

Safe and Secure Communities

1. How should Labour tackle anti-social behaviour and ensure people feel safe in their homes, workplaces, and local communities?

One group of workers who do not feel safe in their workplaces are justice, custodial and immigration workers. Community has long campaigned for safety in the sector to be taken more seriously, with thousands of members across the sector with recognition with several private sector prison and custodial employers across the justice and custodial estate, including within GEOAmey, Mitie, SERCO, SODEXO, and Capita. The next Labour government should take steps to keep all our justice sector workers safe.

One key reason for a lack of safety within the UK's prisons is poor staffing levels driven by challenges with staff retention and recruitment. This issue has several causes, including low pay, low esteem and recognition attracted to the role, and the compounding effects of short staffing and safety issues.

To address these challenges the next Labour government must make changes to support staff safety.

Firstly, KPIs imposed on private justice sector providers must reflect appropriate staffing levels. This must be included in all contracts for prisons and justice settings including those which are returning to tender.

Secondly, healthcare providers within the justice estate must have increased capacity. This would help in several ways. It would relieve the pressure on prison staffing caused by requiring officers to support trips to hospitals, by allowing some medical care to take place in-house. Secondly, it would take the pressure off prison officers, who are often having to step up and support prisoners with increasingly complex needs. We note that prison may not be the right environment for some of these individuals, but it is our members in the justice estate who are managing these challenges. Clearly, this challenging workload is contributing to poor safety at work.

Thirdly, steps must be taken to ensure that staff who are assaulted at work are treated appropriately. This means acting against offenders who assault staff. We believe violence against prison officers and other justice sector staff is unacceptable. Too often, we hear that the police have failed to respond to an incident because the offender is incarcerated. The next Labour government should ensure that every assault is investigated in line with tripartite memorandums of understanding.

Fourthly, a compensation scheme should be established for justice sector workers injured during the course of their duties. Unless there is direct employer negligence, workers do not receive adequate compensation even when they have received lifechanging injuries. Schemes such as the industrial injuries disablement benefit, which support workers after workplace incidents do not fill this gap. They have restrictive thresholds, and as a consequence, they fail to adequately support many workers, including prison staff. Furthermore, sometime, incidents in the justice sector are not classed as workplace accidents leaving workers ineligible to this support.

Workers may be forced to rely on the criminal injuries compensation scheme. This provides very low levels of compensation. We call for the development of a national compensation scheme to support prison officers subject to criminal injuries. Workers need to know that should the worst happen; they will be financially supported.

2. What resources and tools do the police and enforcement agencies need to keep our streets safe and to deal with neighbourhood crime?

At Community we represent workers in the EMS (Electronic Monitoring Service). We recognise that these workers are out in the Community, ensuring that offenders are complying with the requirements of their probation.

One thing that is essential for these workers is appropriate safety equipment. We were pleased to reach agreement that EMS (electronic monitoring services staff) would be equipped with body-worn cameras.

Furthermore, these workers, along with all justice sector workers must be equipped with appropriate body armour. Our members have raised concerns that they are not receiving body armour suitable for women. One member told us how undergoing the symptoms of the menopause made it impossible to comfortably wear the body armour that she was provided with.

All enforcement agencies should be equipped with appropriate safety equipment to ensure that they can do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

4. What approach should the Labour Party take to improving justice?

It is critical that the next Labour government improve the funding of justice to prevent excessively long waiting times which do not do justice to the victims or the accused.

There must be investment in buildings such as courts. At Community we represent PECCs workers, whose job it is to bring offenders into court. We have heard concerning reports about the capacity of court cells to hold several offenders whose requirements mean they need to be kept separately. This is causing safety issues for our staff and slowing down court timetables when it means that PECCs workers cannot do their jobs properly.

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