Dear Meg,

STRENGTHENING PROBATION, BUILDING CONFIDENCE – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

I am writing to inform you that we will tomorrow publish our response to the public consultation ‘Strengthening Probation, Building Confidence’ which sets out our plans for the future of probation services in England and Wales. The document will be available at:
www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-probation-building-confidence. I am enclosing an embargoed copy with this letter, which you are welcome to share on a confidential basis with your colleagues on the Public Accounts Committee.

I would like to thank you and your colleagues on the Public Accounts Committee for the comprehensive work you have undertaken on the Transforming Rehabilitation progress review. I am aware that the Committee has requested further information on the role we expect voluntary providers to play in probation, and on how our new approach takes account of the experience with Transforming Rehabilitation. With the publication of the consultation response, we are now in a position to provide this information and I expect to publish a response in the coming days. I am grateful for your patience in bearing with us during this time, as well as for the Committee’s continuing interest in and scrutiny of the delivery of probation services. Your work has made an important contribution to the future of probation and I look forward to continued engagement as our plans move forward.

As you know, the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms introduced a wider market of private and voluntary sector providers to probation delivery working alongside a newly created National Probation Service. The reforms have led to 40,000 extra offenders a year receiving support and supervision on release, and have brought in a wider range of providers to deliver probation services.

While there have been many positive changes because of these reforms, we recognise that there are real challenges in the system and appreciate the need for reform. We have tackled some of these challenges head on, by ending contracts with Community Rehabilitation Companies two years earlier than planned, and by investing an additional £22 million per year to improve ‘through-the-gate’ prison resettlement services.

The consultation set out a range of options for future delivery of probation in England and proposed separate arrangements in Wales. We received, and were grateful for, a high volume of carefully considered responses. We have listened closely to feedback from the consultation, and have continued to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. We have also reflected carefully on reports from HM Inspectorate of Probation, the National Audit Office, and others.
I am confident that the proposals set out in our consultation response will improve the probation service. Our focus is to deliver better rehabilitation, reduce reoffending and protect the public by increasing the use of effective community sentences, while continuing to leverage the innovation of the private and voluntary sectors. The reforms we will be taking forward are:

- In the future, the National Probation Service (NPS) will have responsibility for managing all offenders on a community sentence or licence following release from prison in England and Wales, and will continue to deliver those services reserved to the public sector such as advice to court;

- There will be a more clearly defined role for the voluntary and private sector in the delivery of unpaid work, accredited programmes; and resettlement and rehabilitative interventions;

- In future, there will be 11 probation areas across England and Wales. This will include the introduction of 10 new probation areas in England with existing arrangements remaining unchanged in Wales;

- In England, each of the areas will be overseen by new dedicated regional directors who will provide strategic leadership and be responsible for the overall delivery and commissioning of probation services. They, along with the NPS Director in Wales, will work closely to ensure an effective, unified approach from pre-sentence stage in court through to management in the community;

- We also intend to go further than set out in the consultation to take action to strengthening the standing of the probation workforce and will seek (when Parliamentary time allows) to implement an independent statutory register for probation professionals alongside changes to support continuous professional development;

- These arrangements will see future arrangements in England more closely mirror the arrangements on which we consulted for Wales;

- In Wales we intend to integrate offender management by the end of 2019.

These changes will allow each sector to play to its strengths, deliver more investment in skilled probation staff, and ensure stronger supervision and support for offenders to give sentencers and the public confidence in community alternatives to prison.

We will be in touch with all our key stakeholders over the coming days and weeks to ensure they are engaged in finalising our proposals, including the design of the future system, services, and on how services will be commissioned. I would be very happy to make my officials available to brief you and other interested Members of the Public Accounts Committee about this topic.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

RT HON DAVID GAUKE MP