



UNISON working for members  
in the Probation Service

# UNISONprobation NEWS

## MONTHLY BULLETIN – July 2009

### **UNISON CREATES NEW 'JUSTICE' SERVICE GROUP**

At UNISON's National Delegate Conference in June, history was made when delegates agreed to create a new 'Police and Justice Service Group' to co-ordinate UNISON's work on behalf of members in the Criminal Justice system. This new service group will include UNISON members working in the Police Service, Probation, CAFCASS and the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). The membership of this new group will be close to 50,000; meaning UNISON will be largest TUC affiliated union representing members in the criminal justice sector. The new service group will sit alongside those from Local Government (which probation members were part of) Health, Energy, Community, Higher Education and Water-Environment-Transport.

What will this mean for probation members? Well for start it creates a new probation sector within UNISON meaning that we should get better recognition and a much greater say over what we do and how we do it. It will also lead to greater accountability in the way we operate and develop for the future. A major benefit will be working in a grouping that is solely

concentrated on justice matters building the links and developing the services that will best deliver results for members this includes more focus on supporting occupational groups which in probation could include for example Unpaid Work members or Hostel staff.

It is expected that this next year will be very much a transitional year and will represent an opportunity to work with new partners to fashion out a better future for our members.

### **MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE AGREEMENT: UNISON WORKING TO PREVENT REDUNDANCIES**

Following the national agreement UNISON reached with the probation employers, some positive results have already started to emerge. So far UNISON has been involved in discussion through the offices of the Joint Secretaries with employers in Sussex and South Yorkshire. These discussions have resulted in some progress and the hope that compulsory redundancies could be avoided. The need to introduce a period of reflection upon signalling the intent to make staff redundant has allowed for the formal intervention of the Joint Secretaries as well as the

Director's of Offender Management (DOM) and this has ensured greater scrutiny of an areas plan, to ensure that all alternatives have been considered and if the plans can be justified. UNISON expects to be involved in many more cases over the coming months, including the five Areas currently in the pipeline. With the agreement in place, we have a better system to support members facing redundancy than previously existed. UNISON is determined to maximise this opportunity.

UNISON also continues to lobby the government for more resources for probation and understands that further work is going on behind the scenes to review the probation budgets for 2010-2011. We met with Jack Straw, alongside sister union Napo, on 7 July to make the case for flexibility in Probation budgets next year to stave off more job cuts.

## **AN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS STRUCTURE FIT FOR PURPOSE**

UNISON has been meeting with officials from NOMS to discuss a future employment relations structure encompassing the many different operations under the NOMS umbrella. UNISON is keen to see clarity on this issue as a formal structure has been missing for some time. Although NOMS does not directly employ probation staff (they are employed by local probation areas) it does have a big influence over what a probation area does. This is especially true now the new DOM regional structures are in place. UNISON is pressing hard for a formal relationship with the new DOMS at Regional level. The new industrial relations structure should allow for a better dialogue with NOMS and the Ministry of Justice, with meetings also proposed with the

Ministry of Justice Permanent Secretary – the top civil servant in NOMS.

## **PROBATION BOARDS TO TRUSTS**

Presently all Probation Boards are being assessed for Trust status. Some have passed and some have failed; some are considering joint bids for merged Trust status. While UNISON remains sceptical of the Trust programme, and is rightly concerned about the levels of additional bureaucracy and money the process creates, it has created an opportunity available to UNISON activists. The Trust application process requires, under 'Domain 4', for Probation Areas to demonstrate how they engage with Trade Unions and to state whether the relationship is a productive one. In a number of Probation Areas this is simply not the case, and UNISON activists need to ensure those who assess the applications understand the true reality of local industrial relations. Some Probation Areas will claim positive and productive relationships even if they do not exist; so it is important we comment and we should be invited to do so. UNISON has raised concerns again about what happens to the Boards that do not pass the assessment; it seems that this remains work in progress.

## **UNPAID WORK Specification Benchmarking and Costing programme.**

UNISON is concerned at what appears to be the outcome of the Unpaid Work Specification Benchmarking and Costing (SBC) framework, although we have yet to see or to be consulted on the findings. The Specification, Benchmarking and Costing framework programme will eventually apply to all

aspects of probation work and will when completed give a national indicator of cost to specification for use in Best Value exercises. It will also soon drive future probation resourcing. UNISON has requested an immediate meeting with NOMS to raise our concerns. Already some areas are suggesting increasing Unpaid Work group sizes in response to the benchmarking exercise even though it has not yet been completed. UNISON will oppose this blanket 'one size fits all' approach.

## **NEW PROBATION MINISTER ANNOUNCED**

Following the recent government reshuffle, David Hanson moved from his post as Minister for Prisons and Probation to become the Minister of Police in the Home Office. We were sorry to see David go, because he had been a friend to UNISON probation members, set up regular meetings with us and sought to respond to our concerns. David has been replaced by Maria Eagle who we are pleased to say has agreed to continue to meet us on a regular basis and seems keen to foster a productive relationship. We will be meeting Maria for the first time on 15 July.

UNISON is also pleased that the Justice Minister Jack Straw has continued, and will continue in the future, to meet UNISON and Napo to discuss probation related issues. The level of contact with government ministers is unprecedented and we must use these links to further the cause of our probation members.

## **NOMS TO REVIEW PRIVATISED ESTATES AND FM CONTRACT**

NOMS has decided to undertake a review of the privatised Probation Estates and Facilities Maintenance contracts. These contracts are currently run by the Home Office, despite largely impacting on Probation which is in the Ministry of Justice. It covers the cleaning, housekeeping, cooking and maintenance of all properties in the Probation estate.

The privatisation of facilities management was problematic from the day contracts were first let in 2002. In 2008 staff on the contracts transferred to Interserve or Amey when Morrison and Mitie lost the contracts on re-tendering.

The NOMS Briefing announcing the review states that:

1. 'Users of the Probation estate currently appear to be receiving a poor service in terms of the maintenance of the estate, which in turn is impacting their ability to deliver an effective and reliable service'
2. This appears to be largely caused by: the quality of the contract itself; the quality of the performance of the contractors Interserve and Amey, and problems with the Home Office acting as the client for the contract, rather than the MoJ.

UNISON will be taking part in the review of the contracts and invites members to contact us to give their views on how the privatised facilities maintenance contracts are working, or not working, as the case may be. The outcome of the NOMS review could be changes to the existing contracts or the cancellation of the existing contracts.

UNISON is continuing its efforts to get Interserve to pay the 2008 and 2009 Probation pay rises due to ex-NPS staff on its pay-roll. Interserve has promised to prioritise this work. UNISON believes strongly that the performance of any private contract is inextricably linked to the way in which staff on that contract are treated. If contract performance is to improve, the way in which staff are treated must improve first.

Members or activists who wish to contribute views or evidence to the NOMS Review of the Probation Facilities Management contracts should contact Ben Priestley at: [b.priestley@unison.co.uk](mailto:b.priestley@unison.co.uk)