

## **Workloads and Staffing in Probation: A Briefing by Napo; Trade Union and Professional Association for Probation and Family Court Staff.**

The Probation Service has experienced serious staff shortages since the implementation of the privatisation reform programme in 2014. This has largely been due to the incorrect allocation of staff (too few in the National Probation Service and too many transferred into the private Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC). This led to the private providers making huge numbers of redundancies during their contracts. Since the welcome reunification of the service in June 2021, it has become very apparent that there is now a staffing crisis resulting in dangerously high caseloads, which in turn has led to a serious recruitment and retention issue. Despite the attempts to undertake a mass recruitment drive in the last two years, staff shortages and workloads have become critical. This briefing highlights a few key examples (but is in no way exhaustive) of the impact this is having on staff, public protection and the overall functioning of the service.

### **London:**

In one Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) alone there are approximately 650 unallocated cases. Unallocated cases are put into a reporting system where they are seen, but usually by a different officer each time and clients/service users are simply asked if they have any issues rather than any meaningful offence focused work being carried out.

On average, staff in this PDU are on 192% of the workload management tool meaning that staff are being expected to carry out double their usual workload. A newly qualified officer (NQO) was on 118% of the Workload Management Tool (WMT) just 2 days after qualifying, when NQO's should be on a protected caseload for the first year of service. Whilst the target staffing for this area has yet to be worked out, it is clear from these figures that there are significant shortages.

### **East Midlands:**

The BBC have contacted Napo to say that they have received an anonymous letter from a Probation Officer in this region stating that they were on 130% of the workload management tool. The practitioner was deeply concerned that this was unsustainable, and will lead to errors and failures in public protection. Napo is already aware of one Serious Further Offence (SFO) in this region and whilst the investigation into this is still ongoing Napo believes that staff shortages and workloads is likely to be a contributory factor with staff simply not having the time or capacity to properly assess cases and manage them appropriately. Napo is very aware that this will likely lead to individuals taking the blame for something that can be directly attributed to the wider organisational crisis affecting the service. Napo are also aware of further reports that the region has numerous teams with Probation officers and Probation Service Officers (unqualified staff) at 130% plus on the WMT.

**Staffordshire West Midlands:**

Due to the Staffs West Midlands Region re-organising staff to try and combine legacy CRC and NPS staff, a number of colleagues have been asked to express their preferences for where they would like to work.. A large number of staff expressed a desire to get out of Offender Management (holding a caseload of clients) and have tried to go into Court teams or other areas of the business where the role does not require them to hold client caseloads. This has resulted in a completely new court team in Birmingham, which now contains many staff with inexperience of this important work. In addition, a lot of staff are unhappy about where they have been allocated and have appealed adding to the issues described above.

It is now becoming normal for practitioners to have caseloads of 130-150%. There is also at least one case of a PQUiP (Trainee Officer) being allocated a caseload between these figures. There is also some evidence to suggest some colleagues have 170% against the WMT.

**Wales:**

Napo has seen evidence that staff are on over 150% on the WMT.

**Warwickshire and West Mercia:**

Staff have submitted Foreseeability Notices to managers due to excessive workloads and concerns of Health and Safety risks to staff. Caseloads fluctuate between 135% - 145% on the WMT.

**Risks:**

The Probation Service has experienced staffing and workload crisis' before. In the 2000's there were two very prominent SFO's: namely the: Sonnex case and Hanson and White. Both were subject to full reviews, and in both instances excessively high caseloads were found to be a significant factor in the failings in risk management which led to the commission of these offences and ultimately the death of their victims.

Napo is deeply concerned that we will see an increase in SFO's which is a serious public protection issue. We are also concerned that this will lead to individuals being held accountable for something that is, in our view, an organisational failing. Under such circumstances Napo will do all it can to defend our members against 'scapegoating.'

**Recruitment & Retention:**

The current Civil Service centric recruitment process for Probation Officers is flawed; especially for internal candidates who are being asked to use personality tests that take no account of an individual's experience. As such, experienced Probation Service Officers who wish to progress to qualification are finding themselves in a dead end job with minimal chance of progression. Napo is aware that there are some internal candidates who whilst being successful in the application process, have had their start date for training postponed as staff shortages mean they cannot be released from their current roles. Many staff are now leaving due to the relentless pressure they find themselves under. Some are leaving shortly after qualifying, which is a waste of talent and public funds.

### **Staff Personal Testimonies:**

“I am leaving the Service end of March after 21 years. I am passionate about what I do and there are aspects of my job that I love, but I cannot continue to look after myself in these circumstances any longer – it is detrimental to my physical health now and mental health – something that my employers pretend to care about and make a lot of noise about – whilst nothing changes on the ground. I have seen so many people leave including new qualified Staff as they just burn out rapidly and the support is not there, they cannot see it getting better.”

“Staffing is a serious concern & it’s always jam tomorrow with PQiP’s coming soon but they cannot be expected to hold the organisation together & don’t actually solve the problem. Firstly data collection & admin continue to dominate the case manager role . The duplication & lack of efficient systems is frustrating.

Also management of this Probation Service always take easy options with staffing & fail to make the tough calls about ensuring experienced & adequate staff are in the front line”

### **What Next?**

Napo is fully aware that this situation cannot be resolved overnight. However, we strongly believe that senior leaders and the Secretary of State for Justice have so far failed to fully grasp the situation or developed a short, medium or long term strategy to ensure the service can run effectively going forward. Whilst a workload management strategy is currently being developed and negotiated, this includes a formal process that will allow staff with unreasonable workloads to “miss out” certain tasks to relieve their workloads. This is a damning indictment of where we are at in this ever growing crisis. Napo is demanding a full staffing review to be carried out and for regional vacancies to be identified and published alongside detailed strategy. Probation staff have effectively run out of good will and are exhausted. The lack of a pay rise, despite their ongoing hard work has added further insult to injury. Probation needs real investment, not in gimmicks such as an expansion of electronic monitoring which has serious limitations in terms of actually reducing reoffending, but in a well-supported and decently paid workforce.

### **Questions you may wish to ask:**

- 1. Whilst HMPPS is currently going through a large recruitment drive, what steps are being taken to address the issues of retention for probation, what are the short, medium and long term plans to alleviate workload pressures for existing staff and what are the target staffing numbers for each region?**
- 2. Will the Minister direct the National Probation Service to enter into meaningful pay talks with all three probation Trade Unions and what assurances can he give to staff that he will ensure that there is a decent pay rise?**
- 3. What assurances can the Minister give that public protection and rehabilitation will not be jeopardised as a result of the workloads and staffing crisis in probation?**
- 4. Will the Minister take full responsibility for any serious further offences that occur as a result of dangerous workloads and severe staff shortages in probation and can he assure staff that they will not be blamed?**

5. What financial investment will the probation service receive to improve recruitment and retention in the service and ensure that staff feel valued?
6. Will the Minister order a full staffing review to identify how many vacancies there are and in what regions?

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**BR02-22**

**21<sup>st</sup> January 2022**