



Independent inspection of
probation and youth offending work

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Response to consultation from HM Chief Inspector of Probation

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Date: 28 July 2008
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I write in response to the invitation set out in the consultation paper CP10/08.

Preliminary:

For the purpose of this response, I am accepting the premise of the Government policy: to expand the capacity of the prison population. Elsewhere I have addressed the Justice reinvestment issue, and will not repeat it here. I also acknowledge that I am not an expert on the detail of the building and running of a prison, and I do not pretend to be such an expert.

However, during the course of my 35 years in and around the Probation Service, I have been placed in or seconded to four different prisons over a total of five years, and have worked closely with a wide range of prison staff at all levels on what we used to call 'Throughcare', now *Offender Management*. I base my views on this experience as well as on my wider knowledge of working with offenders over the years.

Key point:

My point is not to enter a fundamental objection to the 'titan' proposal, but – as seems to be my role nowadays – to put forward some notes of significant caution, which I think needs to be exercised when pursuing the proposals in detail.

- Correct aim – to accommodate prisoners closer to their home areas:
This policy aim is new compared with the past, and is very welcome.

- Efficiency savings v risk: The general principle, for a planning decision such as this, is that a large concentration offers prospective efficiency savings, but it also concentrates *risk* in one location too (both *business risks* and *risk of harm* to life)
- Minimising risk: Hence, when turning this planning decision from principle into practice, the aim must be to minimise these risks as far as possible, while still striving to achieve some of the benefits of economies of scale and of strategic location (London, Midlands, North-West).
- Not 'Titan', but cluster prisons (or similar): It is probably too late to change this now, as the term has entered widespread informal parlance; but the word 'titan' conveys a large monolithic establishment, which is the very thing we should NOT want each one to be.
- A cluster of establishments on one site: The 'negative' reason for aiming for this is that there is much international evidence that large institutions become depersonalised warehouses where 'control' becomes precarious and inmates easily become a risk to themselves and/or others – the larger the institution the greater the 'control risk'. The 'positive' reason is that there will be a need for different prisons catering for different groups of inmates with different needs in all three of the identified locations. There will therefore need to be a cluster of separate small establishments sharing a secure perimeter and perhaps some other infrastructure services.
- Separate units/prisons reduce risks, though they also reduce efficiency savings: In principle, a reduction in the target level of efficiency savings will need to be accepted in order to achieve the benefits of the separate focused establishments on each site.
- Hardest decisions when there are real options: The above points are important but theoretical principles. In reality, the point will come when there are real options to consider: real budgets and real potential locations for future prison-building. On the latter point, it is only when there are real alternative options for (say) five *prisons-on-five-sites* to weigh against five *prisons-on-one-site* that a proper cost-benefit analysis can be made for a cluster prison. Similarly, when a potential large site becomes available for London (for example), a decision has to be made about whether it meets the 'geographical' policy aim. The further it is from Charing Cross the less it meets the aim in practice – depending on the details of its accessibility, any site outside a 30-40 mile radius risks not actually delivering this policy aim.
- 'Deliverability' – horrible word, important concept: Accepting, for the purpose of this response, the prison-building policy, I endorse all of the main policy aims within the consultation paper. If achieved, I would further support their potential for improving future *offender management* – doing the right thing with the right individual in the right way at the right time. My notes of caution, as above, are about the details of *delivering those policy aims in practice*.

Andrew Bridges
 HM Chief Inspector of Probation