

To: all Napo members in the Kent Surrey and Sussex CRC

This important update is for all Napo members employed in the Kent Surrey Sussex CRC including ex-Working Links employees.

Please take the opportunity to show it to workplace colleagues who are not currently members of a trade union

DEMISE OF WORKING LINKS IS A VICTORY FOR MEMBERS BUT BIG TESTS LAY AHEAD

Last week saw some dramatic developments that culminated in the three Working Links Community Rehabilitation Companies going into Administration. The MoJ simultaneously announced the appointment of SEETEC to manage a recovery plan through the Kent Surrey and Sussex CRC until the end of its current contract. Napo and the Probation unions moved quickly to ensure that the necessary transfer orders and arrangements for the payment of wages were in place for ex-Working Links CRC employees.

There is no doubt that the resilience of Napo members and those of their sister unions throughout the dispute with Working Links, have been a major factor in seeing this dreadful employer out of the door. The refusal to be cowed by an endemic bullying culture driven directly by the directors of the Working Links Board, and the resistance to attempts to change your terms and conditions without agreement have been an inspiration. Their efforts were supported by a courageous group of managers in the former Devon, Dorset and Cornwall CRC. They recently helped to expose the scandalous state of operations in this area that were the subject of a most damning HM Inspectorate of Probation report last week.

Working Links have gone away, but there are a multitude of unanswered questions around accountability and responsibility which Napo intend to pursue through Parliament and the media over the coming weeks.

Union engagement with SEETEC and KSS CRC management

There was very little time to celebrate the departure of Working Links before an urgent meeting took place in Chippenham last Monday between the new provider's senior management team and trade union representatives. The key issues included:

- The mechanics of the transfer of ex-Working Links employees into KSS CRC and the initial agenda around the 'measures' that will need to be the subject of negotiation with trades unions
- The initial mobilisation plans (over the first 90 days) to stabilise the delivery of Probation services in the areas that were formally under the remit of Working Links. More specific news will follow on this as soon as it becomes available

- The need to urgently consult with unions and stakeholders on the plans to speed up the handback of Offender Management work to NPS Wales and how this will impact on the current roles of some staff.
- The need to establish a longer-term transition plan under the existing and now varied, KSS CRC contract.
- The positive intentions of the holding company SEETEC in respect of the recruitment of staff and initiatives on professional standards and training.
- Arrangements to ensure that regular meaningful dialogue is established between unions and senior management with the aim of reaching agreement.

Union's response

It is fair to say that while the vast majority of the meeting was positive, the unions had cause to take issue with some of the content of the letters that arrived through ex-Working Links employee's doors last Saturday morning. These caused a number of union reps to have their weekends interrupted fielding calls from a substantial number of worried members.

Such was the pace of developments in respect of the transfer that the unions nationally had simply not had the opportunity to consider the contents of what SEETEC were sending out to their new employees. Whilst we obviously recognised the need to make initial contact with staff and welcomed the required assurances about payment of wages and the desire to engage with the trades unions, we made it clear that issues such as pay and variation of contracts must be the subject of negotiation under the terms of the Staff Transfer and Protections Agreement. I also need to make it clear to members that you not required to respond to these letters.

New suits but same message?

We said that were pleased that the departure of Working Links ended the long running dispute with that employer, and that unions were now ready to engage with positively with SEETEC/KSS CRC.

Nevertheless, we took a strong position on behalf of our members in saying that the level and quality of engagement with the new employer must seriously improve from what has gone before. The employer also agreed the importance of adequate facility time for union reps to have input into the transition plans

We also demanded early sight and discussion of the mobilisation plan and the unions agreed that it would be useful to spend time at an 'away day' event involving managers and union reps from the Kent Surrey and Sussex areas of the enlarged CRC.

The unions will shortly be submitting a joint pay claim covering all of our members in the KSS CRC.

Napo membership

Our membership team at Napo HQ have already made the necessary arrangements to change our databases and have contacted KSSC to ensure that your membership subscriptions will continue. Napo members formerly employed by Working Links need take no action.

Finally, Napo will issue as much news as we can on the above issues and other developments, but also look out for local news from your respective Napo Branch within KSS CRC (these remain unchanged).

Enquiries about this bulletin can be directed to info@napo.org.uk where a member of our team will respond at the earliest opportunity.

Remember: unity is strength, and the more members there are within the whole of KSSC CRC the more effective we can be in taking your issues forward with the employer.

Ian

Ian Lawrence
General Secretary