

Questions & Answers

Yvonne Thomas recently hosted two telephone Q&As and a summary is provided below.

Q1. How much flexibility is there in the Interchange model for larger agency placements or expenditure contracts for community payback?

There has generally been a move to free agency placements over the last 12-18 months. The new model is fairly flexible and it was anticipated that there would continue to be a mixture of the more traditional approach and lower numbers of agency placements.

Q2. Is there a strategy for income generation linked to community payback (CP)?

There are a number of considerations that we have to weigh up carefully. For example, CP must not displace employment. However it would be beneficial for everyone if we could get CP to a point where it's cost neutral so that we cover our costs. It's not anticipated that we generate over and above what it costs to operate. It would however be good to generate income (not profit) to enable us to pay for things as part of CP that we wouldn't be able to do otherwise.

Q3. When are volunteers going to be needed e.g. in workshops?

Involvement will vary according to each work stream. Every work stream is slightly different and involvement will be down to what the project leads need and people's areas of expertise. For some projects, they may require volunteers in the design phase while others may need help to validate proposals. We envisage that everyone will have the opportunity to be involved in the next six to twelve months.

Q4. What is going to happen to replace the services of Achieve North West?

Achieve North West was run out of Merseyside CRC on behalf of Lancashire, Cumbria, Merseyside and parts of Cheshire & Greater Manchester. The contract came to an end and a new consortium was successful in bidding for European Social Fund money. Some CRC staff moved to the new provider as it was no longer a CRC service. The rules still allow us to access the services from them – it's just that the CRC doesn't provide them directly.

Q5. How will you manage the Unison strike?

In the event of strike action, each of the CRCs will invoke its normal industrial relations contingency plan. The impact analysis shows that because of the current caseload, union percentages and the changes in the sort of staffing numbers, we don't anticipate a high degree of operational impact or significantly affect performance.

This is an historical issue and not something we can do anything about. It is a matter for the MoJ and people have the right to take industrial action.

Q6. Will there be a common set of corporate systems across the five CRCs?

An interim review of existing systems was carried out by the Corporate Services Review team led by Mel Gregory. We currently have a real mixture of accounting and HR and payroll systems for example. We have come to the conclusion that an interim finance solution is

required e.g. Sage and a single accounting system. However there's no immediate benefit in consolidating all the HR systems yet as everyone is working and getting paid. In the future, it's anticipated that we will move to a common services platform with more self service i.e. everyone can do everything themselves online. This is likely to be in a couple of year's time and is part of the operational support centre work stream project.

Q7. What is the staffing plan? Why do colleagues in other areas know theirs?

It's not right or safe to remove staff until we have a staffing level and design agreed with your chief executives. Staffing models need to be underpinned by the right systems, processes and locations in order for us to deliver our services. The delay on the MoJ's strategic partner gateway will affect our ability to fully implement the new operating model (Interchange) and new technology. So until we have all those things in place, the status quo continues.

Other primes have completely different models and it's not right to draw comparisons.

To reiterate, and as stated before, there will be no staff changes until the end of the year. If you are on fixed term or agency contracts, that is a matter for you and your chief executives who are keeping levels under review – as they would in any event. We need the right people in the right places to continue delivering great performance.

Q8. What's the latest on the estates strategy? Some leases are up in the next few months and we don't know where we will be working.

We need to ensure that we have a well planned, safe, effective and cost efficient interim estates strategy. We are working with the MoJ, the NPS and Interserve to ensure that happens. It's quite complex as there are lots of moving parts.

The current position is that we are awaiting agreement on the next steps with the MoJ. Until next steps are agreed with MoJ, anything else is rumour.

The delay to the MoJ's strategic partner gateway has meant that we need to review the proposed interim estates strategy to fully assess the impact this delay might have on proposed moves and the costs surrounding this. The gateway allows us to plug our new case management system (CMS) into it. Our buildings need to have the right infrastructure and technology to be in place in order to use the new CMS. The delay impacts our estates strategy and that's why it's a bit complicated.

