SAFER JUSTICE SECTOR CHARTER
Community represents more people employed in the privatised justice, custodial and immigration services sector than any other UK trade union. Thousands of our members are employed in the sector in prisons, secure immigration centres, young offenders institutions, secure training centres, courts and prisoner escorting and electronic monitoring services.

Our members’ work is vital to the justice system. They are uniformed in the same way as the police, fire, and armed services and they work in a situation of considerable risk, often in a potentially dangerous situation. Accordingly, promoting and protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our members is of the utmost importance.

We recognise that across the sector there are varied and complex challenges, from the increased use of psychoactive drugs in prisons to the adults with complex needs that are detained in immigration centres. Many of our members working in the sector describe facing a ‘daily struggle’, never knowing what is going to happen when they turn up to work.

Across the sector, there are growing levels of violent assaults on staff. According to the Ministry of Justice ‘Safety in Custody’ report, assaults on staff are at the highest level since 2006. When at least one officer is seriously assaulted every day, it is time for the government to wake up and take action.

The loss of experienced staff and government pressures to drive down costs, are having a direct effect on the ability of our members to keep prisoners, detainees and their colleagues safe. These issues must be urgently addressed. We want to work with the government and employers to find solutions - and that starts with improving the safety of our members.

We’ve developed a national Charter for a Safer Justice Sector which aims to establish common standards that can be adopted by both the government and companies competing for contracts. Adopting the Charter would ensure protected and safe-guarded environments for staff.

It is important to introduce our Charter into companies for the long term interest of our members and their employers alike. The Charter will enhance the wellbeing of employees, promote equality within companies and advocate improved policies - working in partnership with employers for the benefit of society.

We hope these values and the recommendations of this Charter will play a significant part in future contracting in the justice, custodial and immigration services sector, and that Community is at the forefront of that process.

We hope you’ll support the Charter, and the introduction of these principles to the justice, custodial and immigration services sector to secure a safe place to work for everyone.

Roy Rickhuss CBE
General Secretary, Community
Community wants all providers of justice, custodial and immigration services awarded through the government’s procurement process to adhere to these standards:

1. **REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE**
   Policies that significantly reduce violence against staff and provide proper support and aftercare.

2. **BETTER PAY AND RECOGNITION**
   Securing better pay for staff with recognition for those with proven service.

3. **TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT**
   Establishing a proper framework for consistent and effective training for all employees.

4. **MINIMUM STANDARDS IN CONTRACTS**
   Reversing the ‘race to the bottom’ for minimum standards in contracts, including staffing levels.

Community calls on the government to enact these principles by ensuring that all new contracts adhere to the Charter and by reviewing all current contracts to ensure that they meet these minimum standards.
1. REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE

The number of assaults on staff has increased by 29% from September 2017 to September 2018, of these the number of serious assaults on staff is up 27% from September 2017. The number of serious assaults on staff rose to a huge 33% in the period of 2014-15 and represents the highest figure under current recorded practices which began in 2003.

The Ministry of Justice’s ‘Safety in Custody’ report also included data showing an overall increase in the numbers of violent and sexual assaults.

Assaults reached a record high of 33,803 incidents in the 12 months to September 2018, up 20% from the previous year. Of these, 3,949 (12%) were serious assaults, up 6% from the previous year. In the most recent quarter up to January 2019, assault incidents increased by 5% to 9,082 incidents.

Since 2012, the use of psychoactive substances in prisons and detention centres has risen dramatically, which presents staff with real challenges. Substance misuse is a serious threat to the security of individual facilities, and the health and safety of prisoners, detainees and staff. We have seen progress in securing Personal Protective Equipment for our members, along with the introduction of numerous measures to tackle the growing use of psychoactive substances in prisons and detention centres; however more action is needed to protect and assist staff.

A report by the House of Commons Justice Select Committee stated that the fall in staffing levels stemming from redundancies and increased turnover have affected safety for both officers, and prisoners and detainees. Evidence given provided a picture of deteriorating standards in terms of staffing levels, resulting in less staff contact and less surveillance.

Community wants a commitment from companies to introduce robust policies that significantly reduce acts of violence against staff. These policies should include a structured approach to aftercare.

Community wants a proactive commitment from companies in assisting the union during the prosecution of its members’ interests following any such incident.

Community calls on the government for urgent action on psychoactive substances to protect staff across the sector.

