

Saying “**we told you so**” has become rather tiresome, as Napo has continuously been warning Sodexo of many of the issues that are now coming home to roost. Moreover Napo takes no gratification in having been proved right because the consequences for members and service users are so serious. It is not enough for our members to be proved right. Napo demands Sodexo take immediate action to address the on-going problems that are across its six CRCs to ensure that members are able to come to work in a safe and healthy environment.

This edition of Napo News (Sodexo) covers **Sodexo’s failings** on:

- **Service delivery;**
- **Its estate strategy;**
- **IT;**
- **Office layouts.**

In addition, we will also look at the headline figures from the **Napo Workload Stress Survey** which show that Sodexo is failing to live up to its own health and safety principals. Members are reporting that **workloads** across the CRCs are **spiralling out of control**.

Napo believes that Sodexo should establish a framework to engage in meaningful national discussions to try and address these concerns so that together we can work to mitigate any adverse consequences for our members and service users.

Sodexo’s Failings

- **Service Delivery:** Members will have seen reports in the media on the South Yorkshire Community Rehabilitation Company (SYCRC) after it failed a Ministry of Justice audit. These highlighted aspects of an MoJ audit which showed “a lack of contact with offenders, ineffective enforcement and little or no evidence of any offence or risk focussed work”- amongst a number of other failings. A re-audit is now due in March and we await the outcome of this.

Napo has received reports that in Norfolk and Suffolk CRC and Essex CRC some unpaid work teams are having to travel such long distances that when they reach their destination they literally only have time to use the toilets, before they have to get back in the van to make the return journey.

Moreover, the re-audit by the MoJ in SYCRC is adding to existing excessive workloads for members as they are now required to carry out a caseload audit on top of their existing work.

Napo believes that a major contributing factor for these failings has been the constant change imposed on members. Only this can explain how an award-winning service has deteriorated within such a short space of time.

Napo is concerned that following the staffing cuts, a move to new offices and IT and an operating model that is still not fully operational, and no attempt to address excessive workloads will mean that the failings reported above in SYCRC will be replicated across the Sodexo CRCs.



Newsletter for Napo members in the Sodexo CRCs

➤ **Estate Strategy:** Originally, Sodexo had (in Napo’s view) an excessively ambitious timetable to move into new premises. It was originally planned to exit MoJ premises and move into the new offices by the end of December 2015. As we all know, Sodexo failed to meet this timetable, and therefore a number of staff, across the Sodexo CRCs, are presently still based in MoJ premises.

Moreover, those offices that have “cut over” have experienced avoidable teething problems. If a more realistic timetable had been adopted and Sodexo had taken the time to listen and act on the concerns raised by local union health and safety reps, the “cut over” period surely would have happened in a more seamless way.

More worryingly, the location of many of the new offices visited by service users is causing concern for members, in that they are located in out of town industrial estates that are not on easily accessible transport routes. In addition, the reduction in the number of offices has resulted in service users having to travel greater distances to attend appointments. Napo is also concerned that this will result in a reduction in compliance as it appears there has been a marked decrease in the footfall of service users coming through the door and visiting offices.

➤ **IT:** The new IT procured by Sodexo was supposed to make life easier for staff and therefore enable them to spend more time with service users. However in reality the opposite has occurred. The IT has failed to live up to expectation with even the fundamental “basics” not functioning.

For example in one CRC, staff moved into new offices without any phone lines, no internet lines had been installed, the Wi-Fi was not working and instead staff were asked to tether their new iPhones to access the internet.

This experience of the “cut over” has been a common experience across a number of CRCs and shows that the moves were carried out in haste causing staff to suffer unnecessarily. If only Sodexo had listened and made sure that moves had been carried out with better care and planning, and that moves were only initiated when all the basic infrastructure had been installed and tested!

A further significant failing has been that Sodexo has not yet fully rolled out the use of its “Solo Protect” identicom personal security system. This system was supposed to be a critical feature of the Sodexo Health and Safety measures in the move to new open plan offices and remote working. Yet to date, a number of members have not been issued with solo protect badges, or where they have, they have not been able to activate them.

➤ **Office Layouts:** At the beginning of February Napo wrote to all the Sodexo CRC Chiefs, asking that they re-consider the use of booths in CRC offices. Napo reminded the CRC chiefs that they had previously given assurances that retro-fitting” and other changes to office layouts would be carried out once staff had moved into the new offices and if those offices proved not to be functioning as expected.

It is clear that the **booths are not effective** and members have provided plenty of examples of the high level of “acoustic transfer “which means that conversations can be overheard.

Newsletter for Napo members in the Sodexo CRCs

The Probation Institute (PI) has now entered into this debate and produced a position paper that supports our demands that “booths” have no place in a probation office and should therefore be removed and should be replaced by small, conventional meeting rooms. Principle 3 in the position paper states “the current trend towards the use of pods with half height screens between them **is inappropriate and cannot be condoned**”. It goes on to say that “workers are asking service users to be open and honest about their interactions. **This is simply not possible if their conversations can be overheard**”.

In addition, the PI position paper discusses the broader principles around office arrangements and it argues that the move to open plan offices should not be driven by cost considerations or as a back door way to encourage home and community working. Napo fears that these are, however, exactly the considerations used by Sodexo to inform its design layouts.

Protecting the personal data of service users is proving to be a problem in these new office layouts. For example in one instance a member reported that they were forced to use the toilet as it was the only private space available to make a sensitive call to a partner organisation about a service user, where the member could be confident that the call would not be overheard by other service users.

Napo has requested Sodexo provide reassurance to staff that any inadvertent breach of the Data Protection Act by staff, as a consequence of the new office layouts, will not result in any disciplinary action taken against them. It is also noteworthy that the Information Commissioner’s Office does not take breaches of the Act lightly and can impose fines of up to half a million pounds as well as pursuing a criminal prosecution.

➤ **Health and Safety:** Principle 1 of Sodexo’s *Global Health and Safety Policy* states the following: “We [Sodexo] are committed to providing working conditions and client services that are safe and healthy. Safety is a condition of employment for all Sodexo employees”. It is clear from the findings of the Napo Workload Stress Survey Sodexo is very far from living up to its own mandatory Health and Safety principles.

The headline figures from the survey indicate that excessive workloads are causing work related-stress. **85%** of respondents indicated that their workload had **increased** since September 2015; nearly **95%** of respondents indicated that workload was **causing them stress**; and just over **80%** of respondents indicated that they would leave if they could, or are in fact actively **looking to leave the CRC**.

A full report from the findings of the survey will be produced and shared with members in a future edition of this newsletter. In the meantime it is important that staff protect themselves from the consequences of high workloads and work-related stress (including any adverse effects of working on laptops and mobile working). If you are now using new equipment, Napo recommends that you request a **DSE risk assessment**. If you are suffering from work related stress you should request a **stress risk assessment**; and finally, if you believe that using the new IT equipment, or general work-related stress, has given you a medical condition, then you should request an **occupational health referral**. These will assist in protecting your interests should you need to pursue a claim against the employer at a later stage.