation workers. This ambition included setting clear standards of practice for all staff, embedding a culture of continuous improvement backed up by world-leading learning and development.

Following initial scoping of the work on professional recognition, it became clear that more work was first needed to underpin this new system. For example, the programme wishes to do further work addressing staff shortages; improving the delivery model for learning and development; and actioning steps on pay as agreed with HMT. Whilst professional recognition is the aim, getting the basics right and bolstering the workforce is a necessary first step. These are issues which have been looked at before, however, to make lasting change the programme seeks to address these as one in a more holistic manner than has previously been the case.

PWP was formed to realise the above aims and also to respond to emerging workforce issues from the Reform Programme, including PWP's role as a critical enabler of the Target Operating Model (TOM).

The key objectives of the programme are:

- An appropriately resourced and resilient workforce
- People feel supported to do their jobs effectively
- A valued and engaged workforce
- A workforce that delivers a culturally sensitive and inclusive service
- A culture of continuous improvement
- A skilled and performing workforce



- A critical enabler of the Probation Reform Programme vision

A key workstream within the programme is the Community Justice Learning (CJL) Project. Current statutory guidance sets out that all Probation Officers must undertake the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) to qualify. This training is a blend of academic modules at Level 6, a Vocational Qualification at Level 5 and Level 4 (where appropriate) as well as learning on the job.

The training is currently delivered under contract by three universities, the contracts were originally awarded in April 2016 and are due to expire in April 2022. The abandoned 2021 procurement was based on a design and deliver model, due to commence delivery in October 2021 for four academic years. Subsequently the 2016 contracts were extended by 12 months to April 2023 to include cohorts of learners starting in January 2021 and July 2021. A short term 2021 contract has been put in place for cohorts to ensure continuity of delivery of provision in November 2021 and Mar 2022. There is no design element included and the contract has been extended by agreement (will be formalised by contract extension) to include delivery of cohorts commencing in September 2022.

A lessons learnt exercise was carried out on the failed procurement and recommendations made to improve or change the procurement/delivery of the service. Key recommendations included:

- That there should be clear boundary definitions allocated and assigned to the geographical lots, we have tried to navigate this through splitting lots in line with the 12 newly formed Probation Service regions
- Allow for plenty of mobilisation time for providers to be able to stand up courses, we are therefore giving ourselves hard deadlines to ensure that we have a contract in place for July 2022 which allows four months for providers to stand up the course before first teaching
- The need to ensure that the “Quality questions” are sufficiently specific to enable the Authority to get sufficient information and confidence on delivery – specifically around implementation plans, and staffing support for the contract
- The need to ensure that documents for bidders are clear and easy to understand – specifically the pricing schedule and the Invitation to Tender

All of these recommendations were endorsed by the PWP Board and action taken to address ahead of proceeding with the prospective procurement of the CJL contract.

## **Regularity**

There are no indications that any of the proposals would have insufficient legal or regulatory support and as such would be in compliance with your responsibilities in relation to regularity. There are clear, appropriate and enough legal powers for probation provision.

## Propriety

Approval of the preceding Probation Reform Programme business case in 2020, funding through the recent spending review and alignment to Ministerial and Government priorities demonstrate that the programme is in line with the expectations of Parliament. Its inclusion in existing governance process, both internally and externally, will support a system of robust governance and compliance with Managing Public Money. As such the proposal is compatible with your responsibilities in relation to propriety.

## Value for Money

The proposal does not seek to make cashable savings and as such has a net present cost of £305m over 10 years. The business case describes the benefits which it will deliver, primarily being the continued implementation of the target operating model, which will underpin delivery of the benefits of the wider probation reform programme of which PWP is an element.

The forecasted costs for the overall programme have reduced from the initial cost profile included in the PRP FBC in 2020 and is affordable within the current Probation allocation and expected funding across the full period of the current spending review.

The programme is currently moving forward against delivery of its scope as outlined in the business case and optimising value for money. By utilising in-house services, it allows integration with the MoJ subject-matter experts and strategies but incorporates outside specialist infrastructure and expertise when required. This enables the development of a national learning, development and recruitment model, which is best placed to meet the schemes objectives. Increased access to high quality L&D opportunities across the probation workforce will challenge the currently poor perception among staff of their L&D opportunities and should boost staff morale and upskill them.

## Feasibility

The success of the programme will be predicated on its ability to onboard staff in a timely manner whilst supporting their professional development through participation in the re-procured CJL service. Across HMPPS and the wider MoJ recruitment remains a challenge. The programme has robust plans in place to address this, proven through the successful recruitment of PQIPs throughout 2021, however external factors and changes in the job market could disrupt the programme's ability to reach the ambitious targets which it has set.

A core part of the programme's ability to incentivise recruitment and to reduce attrition will be through reforms to pay and reward for Probation employees. This involves obtaining approval from Treasury and Cabinet Office officials and Ministers as well as successful negotiation with Probation unions. Whilst these are known processes issues of pay within HMPPS are sensitive, both with staff and with HMT/CO and may cause challenges in the programme achieving its aims.

Fundamentally the programme is feasible however full realisation of the proposed strategic objectives is contingent on external market forces and internal and external governance approval.

### **Conclusion for the Accounting Officer**

I have prepared this summary to set out the key points which informed my decision. If any of these factors change materially during the remaining lifetime of this project, I will ensure a revised summary is prepared, setting out my assessment of the changes.

This summary will be published on GOV.UK. Copies will be deposited in the Library of the House of Commons and sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Dr Jo Farrar

HMPPS Chief Executive and Ministry of Justice and Second Permanent Secretary

**Accounting Officer Assessment Memorandum endorsed by Antonia Romeo Principal Accounting Officer of Ministry of Justice**

**Date 12/10/2022**