



HM Prison &
Probation Service

Probation
Service



To: Dr Summer Alston-Smith, Clinks CEO
From: Kim Thornden-Edwards, Chief Probation Officer

Date: 20th August 2026

**Implementation of the Sentencing Act 2026 and associated changes to
probation practice taking effect from 1 October 2026**

Dear Dr Alston-Smith,

I am writing to provide an update on the next phase of changes under the Sentencing Act 2026, taking effect from 1 October 2026.

As you may be aware, on 23 July 2026 the Prime Minister announced a review of the Progression Model, which introduces new release and supervision arrangements for eligible individuals serving Standard Determinate Sentences. The initial outcome of that review was confirmed on 4 August 2026 and resulted in changes to the implementation timetable and eligibility criteria. The overall objectives of the reforms remain unchanged, with a continued focus on public protection, reducing reoffending and supporting rehabilitation.

The summary note below sets out how the Probation Service will implement the key changes arising from the Act and the associated changes to probation practice being introduced through the Our Future Probation Service (OFPS) Programme. It also highlights the principal areas which may have an impact on our third sector partners.

Should you have any questions about these changes, please contact HMPPSGrants@Justice.gov.uk and a member of the HMPPS team will be happy to assist.

Kind regards,

Kim Thornden-Edwards
Chief Probation Officer

Summary note: Implementation of the Sentencing Act 2026 and associated changes to probation practice taking effect from 1 October 2026

What is changing

On **1 October 2026**, a significant package of reforms will be implemented across the Probation Service through the combined delivery of the **Sentencing Act 2026** and the **Our Future Probation Service (OFPS) Programme**.

Together, the reforms introduce a more structured and evidence-informed approach to probation supervision and sentence management. They place greater emphasis on targeting resources according to risk and need, while maintaining public protection and reducing reoffending as the overriding priorities.

Following the ministerial review of the Progression Model, an enhanced package of support for victims has been announced. Alongside changes to eligibility and release arrangements for some offence cohorts, the Government has committed to strengthening how victims are kept informed and supported throughout implementation. This includes a new national helpline, improved victim contact arrangements, additional support for affected victims and enhanced communication about release decisions and licence conditions. VCSE organisations that support victims may wish to engage with local probation, Victim Liaison Units and victim services colleagues as implementation progresses to ensure victims continue to receive timely information and appropriate support.

How this is relevant to third sector partners

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations play a critical role in supporting rehabilitation, reducing reoffending and addressing the complex needs of people in contact with probation. VCSE organisations often provide trusted relationships, specialist expertise and local knowledge that help engage individuals who may not fully engage with statutory services.

While these reforms primarily change how probation supervises and manages cases, several of the changes have implications for how and when individuals engage with support services. VCSE-delivered services and interventions remain an important part of the rehabilitative offer and continue to play an important role in supporting positive outcomes for people in contact with probation and protecting the public.

Key implications include:

- Greater emphasis on early engagement, particularly following release from custody and at the start of supervision for Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders.
- Changes to referral patterns, including earlier referrals and potentially shorter delivery windows for some interventions and services.
- Increased importance of sharing information relating to engagement, attendance, progress, safeguarding concerns and emerging risks.
- Greater emphasis on evidencing outcomes and demonstrating progress against identified needs.

- Continued reliance on partnership working to support rehabilitation, public protection and successful resettlement.

Overall, the reforms reinforce the important role that VCSE organisations play in supporting people to make positive and sustained changes and reducing reoffending.

Implementation of the Sentencing Act 2026

Progression Model

The Sentencing Act introduces a new sentence structure for those serving an SDS which will apply from 1 October 2026. The model comprises three stages: custody, a supervision period in the community, and a final licence stage where all individuals remain on licence and may be recalled to custody if they cannot be safely managed in the community.

Following the ministerial review of the Progression Model, it was announced on 4 August that individuals convicted of rape and certain sexual offences against children are excluded from the revised release arrangements and will continue to follow their existing statutory release regulations. Child Sexual Exploitation offenders remain eligible for the new standard release points with enhanced supervision, unless otherwise excluded.

Under the Progression Model, eligible individuals serving a Standard Determinate Sentence will generally be released after serving one-third of their sentence, while those serving a Standard Determinate Sentence Plus (SDS+), which applies to certain more serious violent and sexual offences, will generally be released after serving one-half of their sentence. Both groups remain subject to the exclusions introduced following the ministerial review.

