

IL/AV 55-19

Sonia Crozier, Chief Probation Officer and Executive Director Women
HM Prison and Probation Service
8th Floor 102 Petty France
London SW1H 9AJ

(by email)

1st October 2019

Dear Sonia,

DISPUTE - OFFENDER MANAGEMENT IN CUSTODY (OMIC)

Thank you for your reply of 5th September to our letter giving notice of dispute dated 12th August, which was the subject of a meeting at our Offices on 27th August.

Whilst we welcomed the constructive discussion that took place between us, we nevertheless feel that certain aspects of your written response require some comment.

Staffing Levels

Having reflected carefully on the narrative that you have provided, Napo does not agree that the expected ratio for Prison based Probation Officers of 'no more than 80 cases' represents a safe workload. Here you reference the additional Case Management support that will be provided by Prison staff, but the genesis of this dispute is that Napo does not believe that prison staff (while no doubt being in possession of skillsets applicable to their core functions) have the requisite experience in offender management and that the anticipated caseloads for Probation Officers within the custodial environment remain unsafe. We have consistently challenged the idea that the case management support model provides significant workload relief for the PO or PSO holding a case and this means that we have little confidence that such an arrangement would make managing such a high caseload safe.

Additionally, Napo has some difficulty accepting that the three bespoke Community Hubs will be an effective work around in covering vacancies. Here we foresee large volumes of cases being managed remotely by practitioners where the likelihood of engaging directly with clients in the way that you have suggested is highly unlikely to occur.

Unfortunately your letter is silent on the key issue of staffing in the community and we continue to pick up concerns from members that despite high vacancy rates in some areas staff are still being expected to move into the custody roles with no immediate plan to backfill them. Indeed you have admitted yourself that it is unlikely that Probation staffing levels will stabilise for at least another year leaving divisions struggling to manage such a significant organisational change.

All of this leads us to say that we do not believe that all of this is in keeping with assurances we have been given on safe staffing levels. On that basis we seek a further and urgent review of the calculations which have given rise to the caseload forecast.

SPO Workloads

We generally welcome the narrative that you have provided in respect of our concerns and we look forward to engaging with your OMiC Team to explore how best we can construct the SPO Survey that you have agreed to launch.

‘For Profit’ Prisons

Napo has long held the view that OM supervision in these establishments is well below the standards that we would expect. Napo does not believe that the CMS model will offer suitable workload relief for Probation Officers to oversee High Risk cases for the reasons outlined above. This plan also goes against the original assurance given in response to our representations about “For Profit” prisons.

Continuity of Offender Manager

The Offender Management in Custody model builds in an inconsistency in client – worker relationship that we seek to avoid in other circumstances. In fact part of the rationale for the integration of offender management out of CRCs and into the NPS is to create fewer changes of worker in the system. The only conclusion that can be reached is that the OMiC model is cheaper than properly resourcing end to end offender management. While most will welcome the increases to prison staff resources and the renewed focus on rehabilitation in custody the reality is that the proposed model requires fewer reviews of the sentence plan during the custodial phase of the sentence (moving from annual to biennial or triennial dependent on the length of sentence) and only mandates monthly contact between offender manager and client for high risk cases and only quarterly contact with the client in low risk cases. While this may appear to be more than the current model for offender manager contact it is less contact than most clients experience from the combined team of offender manager based in the community and the offender supervisor based in custody. Closer examination of the model reveals that decisions have been made in terms of resourcing that assume shorter times to complete various tasks including OASys assessments which will lead to higher caseloads for staff undertaking the Offender Manager role. While the mandatory contact and review of sentence plan demand may be lower than before this will place intense pressure on staff working in custody.

Women in Custody

We welcome the commitment to change the descriptive language as described in the OMiC model and will work closely with your team on the issues that we have raised.


Reassurance about no redundancies

Whilst we acknowledge the pledge for there to be no redundancies under the OMiC transition, we feel that you have failed to acknowledge the fact that NPS vacancies are being filled by prison staff whom we feel are under qualified for the role that they are going to be asked to undertake.

Again, and linked to our concerns above, Napo believe that we need a joint review to identify the exact staffing need under the proposed OMiC Operational model in order to give staff confidence that it is fit for purpose.

We look forward to another opportunity to try and resolve these issues and hope that we can arrive at position which provides confidence to our members that their concerns are being taken seriously by the employer

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "T. I. Lawrence". The signature is written in dark ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

IAN LAWRENCE
General Secretary

KATIE LOMAS
National Chair