

## Being a critical friend – in complex transformational programmes



**Astute Transformations** was approached in 2019 by the National Probation Service [NPS] England and Wales to act as the Critical Friend for the Probation Reform Programme. This multi-billion pound, end to end transformation programme covers all probation services in England and Wales with the return of management of all probation services to the NPS from Community Rehabilitation Companies. It will define how probation services are delivered into the future resulting in; lower reoffending, improved professionalisation of probation services and better access and user experience for those receiving probation support. It reverses the widely criticised Transforming Rehabilitation programme that outsourced key probation services to the private and not for profit sector in the 2010's

The Probation Reform Programme is a mega project for the MoJ incorporating huge technological, digital and people change, as well as the normal management of change disciplines. PA Consulting and KPMG provide standard consulting support in the background, reporting to the main programme board. Astute Transformations sits as a main board member on the Probation Reform Programme Board and advises on all matters related to the programme.

We were chosen by senior MoJ leaders because of our long standing and recognised expertise in the sector, and our pragmatic and personal approach to programme challenge.

Our knowledge of the Criminal Justice sector goes back to 2006 having worked in the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Crown Prosecution Service, Met Police and 5 other police forces in England and Wales. Our role is to support the SRO and Programme Director offering effective challenge, insight and bringing 'outside' experience of large, complex and high risk programmes into the thinking and deliberation of the Probation Programme Board and sub boards. Our work on other mega programmes at AWE, Rolls – Royce, MoD, Microsoft, DWP, and Kier enable us to offer guidance and challenge for the programme team and programme board.

Our top five key messages, for this and any other major, complex transformation programme are;

- Plan the work, and document what the *work* actually is, so it can be understood and you will know when it is, or isn't delivered
- Communicate – even when you don't know what the answer to the obvious questions are. Early engagement will help build a guiding coalition
- Avoid 'green washing' of plans – test the relative RAG status though deep dives
- Be clear on what the 2-3 main objectives are and subordinate all others – and as they often contradict each other, work out a hierarchy of need to avoid confusion. This will help avoid the worst of all programmatic outcomes- all stakeholders not being satisfied
- Drive team spirit – grab it, nurture it and feed it. It will pay huge dividends when things inevitably get difficult
- Oh and have fun when you can – and yes this is the 6<sup>th</sup> point!

If you would like to understand more about our approach and allow us to offer some insight into how we can assist your change programmes please contact [Chris Ledgard](#), Director.