All the local proposals have been led by Chief Executives and their teams as it's really important to consider local issues.

The plan is to exit properties where it makes sense to do so e.g. where they are under-utilised or very expensive or not fit for purpose. We will retain properties that we want to keep. We may go into some interim properties as this is a long-term plan given we are here for the next 7-10 years. We may also extend leases on some properties off the back of the MoJ's delay to the strategic partner gateway.

Where there is an immediate or short term exit, there are some plans to move staff into other buildings where we have the right infrastructure. We are not aware of any plans to move staff on an ad hoc basis into partner buildings. There might be good reasons in the longer term but only when the right risk assessments are done and where the operating model is implemented in its new form. If you are aware of local plans to do this in the short term, please let us know.

Q9. It's been suggested that we might work remotely out of a partnership building to see service users but given the recent murder of a security officer, what are you doing about duty of care to ensure the safety of staff and service users?

Remote working is dependent on a number of things and it depends on what you mean by 'remote'. If you mean remote from an administrative HQ office but closer to a service user, the considerations are that proper risk assessments are backed up by clever technology e.g. tracking devices. If the risk assessments are performed correctly that's the best way to ensure our colleagues are kept safe.

Nobody will be sending anybody out into risky situations but what we are committed to is spending more time in front of those people who have offended.

We need to marry those elements up and they aren't mutually exclusive.

There is nothing more important than the safety of the public, the safety of our staff and the safety of other service users. This will be unequivocal and won't be compromised.

Q10. What aspects of Through The Gate do you think are going well?

It was a quite a challenge to mobilise a brand new service with new providers and late in the day. We managed to do that but we are aware that in some prisons, there are still CRC staff and we want to make sure the service is fully delivered by providers.

There are some areas that we need to look at e.g. domestic violence and sex work as they are a core part of the contract. This poses some difficulties but we are working with women's organisations, particularly in the prisons, to make sure that there isn't a gap in that service. We know that this area isn't exclusive to female prisoners and that it should be offered to male prisoners but need to scope the needs to ensure a proportionate response.

We need to look at the whole concept of TTG including any gaps and we have been reviewing it in detail and have a comprehensive plan in place. We have a resettlement service and a community service and we need to properly dovetail to make it feel seamless.

We are only nine weeks in and we've still got some way to go before it's an excellent service.

Q11. Are you centralising all admin support and removing all admin staff from shared buildings with officers?

Centralisation of admin covers a wide range of functions e.g. payroll, back office systems, processing of invoices and what would traditionally be thought of as corporate services back office activities.

There is a move to centralise some aspects already. For example, on health and safety policy and reporting, Hampshire & Isle of Wight are leading as they have resources in place and now do the reporting for all five CRCs. Another example is that we had five company secretarial positions and arrangements are in place to reduce that to two.

When people leave we are taking the opportunity to rationalise. At some point there will be a support centre where we do things like document management, the 24 hour helpline that that will be coming in and possibly IT hosting. This work is ongoing.

The role of case administrator is very different across locations. So we need to look at how the different teams operate and the dynamics that the case administrator provides. The case administrator can act as the oil in the machine and the brief can be wide or specialised depending on where you are. The job title doesn't always do the role justice. One of work streams will be looking at the professional discipline of case admin which is largely misunderstood. The roles of case administrators, POs and PSOs will be looked at in the context of IT, document management, document imaging etc.

There are no plans to pull out case admin wholesale otherwise practice and service delivery would fall over. We want to help reduce admin burden and focus on the case management aspects.

Q12. Will we be issued with new contracts?

No. Your terms and conditions are protected.

There are no plans but the new business model may mean some changes to roles and responsibilities. We are looking at job descriptions through one of the work streams. If there are any changes to job descriptions, normal consultation will apply. With regards to employment contracts, they will remain in place. If there are any new contracts, that will be a matter of choice for existing employees.

Q13. Will our annual salary be reduced?

