

National Assembly for Wales Justice Unions Group Inaugural AGM held at Senedd on 6th May 2014

Present: Julie Morgan AM, Julie James AM, Mike Hedges AM, Joyce Watson AM, David Rees AM, Mike Antoniw AM, Leanne Wood AM, Bethan Jenkins AM, Jenny Rathbone AM, Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM, Aled Roberts AM, Sian Mile (AM support), Neil Woollard (AM support), Anne Smyth (AM support), Helen Cunningham (AM support), Tracey Worth (Napo), Rob Thomas (Napo), Tom Rendon (Napo), Jane Foulner (Napo), Jo Stevens (Thompsons solicitors) and Glyn Jones (Unison)

1. Welcome

Julie Morgan AM (Cardiff North) opened the meeting by welcoming everybody to the newly launched Justice Group. Julie asked for each member to introduce themselves. Tracey Worth asked for a nomination for Chair. Mike Hedges nominated Julie Morgan as Chair. Julie Morgan then nominated Tracey Worth as Secretary of the Group. Julie then introduced National Napo Chair, Tom Rendon.

2. Speaker-Tom Rendon

Tom Rendon provided the group with an update on the privatisation of the Probation Service (Transforming Rehabilitation). He specifically focused upon Wales, bidders and the issue of rurality. He outlined concerns with Payment by Results (PbR) mechanism and issues with private companies with limited experience of working within the Criminal Justice System taking on huge MoJ contracts. Tom pointed out that there has been no pilot of this scheme and that probation does not work with offenders who are sentenced to under 12 months custody.

Mike Hedges asked a question about the contracts, specifically what happens if in three years' time the private company successor to the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) decides that it wants out because it is not making sufficient profits. Tom Rendon explained that this question was put to the Ministry of Justice at the recent Public Accounts Committee and the initial response was that another company could potentially take over the CRC; however when probed further the MOJ response was that it could not go into it further because the information was 'commercially sensitive'. Mike Hedges voiced his concern that the CRC would request more money from public funds.

Leanne Wood stated that, as a former probation officer, it is heart breaking to see Probation being destroyed. Leanne mentioned the real possibility of devolving the Probation Service to Welsh Assembly and asked Napo to provide parliamentary briefings and also that action focused on the Assembly. Glyn Davies (Unison) made reference to the SILK report and suggested that AMs write to prospective bidders telling them that they are not welcome in Wales.

Jenny Rathbone asked what will happen between 1 June, when Trusts are dissolved, and the eventual share sale? Tom Rendon informed the Group of the process of staff assignment which will be in force by 1 June. He also explained that Napo was trying to prevent the share sale of CRCs taking place, so that they remain within public ownership.

Bethan Jenkins AM asked a question about the contracts and whether the Assembly could insist on certain protections being put in place. Tom Rendon spoke of MOJ's contract management history so far; which has not been very successful i.e. with G4S running the tagging contract and Capita providing interpreters.

It was agreed that Tracey Worth would circulate the Napo briefing to all AMs

3. Future Meetings

Julie Morgan asked for topics for future discussion. The following were suggested:

- Privatisation of prisons (Jenny Rathbone)
- Changes in Legal Aid, specially focused on domestic abuse (Aled Roberts) - Tracey worth pointed out that under TR perpetrators of domestic violence will be supervised in the main by the CRC.

Aled Roberts informed the Group that in North Wales they have regular meetings with NOMS in relation to the new Titan Prison and AMs felt that such meetings would be beneficial in South Wales too.

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held early October 2014

4. Action points

- The Welsh Assembly Government to write to the MoJ and to ask what experience companies such as of MTCamey/Working Links have within the Criminal Justice System?
- To make enquires with Police and Crime Commissioners about the impact of TR and the introduction of the Wales CRCs on good working relations between Probation and the police – for example in relation to Integrated Offender Management (IOM)
- To question why the government is forging ahead with the privatisation of Probation in Wales when the SILK report refers to devolving the Probation Service to the Welsh Assembly and it therefore remaining in the public sector?
- To ask the MoJ how the caseload split between the National Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Company is going in Wales?
- To ask the MoJ what would happen if a CRC contract fails? What protection is in place that ensures the safety of the public? How will the MoJ get to know that a contract is failing? And what will the consequences be?
- The Welsh Assembly to ask Wales Probation Trust how it intends to fill current probation officer vacancies and to raise concerns over gaps in rural areas e.g. Aberystwyth

Minutes prepared by Tracey Worth, Napo Cymru

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