




Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

SJR(2)-04-07(p.2)

Date: Wednesday 7 March 2007

Time: 9.30am – 12.30pm

Venue: The Senedd, Cardiff Bay

NOMS Wales Paper to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee 7 March 2007

Introduction

Carol Bernard, Director of Offender Management Service Wales attended the Social Justice & Regeneration Committee on 3 May 2006. Carol Bernard has been succeeded by Sian West who is currently Acting Director of NOMS Wales. Following the committee meeting in May, Carol Bernard provided information requested by the committee on a range of issues.

This paper provides an update on the work of NOMS Wales since May 2006, follows up on actions and commitments made during the meeting and addresses issues relating to the Probation Service, as raised at the Social Justice & Regeneration committee on 6 July 2006.

Update on the work of NOMS Wales

Offender Management (OM)

The Offender Management Bill had its 3rd reading in Parliament on 28 February 2007, and was approved by the Commons, having had various amendments since its first presentation. Amongst a range of changes to current arrangements, the Bill allows for probation boards in England and Wales to gain more autonomy by becoming Trusts in due course, as the authority to carry out probation services transfers to the Secretary of State. This will also enable Commissioners to seek other providers from the voluntary and community or private sectors over the next few years.

In Wales the Offender Management Model (OMM) has been implemented in all Probation Areas

within the target date of 31 March 2006. HM Prison Service implemented Phase II for high risk of harm and prolific offenders in November 2006, with a phased roll-out to more and more prisoners over the next two years. The principles of Offender Management are the 'end-to-end' management of offenders, each case being managed by a single Offender Manager, and to increase the joint working between prison and probation.

Reducing re-offending

The Wales Reducing Re-offending Action Plan was launched at the NOMS Wales conference on 16 February 2007. This is the product of the February 2006 consultation on "Joining Together in Wales: an Adults and Young People's Strategy to Reduce Re-offending". The action plan has developed the actions necessary to achieve a reduction in re-offending in Wales by addressing the seven intervention pathways; accommodation, education training & employment, health & social care, substance misuse, finance benefit & debt, children & families of offenders, attitudes thinking & behaviour. Cross-cutting issues Prolific & priority offenders, public protection, diversity and the reducing re-offending alliances are also addressed. The plan has been developed in partnership, primarily between NOMS and Welsh Assembly Government, and will be delivered in partnership, involving a wide range of stake-holders.

Current targets are to reduce re-offending by ten per cent by the end of the decade based on a 2003 cohort; the latest figures, published in November 2006, showed that re-offending in England and Wales is 57.6%. A reducing re-offending metric based on local information will be included in the 2007-08 Service Level Agreements with providers.

Commissioning

NOMS Wales launched the first Wales Commissioning Plan 2007-08 during February 2007. The commissioning plan indicates how NOMS will commission services from providers who provide specialist knowledge and experience, are flexible & responsive to change, provide creative/innovative services, provide access to communities and specific client groups. General aims are to increase quality and range of services, encourage competition from all sectors, ensure best value for money and champion diversity. Meeting the diverse needs of offenders in order to address their offending behaviour, is an essential requirement.

2006-07 has been the first year of NOMS Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with prisons and probation, and we are working positively with both sectors, evidenced in success against performance targets. We are currently negotiating new SLAs for 2007-08 with Probation Areas and HM Prison Service in Wales. Providers are engaging positively, and this will ensure continuing high performance and proper services for offenders.

Budgets for main providers for 2007-08 will be approved by the Director of NOMS Wales, although funding for Education and Skills is directly allocated by the Director of NOMS Wales.

The National Probation Directorate is now part of NOMS, which has streamlined its headquarters with a strong emphasis on commissioning and on performance.

In August 2006 NOMS published "Improving Prison and Probation Services: Public Value Partnerships"; within this document are the government's stated aims for introducing a more diverse 'market-place' so that public protection and reduced re-offending can be achieved in a way that provides best value for public money.

Rebalancing sentencing

NOMS Wales is working with the Regional Courts Director for Wales (and Cheshire) to ensure changes within the Criminal Justice Act 2003 are implemented, and to continue to find effective ways to provide information to Sentencers about what works best in Wales.

Prisons in Wales

The Welsh Affairs Select Committee is due to publish their report into Welsh prisoners in the prison estate shortly. The cross-party committee took evidence from a wide variety of interested parties, and heard from the government that a new prison is to be sited in southern Wales, although no final decision on the best site has been made.

Accommodation pathfinder

Funding was secured to undertake an accommodation 'pathfinder' project in Wales. A project board has been established consisting of the prison and probation partners and the Welsh Assembly Government (Housing Directorate). Our pathfinder presents a major opportunity to gain an understanding of the level of need for accommodation for female offenders. The pathfinder will seek to develop a quality service for service users in Wales by scoping the needs and bringing together providers.

Welsh language scheme

NOMS Wales has produced a draft Welsh Language Scheme which has been well received by the Welsh Language Board, and which will shortly be distributed for wide consultation within the next couple of weeks.

NOMS relationship with the Probation Service

Ref: a) Minister's Report to SJ&R Committee – 6 July 2006, item 15 b) Transcript of SJ&R Committee - 6 July 2006 para 50

Gwent probation area has opened a new office in Caerphilly but at this stage are keeping the Bargoed office open. They have not as yet progressed the new Newport office. This matter currently lies with NOMS Estates. No other offices have been closed.

Sian West

Acting Director, NOMS Wales

February 2007