Home Detention Curfew (HDC) will cease as a routine policy for adults from 2 September 2026. There will be no new HDC releases from this point.

Existing SDS prisoners in custody immediately before implementation will have their release dates recalculated and, where eligible, release will be phased through a series of implementation tranches between October 2026 and June 2027. The first tranche will take place on 1 October 2026 and the second on 13 October 2026.

The supervision stage also introduces a presumption of Electronic Monitoring on release for eligible cases, subject to specified exemptions. New restrictive licence conditions may also be applied where they are necessary and proportionate to manage risk. Enhanced community risk management arrangements will support supervision during this period. These arrangements will generally remain in place until the point at which the individual would previously have been released under existing arrangements.

In the final licence stage, active supervision will cease for some offenders, while a defined cohort will continue to be supervised until the end of their sentence. Individuals excluded from the revised Progression Model release arrangements, including those convicted of rape and certain sexual offences against children, will not be eligible for final third suspension of supervision. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) offenders, Child Sexual Exploitation offenders

and those assessed by probation as most likely to reoffend will be supervised until the end of their sentence.

Where individuals are not actively supervised, probation retains the ability to respond to emerging risk, including through reactive supervision, enforcement action, or a return to active management where behaviour or intelligence from partners indicates a material increase in risk.

These changes represent a significant shift in release and licence arrangements for SDS prisoners, with a greater emphasis on community-based supervision, Electronic Monitoring and risk management following release.

Relevance to third sector partners

The Progression Model is likely to increase the importance of early engagement with support services, particularly following release from custody. Changes to release arrangements, the removal of HDC for most adults and the phased implementation of recalculated SDS release dates may affect the timing of referrals and access to community-based support services. VCSE organisations may see referrals earlier in the sentence and may need to deliver support within more concentrated timescales.

For some individuals, probation supervision may cease during the final third of the licence period. While licence conditions remain in force and probation retains responsibility for public protection and licence management, individuals may increasingly rely on community-based support, voluntary engagement and services delivered by VCSE organisations. As a result, VCSE partners may play an important role in supporting ongoing rehabilitation, recovery, resettlement and wellbeing during the later stages of a sentence.

Restrictive Measures and Restriction Zones

From 1 October 2026, the Sentencing Act 2026 introduces new Restrictive Measures which courts, the Parole Board and probation practitioners can use as licence conditions or prohibited activity for Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders. These measures include Prohibition from Driving, Prohibition from Entering a Drinking Establishment and Prohibition from Attending a Public Event. These additional measures do not have to be linked to the index offence.

The Act also introduces the power for probation to set a Restriction Zone as an additional licence condition. Restriction Zones require an individual to remain within a designated area, rather than excluding them from one, for as long as is necessary and proportionate to manage risk. Restriction Zones can be applied to individuals subject to an existing licence and those released on licence from 1 October 2026. Restriction Zones may be considered where the offence is Victim Contact Scheme (VCS) eligible, and/or they have committed a serious sexual or violent offence under schedule 15 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and are subject to a custodial sentence of 12 months or more, where the Restriction Zone is considered to be necessary and proportionate to manage risk. Individuals subject to a Restriction Zone will be electronically monitored.

In addition, some cohorts will be subject to enhanced Electronic Monitoring arrangements. Individuals convicted of rape and certain sexual offences against children who are excluded from the revised release arrangements will be subject to a

presumption of Electronic Monitoring with trail monitoring for 12 months, subject to operational and legal exceptions. Child Sexual Exploitation offenders will also be subject to a presumption of Electronic Monitoring and enhanced community management arrangements.

Alongside these changes, associated amendments will be made to standard licence conditions. The wording of existing conditions has been revised to improve accessibility and support understanding by those subject to them. A new standard licence condition will also require individuals to provide passport details and seek permission before applying for a new passport. This strengthens the existing requirement to obtain prior approval before travelling overseas and supports effective licence management and compliance with licence conditions.

Relevance to third sector partners

Restrictive Measures and Restriction Zones may affect how some individuals access community-based support services. VCSE organisations may need to work closely with probation to ensure that support, mentoring, accommodation, employment, education and other rehabilitative interventions can continue to be delivered safely and effectively where restrictions are in place.

Effective communication between probation and VCSE partners will be important to ensure individuals can continue to access appropriate support whilst complying with any conditions or restrictions that form part of their sentence or licence.

