

Justice Unions CPG Meeting
16 March 2016
Conference Room D, Ty Hywel
12.30 – 1.30pm
Sponsored by Julie Morgan AM

Present:

Julie Morgan AM, Chair
Helen West, Office of Julie Morgan
Nancy Cavill, Office of Julie Morgan
Anne Smyth, Office of Julie Morgan
Emily Cannon, UNISON
Pen Gwilliam
Peter Robinson
Huw Price

Apologies:

Tracey Worth
Jane Foulner

Agenda

12:30 Welcome/Apologies.

12:40 Approve minutes from last meeting
Matters arising

12:45 Speaker - Emily Cannon, Unison, Privatisation of Probation

13:00 Questions

13:10 Closing remarks/Actions from meeting

Next meeting date

Welcome & approval of minutes from the last meeting

Julie welcomed everyone and apologised that Tracey and Jane could not be at the meeting today. Julie explained that all actions from the last meeting had been implemented and the minutes were agreed. Julie welcomed Emily Cannon to the meeting and handed over to her.

Main speaker – Emily Cannon, UNISON – Privatisation of Probation

Emily acknowledged the timely nature of the meeting in relation to changes in probation.

Probation can no longer be discussed as one entity since the creation of the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Centres (CRC).

NPS remains within the public sector as part of the civil service and focuses on high risk service users and operates across England and Wales as one entity. It is currently undergoing an organisational change referred to as the 'E3 Blueprint'.

UNISON invited all members working for NPS to complete a questionnaire to inform UNISON's ongoing response to the E3 consultation.

UNISON's response to the consultation included:

- The E3 proposal for all staff to be multi skilled and transferrable across specialist teams has not generally been well received and requires a re-think
- NPS and its trade unions should negotiate an E3 Organisational Change Policy and procedure.

Working Links is the company that now owns **Wales CRC** which carries out approx. Payment by results will mean change of focus for employees. 75% of probation work across Wales. In December 2015 it was outlined that there will now be two operation hubs located in Swansea and Cardiff, plus a smaller satellite hub in Colwyn Bay (to be managed by Cardiff). No information was given to show how the service would be delivered in West or Mid Wales.

New technology systems are being considered which would include the need for physical face to face supervision being reduced and using systems like Skype and text message as a suitable alternative method.

An efficiency saving announcement was made with staffing, estates and ICT – a figure of 40% has been announced for Wales. This equates to 44% full time equivalent staff in Wales – 230 posts in total. Wales bearing the deepest cuts.

An Enhanced Voluntary Redundancy (EVR) process began in December for corporate staff – not being seen as ‘voluntary’ on the ground.

Working Links stated that this ‘transformation and integration’ programme could take up to 15 months to complete.

Job losses of this kind would mean that the standard of rehabilitation and probation would fall dramatically.

Recently there have been articles in the press around the changes of plan to overhauling the Wales Devolution Settlement, calling for policing and justice to be devolved to Wales – but this will obviously be a lengthy process. The creation of a Welsh Criminal Justice Board should become a priority for the new Assembly as it would bring together both Governments and relevant agencies to discuss, develop and implement this area of devolution as recommended in the Silk Report, part 2.

Emily opened the floor for comments.

Huw Price – Worked for CRC

Conveyed his frustration, anger and desperate position that probation staff are in at the moment. They were told about the efficiency savings in November, but no factual proof of why they need to cut this money. Stressed the point that this is a difficult position for staff. Huw said how difficult this had been for him as he is visually impaired. There was no job stability, he didn’t know where his office would be, so he opted to take voluntary redundancy.

Learning and development has moved to Middlesbrough – part of Working Links.

He believes that rehabilitation is now a profit making entity because of the new 'payment by result', target driven way that the Wales CRC is now.

Hubs will end up like call centres – they are removed from the front line.

Probation officers and rehabilitation officers are being forced to work in church vestries, community halls, open plan offices – no security or privacy for offender or the staff.

Justice and employability have been merged into one job instead of two jobs. Resources are no longer there for training.

Penelope Gwilliam, Joint Chair of NAPO Cymru (works in CRC)

Penelope agreed with everything that Emily and Huw said.

The changes to probation are being revealed in a piecemeal way.

English Working Links is seeing just under 40% cuts – so Wales is being hit hardest. May lose 250 staff.

No information about where corporate services jobs will live.

Wales CRC deals with low and medium risk offenders – some do commit serious further offences. In general you see more reoffending in these categories so it is worrying that changes being made to probation could result in these number increasing further. Suggested PCCs should commission services.

Engagement with the offender is crucial to stop bad behaviour and reoffending. Text and calls to offenders won't work the same way.

The culture and diversity of Wales is not reflected in the changes. Engagement with the community cannot be done.

The Assembly and PCCs is being bypassed – need to be included.

Julie

Julie expressed her support for devolution of the probation and justice system to Wales but was concerned about what will be left when it is devolved. Welsh probation has been very successful so there was no need to change. Julie put this down to ideological changes. Julie was shocked about text messaging offenders – highlighted problems with signal and offenders selling phones for drugs etc.

Peter Robinson

Peter explained that if you communicate with an offender over the phone/via text message you don't know what they look like so you can't prove that the person showing up to meetings/attending placements are the offenders themselves.

He also said that you can't tell if people are using drugs, self harming etc over the phone or via text message – this can only be done face to face.

Huw Price

Working Links doesn't know what the big picture looks like yet, even though they are the ones implementing it.

If you don't interact with offenders properly, you can't seek to change them.

Julie

Wales is not being recognised as a valid entity.

Asked what the implications are for the Welsh Language. Highlighted the Welsh Language Strategy.

Penelope

There have been lots of letters sent out that are only in English. The lack of bilingualism has been brought up on a regular basis.

Emily

The English based Working Links doesn't take into account the use of the Welsh Language in Wales.

Huw

Highlighted again that Mid and West Wales has been more or less rejected in the new model of probation in Wales

Penelope

Warned that something serious is going to happen before long which will highlight the failings in the new system.

Julie

Stated that this was a very successful meeting and this issue is definitely something that should be taken up in the next Assembly.

Julie thanked everyone for coming and brought the meeting to a close.