

HMI Probation Annual Report 2009-10 Launch Event 13 July 2010:

Speech by Crispin Blunt MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice

Introduction and the annual report

- Many thanks, Andrew. I am very pleased to accept your report of the work of HM Inspectorate of Probation in 2009-10. I want to take this opportunity to say a few words about the challenges we face to reform the criminal justice system as a whole. But first I would like to say a few words about this annual report and pay tribute to the work of the Inspectorate.
- This is the first report from your Inspectorate that I have received, and I am struck by the impressive volume and range of your inspections. I note in particular the successful start to the new longer term regular inspection programmes of youth and adult offending work; and your major contribution to joint thematic inspection work. We are very grateful to everyone in the Inspectorate for your work during the year.
- And I want to thank in particular those directly involved in inspections. I know that living out of a suitcase has some very clear disadvantages. But I hope you can balance that with the importance of the work you do.
- But I am just as grateful to everyone who supports the work of inspection in different ways. The launch of the annual report is a good time to recognise the important contribution made by everyone in the Inspectorate and I am glad to be able to join in this.
- There are one or two points I would like to comment on:
 - First, I welcome the principle that inspection should be proportionate and focused on key aspects of work where direct inspection makes assessments that cannot easily be made by other means. I also welcome your work assessing the effectiveness of public protection and other work in individual cases. These principles ensure that your resources are concentrated on where you can best add value – and the best use of our money is uppermost in ministers' minds at the moment.
 - Second, I am glad to see the rigorous and objective way in which you inspect adult and youth offending work. But I am also glad to see the way you aim to engage with the people whose work you inspect, in order to encourage their work to improve even more.
 - Third, I also welcome your concern to minimise the amount of extra work arising from the inspection process for the organisations you inspect. You should be proud that over 90% of the lead managers of these organisations were fully or mainly satisfied with the conduct and overall management of the inspection.

- Finally, I have noted the very thoughtful comments Andrew makes in his Foreword about the costs and benefits of imprisonment as a means of providing public protection. We will carefully consider them – and they give me the chance to say a few words about the wider criminal justice system.

The criminal justice system

- It will not surprise you to learn that I wholly endorse the Justice Secretary's vision in his first substantive speech on his return to office. In any circumstances I would be excited by the challenge of the post I hold, but am especially privileged to have the opportunity to work with such a distinguished politician – and one who clearly wants to base policy making evidence. I hope the change to evidence based policy making from policy based evidence is a positive one. I am very mindful that we have a genuine opportunity to transform our criminal justice system, and that not only do I have the chance to contribute to that change but the responsibility to effect it under Ken's empowering leadership.
- That's why I am spending as much of my time as I am able, visiting prisons, probation trusts and youth offending teams across the country. I want to hear the views of staff – the people at the sharp end who know what does and does not work; to find out more about the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis; and most importantly to listen to how they would improve the system. I have already met very good people out there, doing some outstanding work. I know the commitment and professionalism of the staff. I hope we can get that recognised and appreciated more, as well as the realisation that their success in rehabilitating offenders in their care makes all our futures more secure.
- But it is just as clear to me that in many areas the criminal justice system is failing – it's failing the people who serve in that system, it's failing the offenders managed by that system and by extension their victims and the victims of the future we are unnecessarily creating – it's failing in summary to serve the public.
- The causes and solutions to crime are not absolutes, or simple, and do not lend themselves to easy nostrums presented in a single press release or even a single speech. Success will be measured over a generation. A singular challenge for policy makers in the age of the 24 hour rolling news cycle.

The Vision

- These challenges are not new ones. Indeed they are all too familiar. But this cannot go on as at the moment. We just cannot continue to spend more on a system that does not have the faith of the public and which does not break the cycle of crime. We now have an opportunity – to think carefully and creatively how we reform the criminal justice system to more effectively protect the public, to prevent crime, rehabilitate offenders and cut re-offending. And we are going to set out in detail our proposals for

rehabilitation and sentencing reform in a Green Paper in October. And this is something we want everyone to contribute to – and especially those who work with and in the system.

The opportunity for Probation

- Here I cannot emphasise strongly enough how profound an opportunity this is for probation. This government wants to make a strategic shift from paying for inputs, marked by a top down centralised management that demands obeisance to targets around directed service provision. For probation we hold out the prospect of the freedom to be measured by outputs. I need no convincing of the economic argument for effective supervision and support of offenders delivering rehabilitation in the community. We want to provide an economic model that recognises that value.
- Today's Probation Service possesses the professional expertise on offender management and we want to release the nation's capacity, public, private and voluntary, to effect a revolution in how we provide rehabilitation of offenders. No organisations are better placed to lead this than today's Probation Trusts. I hope they seize this chance which is why I have asked the Probation Association and the Probation Chiefs Association to work urgently with my officials to help shape our green Paper proposals. I am very confident about what they can achieve.

Conclusion

- In this environment the work of the Inspectorate will become more important not less. It will be more professionally challenging because there will not be uniform standards and targets for probation. There will be a wider professional judgements required both in service provision and oversight. So the work to be done on inspecting the effectiveness of offending work carried out by you will be central and we look forward to the increasingly important role in which Her Majesty's Inspectorate will continue to play.
- I am confident about what we can achieve together, not least if we release the professional and creative capacity of all Probation practitioners.
- Andrew - I and my Ministerial colleagues thank you for this report and all of your staff for this important work you do and will continue to do.