

Giving probation a voice on criminal justice boards

The Bishop of Liverpool argues why there should be a representative from the Probation Chiefs Association on the National Criminal Justice Board, ahead of his question in the Lords. Skip related content

Probation is a key player on the local criminal justice boards throughout England and Wales. Direct representation on the National Criminal Justice Board (NCJB) would allow us to bring our operational experience to bear at a strategic national level, which surely must be of particular interest in the area of public protection.

To this end, the Probation Chiefs Association, the national professional body representing the probation leadership, is ideally placed to explain and provide feedback on how policy works on the ground.

Returning prisoners to custody when they have breached their licences, for example, is of significant strategic importance given the risk to the public. The main process is conducted at the local level. Should obstacles arise, this is likely to require action at a national level to be fixed.

Probation already has key responsibility for reducing reoffending. We lead on MAPPA (a multi agency forum for managing high risk offenders in the community) with the police, and we are both engaged in crime and disorder reduction partnerships for which probation will soon have a statutory responsibility - all the more vital that the views of the police are supplemented by those of probation.

Probation's collective local voice warrants a national hearing on the grounds that of the total caseload of offenders in the criminal justice system, the majority stay and are supervised in the community. Again, it is important that the NCJB is apprised of issues at a local level, which impact upon government policy and strategy.

Probation's role begins just after the point of arrest/at the first court appearance and ends when offenders are discharged from prison/being supervised in the community. Our unique operational perspective would be valuable in informing national strategy aimed at integrating the work of local services. It would allow us to provide key intelligence around the local authority agenda to deliver sustainable communities through local area agreements that fit within the justice agenda.

Like the Youth Justice Board (YJB), the Probation Service delivers services locally. Like the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Probation Chiefs Association (PCA) is a leadership association. The YJB and ACPO are on the National Criminal Justice Board. We are not.

Probation is indirectly represented by the National Offender Management Service. However, representatives from the centre cannot be expected to understand all aspects of local delivery mechanisms. This falls well within the operational experience and scope of probation and the PCA.