

NOMS Event – Final Thoughts

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Contributions at the **Social Enterprise: Unlocking Opportunity for Ex-Offenders** event demonstrated so many important common themes. You only had to listen to speakers from Probation Trusts to know that across the area of work with ex-offenders, there will be a great deal of change in the future. The encouraging response to that change was highlighted by a delegate who tweeted during the conference: “Greatest encouragement of today? Open minds, willingness to work together and common goals and aspirations”. That is a great principle to take forward from the event.

Like many other areas of public service, commissioning the delivery of activities will, in the future, be the Probation Services’ main role in relation to ex-offenders outside of prison. Many social enterprises should already be geared up to respond to this way of working. Certainly, hearing from Matt Home at Willowdene Farm, his experiences demonstrated not only the benefits, but also the difficulties of cultivating a strong partnership arrangement with commissioning bodies. The main point was that Willowdene has maintained its ethos and services and it ‘sells’ these to Commissioners rather than being a social enterprise that works for the Probation Service.

Another message from the Conference is that being flexible and able to adapt to the changing environment will be essential for social enterprises and this was made clear as the structural and organisational changes being visited upon Probation services were spelt out.

Firstly, many probation services will be put out to market and as such will be subject to increased competition. This will be in a similar way to that affecting police services where, for example, G4S (formerly Group 4 Securitas) has contracted with the Lincolnshire Police Service.

West Midlands & Staffs Probation Trust is piloting a payment by results scheme which scraps multiple targets in favour of one: reduced re-offending by any means or intervention. Again the contract to deliver this is likely to go to a large private sector provider, much as has happened with the Work Programme. But social enterprises, especially if they can form a strong delivery consortium, can play a major role in supporting these contracts. For example, they can bring innovation in service delivery and private sector organisations will be eager to look to partners that can provide that innovative and creative approach that will deliver reduced rates of re-offending.

Another example given was Community Payback which has already been put out to national competition. West Midlands and Staffs Probation Trust is the prime bidder for community payback work in its catchment area. They intend to provide space for social enterprises to contribute to the delivery of these payback services e.g. through supervision of out of hours work, or working with ‘niche’ offenders. So keeping engaged with Probation Trust and monitoring the news on their websites will be important for social enterprises to keep track of opportunities.

At SEWM we will be hoping that we can utilise our national online directory www.buyse.co.uk to advertise ten opportunities over the coming months.

The contributions from those delivery organisations speaking at the event demonstrated how they had responded working in a rapidly changing environment. And in all cases they had remained focused on the client and their needs, such as like Fry Housing with years of experience in working with and providing homes and support for ex-offenders.

Enabling interested organisations to tap into this pool of experience and knowledge is what SEWM has aimed to achieve through the Conference and it was great to observe the enthusiasm of the speakers from Probation for stronger engagement with the social enterprise sector as well as the enthusiastic and informed discussion stimulated by the social enterprises.

'We at SEWM will continue to champion the opportunities for social enterprises to work with NOMS, prisons, probation and rest assured we will be chasing NOMS down for more support and resources so we can continue to keep this topic front of mind!!'

Kevin

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