Probation Requirement and the replacement of RAR

From 1 October 2026, the Probation Requirement will replace the Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) for new Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders. This change means that courts will no longer specify a maximum number of rehabilitation activity days. Instead, probation practitioners will determine the nature, timing and intensity of rehabilitative activity following sentence based on assessed risk, need, responsivity and progress. A Probation Requirement will apply for the duration of the Community Order or the supervision period of a Suspended Sentence Order, providing a framework within which rehabilitation activity can be tailored throughout the life of the order.

Relevance to third sector partners

The Probation Requirement supports a shift towards more personalised and outcome-focused supervision. For VCSE organisations, this creates greater emphasis on the quality and impact of support delivered, rather than activity volume alone. Information relating to engagement, progress and outcomes may play an increasingly important role in supporting probation decision-making and sentence management.

Early Termination

Early Termination was introduced earlier in 2026 and allows Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders to be concluded before sentence expiry where sentence objectives have been achieved and continued supervision is no longer considered necessary. Decisions must be supported by evidence of progress, informed by risk assessment and professional judgement, and subject to appropriate governance and oversight.

Relevance to third sector partners

Early Termination reinforces the focus on rehabilitation outcomes, progress and sustained positive change. VCSE organisations often play an important role in supporting individuals to address offending-related needs, engage with services and achieve sentence objectives. Information relating to engagement, progress and outcomes may contribute to probation's assessment of whether the objectives of a sentence have been achieved and whether continued supervision remains necessary.

Early Termination may also mean that some individuals complete their probation supervision earlier than originally anticipated. This places greater emphasis on ensuring support is purposeful, targeted and delivered at the point where it is most likely to have a positive impact, while continuing to support individuals to maintain progress beyond the end of statutory supervision.

Changes to probation practice**Supervision Packages**

To support implementation of the Sentencing Act 2026 reforms, the Probation Service is introducing a new framework for determining the level of supervision individuals receive on Community Orders, Suspended Sentence Orders with a Probation Requirement and licences. This will apply from 1 October 2026.

The introduction of Supervision Packages creates a more structured and transparent approach to determining supervision levels in the community. Unlike the current model, supervision intensity will be more explicitly aligned to assessed risk, need and likelihood of reoffending, considered to be necessary and proportionate, and supported by evidence-based assessment tools and professional judgement.

The reforms are intended to ensure finite probation resources are targeted towards those who present the highest risk of serious harm and likelihood of reoffending, while enabling a more proportionate approach to managing lower-risk individuals.

Following the ministerial review in July 2026, some cohorts, including those excluded from the new standard release points and Child Sexual Exploitation offenders will receive enhanced community management arrangements. This includes enhanced supervision and additional restrictions. These arrangements are intended to ensure that individuals presenting the greatest risk, alongside those excluded from the revised release arrangements, continue to receive the highest levels of supervision, monitoring and management.

Relevance to third sector partners

The introduction of Supervision Packages may change how frequently some individuals are in contact with probation and how support is coordinated across services. In some circumstances, VCSE organisations may play an increasingly important role in maintaining engagement, identifying unmet needs and supporting progress where probation contact is less frequent.

We recognise the significant pressures many voluntary sector organisations face and remain committed to working with partners to understand and manage the impact of these changes.

Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) Interim State and Pre-Release Arrangements

The Probation Service is introducing changes to Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) and pre-release arrangements from 1 September 2026. This is intended to strengthen transition planning between custody and the community by improving information sharing, reducing duplication and supporting continuity of risk management. This is an interim model pending the development of a longer-term custodial sentence management approach.

Relevance to third sector partners

The reforms place greater emphasis on early engagement and support following release from custody. VCSE organisations involved in accommodation, mentoring, employment, substance misuse, women's services and other rehabilitative support may see increased demand at the point of release and a greater need for timely mobilisation of services. Effective information sharing between probation and VCSE partners will remain essential in supporting safe transitions and successful resettlement.

SPARKS

SPARKS, introduced earlier this year, provides a single framework for supervision conversations designed to strengthen the quality and consistency of practitioner engagement.

Relevance to third sector partners

SPARKS supports a more structured approach to identifying needs, strengths and barriers to progress. This can help strengthen links between probation supervision and the support delivered by VCSE organisations, creating a clearer focus on outcomes and rehabilitation.