

IL/AV 47-19

Sonia Crozier, Chief Probation Officer and Executive Director Women
HM Prison and Probation Service

12th August 2019

Dear Sonia,

Dispute re OMiC

During recent engagement with your Officials about OMiC, we have received information that causes such significant concern to our members that we have no option but to formally register a dispute. Our concerns are summarised here.

Lack of Consultation

At the last meeting on July 24th we were presented with (after around a year of asking) a Powerpoint presentation titled "OMiC Staffing Model". The document was dated March 2019. This document includes changes to agreed workload timings and changes to work practices such as completion dates for OASys and the OASys review frequency that we have not been properly consulted about. These constitute a significant change for members as well as establishing a lower level of assessment and review than is currently in place for clients in custody.

Broken assurances on staffing levels

At the start of OMiC, we were assured that the Offender Management part of the project would not be rolled out until staffing levels are safe. It is now clear that this is not the case and many members are reporting that their division is pressing ahead despite the significant vacancy levels and unacceptably high workloads that exist.

We have been informed that, in five prisons, there are serious staffing issues that are not likely to be resolved by the "go live" date. Our understanding was that in such a situation the "go live" would not proceed, but instead we have been informed that the Case Management Support model will be used instead. This will force Probation staff to take on dangerously high caseloads of high risk clients and will see prison staff who have not had the requisite training or acquired the qualification to carry out offender management tasks with those clients. Taking aside the reality that the Case Management Support model rarely affords the workload relief it promises in the custody part of the sentence, there is little work that can be usefully given to someone else in this way. Our members who are being forced to work in this way are at real risk from such excessive workloads and we know from tragic experience that working so far beyond capacity also prevents members from delivering the standard of work required from them.

SPO workloads

We have raised our concerns for some time about the prison SPO role after it was announced that the ratio of SPO: reportee would be 1:14 FTE rather than the 1:10 FTE in the community. The SPOs working in prisons will be supervising both probation and prison staff who are on different sets of terms and conditions. We already see SPOs in the community struggling with workloads, especially where there are a number of part time staff (far more likely in a predominantly female workforce) which often means there are far more than 10 staff to supervise. In Prisons, these difficulties will be exacerbated, as the SPO is expected to drive the rehabilitation culture in the OMU while referencing multiple management and support structures for the two sets of staff. Our representations on this issue up to now have been ignored.

Change to agreement on the contracted out estate

During the meeting on the 24th July, we were also informed that, contrary to the previous assurance that high-risk clients in the contracted-out estate would have an OM with a Probation Qualification, there was a plan to use the Case Management Support model here too. This again forces members to work with dangerously high caseloads and way beyond their safe capacity thus risking their health and safety as well as making it impossible for them to deliver the standard of work expected.

Concerns about the model

You are of course aware that right from the start, Napo have questioned the OMiC model because it builds in working practices that are not supportive of desistance including inconsistency of worker through the sentence. The change of Offender Manager during the preparation for a client's release is particularly concerning; as the period immediately prior to and just after release are especially vulnerable points in the sentence. The blueprint for the change to Probation Services discusses how problematic these "handoffs" are, and this forms part of the basis for one of the most significant U-turns in policy we have seen in Probation. It is therefore astounding that the OMiC model is being forced through with the same flaws embedded.

The announcements by the Prime Minister over the weekend of the intention to create 10,000 new Prison places, in itself means that urgent dialogue (and surely a further review) is now necessary on the whole OMiC strategy and the resourcing requirements that are going to be needed in Prisons and Probation.

In addition, the OMiC model has been altered for the Women's Estate to remove the Keyworker role for those women described in the documentation as "high complexity women". We have made representations about the degrading language being used and suggested that "women with complex needs" would be more appropriate. We question the decision to remove the Keyworker role which has been described as providing more consistency. Using consistency of worker as a reasoning for any decision in this model is bizarre, given the representations we have made about the model overall, but in this case it doesn't fit at all. The Keyworker role is one of the positive aspects of OMiC, providing an additional supportive member of the "team" in the prison. This should be used to enhance, not supplant the interaction with the Offender Manager. Instead of removing the Keyworker role we believe that the Keyworker should remain, but the Offender Manager should be allocated additional time to ensure that positive working relationships can be built.

No consultation on job losses

In addition to the practice concerns we have illustrated above, it is very clear that the OMiC model is simply seeking to resolve the acute and chronic staffing issues in the NPS by giving staff unacceptably high workloads and by giving 30% of the custody caseload to Prison staff to manage. Although no NPS staff will lose their employment (because of the high vacancy rate in the NPS and our 'no redundancy' agreement) this nevertheless represents a net loss of jobs which has also not been the subject of prior consultation with the unions.

In view of the urgency of this issue, we are seeking its inclusion as an additional item at this weeks' meeting of the NPS JNC. Meanwhile, Napo will be taking steps to consult with our sister trade unions and our members about how we should progress this dispute.

Yours sincerely



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