of offenders or victims, having limited practical effect, with the legitimacy of the system continually undermined (Gelsthorpe, 2009). The ‘Payment by Results’ strategy presented in all recent policy documents (Ministry of Justice, 2010; Ministry of Justice, 2011; Ministry Of Justice, 2013a) is a government tool birthed from a combination of fiscal realignments, punitive and bureaucratic expansion aimed at reforming the service provision and delivery of offender rehabilitation to reduce reoffending in a time of financial austerity (Whitehead and Crenshaw, 2013). However, it is largely unproven in its effectiveness, in fact evidence from the USA (Teague, 2011) suggests that the introduction of the profit motive into community justice does not enhance the rehabilitative process whatsoever, and it simply appears to be a twist on the previously failed attempts to introduce contestability into the criminal justice system (Calder and Goodman, 2013: 184).

The rhetoric of increased efficiency, lower costs, extended provision and greater innovation within a broader range of services rationalised the transference of responsibility that was so attractive to the government (Gelsthorpe and Hedderman, 2012). Despite the official insistence that this decision is rooted in achieving greater efficiency and better value for taxpayers, the shift to the private sector is primarily propelled by neoliberal dogma (Teague, 2013:16). There is an inevitable contradiction in an idea that has localism as a principle and is being driven forward by central government action (Domiene, 2012). Although the controversy lies not in the aims but rather in the imagined mechanisms of service delivery and the organisations harbouring the bulk of the workload (Newburn, 2013:2). Crudely it is anticipated that the smaller public sector probation service will retain responsibility for managing those assessed as high risk offenders, with its public image characterised by delegitimisation via accounts of ‘inevitable’ serious further offences committed by problematic offenders (Maguire, 2012). The private and third sector providers will assume responsibility for all those who have been assessed as presenting a low or medium risk. This includes both those sentenced to community penalties and those released from prison on licence (Bullock, 2011).

It is plausible that voluntary organisations, certainly those who are small and lack considerable finance, will attempt to make the targets more achievable through activities such as ‘cherry picking’ or selecting the offenders more motivated to engage with the programmes. This issue can, in part by ameliorated by giving providers higher payments to work with more challenging cases (Fox and Albertson, 2012). Nevertheless, critics have argued that outsourcing probation work privileges profit and ideology at the expense of public safety, expressing concerns about the inevitable fragmentation of probation work and a potential increase in public risk (Vennard and Hedderman, 2009). Pushing over two thirds of probation’s challenging workload into untrained private sector hands is viewed as an inherently risky strategy that may compromise public protection. Given the prevalence of mental health problems and substance abuse