No we have no plans to do so.

Q14. Will there be a requirement to work weekends?

Many people already work weekends e.g. community payback. If the service design suggests that we are likely to get better outcomes if we work more at weekends or evenings, then we will discuss this with you with a view to finding a way of delivering that.

We will adopt a collaborative approach to working with you especially if this might lead to better outcomes.

Q15. What will our development prospects be?

In 12 months' time, there will be fewer jobs but more opportunities across the wider group than there were previously in the public sector.

We now have five CRCs and there has been some interest from people who are looking to move within CRCs. There are lots of prospects for personal fit e.g. where the geography works for people in a neighbouring CRC.

We have many people who have the right talents that might also fit with our sister Interserve businesses including learning and employment, healthcare and work programme businesses - many of which are located near our CRCs. We also have cluster of offices near the south coast which might work for Hampshire colleagues.

Partners are also ramping up staff levels and are looking for good people so there may be opportunities there that weren't previously.

Q16. When interventions/activities are more integrated into case management this can cause problems with the management of volumes of cases, how will this be managed? Also, many Offender Managers have not received any training in running groups which leaves them vulnerable and the service user may not then receive a proper service from a trained facilitator.

This question relates to a piece of work currently being undertaken in West Yorkshire as part of the West Yorkshire Accelerated Programme which is testing out some of the components of the new model – in this case the integration of case management and interventions. The purpose of testing is to surface what works well, and what is difficult or a problem, so that it can be addressed. Clearly some of the difficulties or concerns are coming to the surface here, which is a good thing as now they can be worked out, as I'm sure they will be as part of this project.

All of our proposed changes need to work for both staff and service users, and we are committed to making them work, including providing training and support where this is

needed. The offender management role does have some variations across the different CRCs, so different issues will arise. Our commitment is to keep an open mind and listen to feedback when we are delivering big changes.

Q17. I understand that 3SC have located and signed up some external companies to provide specific work, however I am concerned that they don't seem to be engaging with staff or organisations in the north of the county to do the same. We are getting PSS cases and have no more resources to work with them, can you please advise how far 3SC are in this process and could they please be more transparent about what is happening?

3SC have been working with the CRCs to firstly, identify existing offender facing services and to establish when the contracts with these providers come to an end.

On the recommendations of the CRC, these existing contracts have either been extended to allow 3SC to further analyse the performance of these organisations with a view to renewing contracts or in a very small number of cases, terminate contracts.

There is a subsequent piece of work 3SC are undertaking with each CRC to identify where there may be gaps in provision. Once identified, the CRC may commission 3SC to source a suitable provider to deliver an identified service based on needs.

This particular issue may be around this current work which is underway. If you have problems locally, please raise with your chief and ask to see the plans. If you feel uncomfortable doing so, you may email us. The plans are there to be discussed. There is a named 3SC lead permanently based in each CRC so please feel free to contact them.

If there is a requirement to contract with a new provider, in the first instance 3SC will check to see if there is a suitable provider in schedule 6 which is the MoJ approved list of supply chain providers we identified during the bid.

Q18. Can you confirm if there will be voluntary redundancies for PO and SPO grades and if so, in what timescale?

We are not planning to make redundancies in this calendar year. Our previous answers to this question remain consistent. As new ways of working come in during transformation, each CRC will publish plans and carry out consultations.

We will offer a voluntary scheme to staff whose posts become redundant. This scheme will of course be subject to consultation.

We are currently not filling corporate services roles as natural churn occurs. As we have five CRCs, we are successfully starting to share functions across CRCs. This is both reducing our overhead costs and promoting shared best practice.

Examples of this are in our standardised approach to health and safety, which is being led from Hampshire & Isle of Wight, and sharing of company secretarial services where we are moving from five separate arrangements to two people supporting our CRCs. We will continue this practice as opportunities to do so arise.

All staff whose posts become redundant will be consulted, there will be a proper process and a voluntary redundancy scheme.