Changes to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme make it more difficult for workers in the justice and custodial sector to get the compensation they deserve when they are victims of a criminal assault in work. Community is campaigning for government to do the right thing and bring forward new laws to ensure workers are properly compensated.
2. BETTER PAY AND RECOGNITION

Research carried out with our members showed that pay and development opportunities were closely linked. A major source of frustration within the research was static pay, as experienced staff were frustrated that their length of service and the skills they had acquired were not reflected in their pay packet.

Frustration with regards to pay and recognition have been exacerbated by recent improvements to starting salaries and increments for new staff, but without any corresponding changes to more experienced staff pay or benefits. A survey conducted by the National Offender Management Service found that only 21% of staff feel that their pay adequately reflects their performance.

Community wants a commitment from the government and companies to ensure parity of pay with the public sector, which involves new roles for experienced staff, additional specialist training and salaries.

Community wants proactive solutions from companies to introduce better career paths and pay for staff in order to address some of the retention problems.

“There is no reward for service – this means that officers who started a long time ago have lost money since starting – this is unfair. You now only have to work three years to get to 25k. Older officers have had to work 15 years to get to 25k and have no further benefits.”

Prison Officer and Community member
Working in the justice, custodial and immigration services sector can be dangerous, but it shouldn’t be. These jobs, like many other uniformed jobs such as police officers or firefighters, require investment in high-quality training to ensure that lives are not put at risk.

Private contractors are required to provide training for staff as part of their contracts. However, members report that the standard of training delivered by private contractors is inconsistent and varied in quality particularly compared to the public sector.

Research from our members suggest there was a lack of additional training for long-serving staff, leading to a lack of opportunities to refresh their understanding of the role or to receive additional training in a specific area. Staff reported that they couldn’t access refresher or specialist training, mainly due to staff shortages.

Companies should deliver a top-class, consistent and continuous training model, culminating in accredited qualifications that are valid across the sector working closely with Community learning reps.

There should be investment in continuous training and staff should be given individual training plans tailored to individual needs and ambitions.

Specific in-depth training on issues such as mental health, working with sex offenders and vulnerable adults, identifying and preventing self-harm should be provided in order for staff to be more effective in their jobs.

Probation periods should be meaningful processes that properly prepare staff for the realities of working in the justice, custodial and immigration services sector. A review of probation periods would help tackle the high staff turnover within the sector.

“The prisoners are treated better than we are. They are an asset for the contractor because they get money for them. We are seen as a cost.”

Prison Officer and Community member
4. MINIMUM STANDARDS IN CONTRACTS

Resources, overcrowding, drugs and other problems all play a part in the very challenging conditions that staff in the sector face.

The prison system has been overcrowded in every year since 1994. In 2017 statistics published by the Ministry of Justice showed 68% of prisons were housing more inmates than their usable “certified normal accommodation” (CNA). Meanwhile concerns are raised that immigration detention centres are routinely understaffed, which leads to stressful working conditions, to the detriment of both staff and detainees.

Attrition continues to be a problem across the sector with reports of many staff leaving their jobs due to increased assaults on staff, long working hours or inadequate working conditions. Fluctuating staff levels, as well as low retention leads to an overall less experienced workforce. Action is needed to tackle attrition by providing better terms and conditions alongside improved training and development opportunities.

Private justice, custodial and immigration services sector employers are able to develop their own plans for recruitment and retention and this flexibility should be utilised to deliver safe staffing levels and sustainable working practices which ensure safe working environments.

Community’s members on the frontline are in a daily struggle to ensure the safety and welfare of prisoners and detainees as well as their colleagues. There should be agreed staffing levels in place during the bid process, the eradication of lone working, agreed policies relating to the shortfall of staffing levels and a consistent approach from all justice sector companies locally or nationally.

Community wants a commitment from companies to deliver an effective risk assessment for health and safety of employees, and a consistent approach to agreed policies which establish a duty of care to the health and safety of employees.

Community wants companies to recommit to engaging and consulting with Community health and safety reps when carrying out risk assessments.

“Our job roles are constantly changing depending on the detainees we’re dealing with. We have seen an increase in vulnerable detainees with mental health problems and growing levels of self-harm. We just don’t have the skills or training to deal with this. When there’s not enough staff it makes looking after detainees even more difficult. We need more staff and more support to do our jobs”

Detention Custody Officer and Community member
Want action on safety?
Get involved!

Visit our website for the latest campaign information online at www.community-tu.org/saferjusticesector or talk to your local Community reps about supporting the campaign.

Not a Community member?
Join today at www.community-tu.org/join or chat to one of our team on 0800 389 6332. Alternatively speak to your local Community rep.

We are Community.
The modern union for a changing world.

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