



## MONTHLY BULLETIN – FEBRUARY 2009

### **No Compulsory Redundancies in Probation!**

'No Compulsory Redundancies!' That was the key message a UNISON delegation, led by General Secretary Dave Prentis, gave to the Government when they met on the 12<sup>th</sup> Feb. The meeting requested by UNISON, saw Dave Prentis, National Probation Committee Chair Matthew Lay and National Officer Ben Priestley lobbying Jack Straw the Lord Chancellor and David Hanson the Prison and Probation Minister.

UNISON pressed the Government to work with the Trade Unions in Probation to ensure that none of our members is subjected to compulsory redundancy. UNISON outlined the key parts of the unions' 'Management of Change' proposal which we have taken to the Probation Employers. The proposal makes clear that many alternative options can be used to manage the current period of reduced resources and all of these should be exhausted. They include: active vacancy management, workload prioritisation, and enhanced voluntary severance and early retirement.

UNISON outlined its commitment to work with the Government, but made it clear that our members are already suffering from the current cutbacks and are fearful of widespread job losses. We explained our concerns at the actions of individual probation employers who seem ill prepared to cope with the challenging future ahead and may be tempted to take the cheapest, easiest course to reduce expenditure. The damage to morale that this will cause should not be underestimated.

Both Jack Straw and David Hanson agreed that all should be done to limit the need for compulsory redundancy. They pledged to look at ways to ensure that this does not happen. They also agreed to re-examine the constraints on the ability of Probation Boards to enhance voluntary redundancy and early retirement packages. The Ministers listened to UNISON's call for more financial flexibility for Boards to carry forward budget deficits to help manage the cuts.

It is apparent that Government intervention will be crucial to getting employers to support any commitment to avoid compulsory redundancies. This is why it is so important that we lobby the Government and make them understand what we are facing. UNISON will be following up the outcomes from our meeting with Jack Straw and demanding action on this vital matter.

### **UNISON attends the NOMS Agency Conference.**

For the first time UNISON was invited to attend the new NOMS Agency conference which was held in Birmingham. The conference which brings together the great and good within the prison and probation services was addressed by both the Lord Chancellor Jack Straw and NOMS head Phil Wheatley. The conference in many ways highlighted the uphill struggle probation is going to face in the months and years ahead. The conference had a very strong prison service focus and a clear perception that somehow probation is living in the past and needs yet more reform. The key message was that we all needed to do more with less resources and there is no chance of any further money coming our way, so get on with it. The conference also saw a commitment given to prison staff to avoid compulsory redundancies; a promise sadly not applicable to probation staff yet!

### **Preparing for Battle in Yorkshire and Humberside.**

National Chair Matthew Lay attended a key meeting held by UNISON probation activists and officials in Leeds on 25 February. The meeting called by Neil Richardson and Richard Nelson, both UNISON NNC reps, and UNISON's Yorkshire and Humberside Region, was to prepare a strategy in Yorkshire and Humberside to fight the proposed probation cuts in the region; some of which will devastate the service. The meeting, which was also attended by Napo activists and Napo General Secretary Jonathan Ledger, drew up a plan of action to fight the cuts which at present include compulsory redundancies. UNISON is clear that all alternatives need to be exhausted before compulsory redundancies are declared, and this has not been done. We are concerned that some Areas are acting in a very volatile and gung-ho fashion. We want to work with employers to help manage this transition but we are not prepared to see members treated in this way. In South Yorkshire Probation, UNISON has run a consultative ballot in which members backed potential industrial action to oppose compulsory redundancies. We have also requested the formal involvement of the NNC Joint Secretaries to help avoid the compulsory redundancies already declared in West Yorkshire.

UNISON is committed to support members and activists in Areas to fight any compulsory redundancies. Please let your branch, UNISON Regional Office and Ben Priestley, National Officer [b.priestley@unison.co.uk](mailto:b.priestley@unison.co.uk) know if you are faced with compulsory redundancies.

### **Waking-Night cover requirements change in Approved Premises**

UNISON has been in discussions with Probation Minister David Hanson, and the NOMS Public Protection Unit (PPU), to ensure that the requirements for

waking night cover are adhered too. UNISON has been concerned for some time that some probation employers have been seeking to downgrade provision and failing to work with unions to deliver acceptable levels of cover. A draft new circular has been published which seeks to enforce a common position in what is a highly sensitive area of work. The new draft circular states that "in all approved premises, there must be at least two members of staff on duty at all times. At night there must be waking night cover. Double waking night cover will be the expected norm" Alternative arrangements can be agreed for small units where appropriate but an employer must carry out a full risk assessment, the relevant DOM will need to be consulted, the local trade union will need to be fully consulted and the arrangements will need to be endorsed by the Public Protection Unit. The circular also says that one member of staff at night must have a supervisory role and be employed directly by the probation board/trust/voluntary management committee. UNISON is continuing to push for better and standardized operation specifications. This we hope will stop employers seeking to downgrade provision to the lowest denominator as some areas have done. UNISON is continuing to meet with the PPU to develop a shared agenda of higher standards and recognition of the excellent work carried out in this difficult environment.

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