

National Probation Service Briefing



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NPD BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT UNIT

INTRODUCTION

Business Development Training

In order to sensibly prepare for “contestability” a national training plan for National Probation Service (NPS) staff is now being implemented. It is the intention that, where services are eventually contested, they are won by the public sector provider (i.e. the NPS).

This training plan involves two main events “Advanced Bid Techniques” (the competitive edge) and the “Mock Contestability” exercises.

ADVANCED BID TECHNIQUES

The advanced bid techniques is a course that deals with the (written and unwritten) rules affecting those who wish to put forward award winning bids to commissioners, in our case the Regional Offender Managers (ROMS).

During the course of the training, staff will develop a better understanding of the pressures upon the public sector procurement staff when they administer the bid processes, find out how the winning bidder is chosen and how to influence the decision making process by identifying and selling the unique strengths of the Probation Service.

MOCK CONTESTABILITY EXERCISE

A series of mock contestability exercises will take place throughout the year;

Two regions will submit a regional bid to deliver Unpaid Work (UPW) in “Mid-shires”. If the bids meet the requirements of the ROM, the regional team will be awarded the contract.

The mock exercise also includes a two day training module in service scoping, identifying unit costings, recognising Value for Money (VFM) and marketing the regional service.

The Business Development Unit (BDU) have worked alongside the Commercial and Competitions Unit (CCU) in NOMS, to ensure that the documentation closely matches that which has been used in previous competitive tendering processes in the Prison Service. The CCU will be responsible for managing and providing specialist support to ROMS when they begin to contest services.

Feedback from a previous mock contestability exercise is very encouraging, showing that people are engaged with about the task ahead. Below are some comments from the participants of the last exercise.

- “Stimulating, enjoyable event and lots of valuable tools and techniques”
- “Great opportunity to get a full understanding of the process”

There are also additional training events that will be offered to cover;

1. Marketing ourselves as a business
2. TUPE and the impact of NOMS
3. Stakeholder analysis
4. Identifying effective business models.

CUSTOMER FOCUS

In order to best position ourselves to be the provider of choice for commissioners, we need to ensure our approach is more “customer” focused and we focus on their needs. If areas are to do this effectively they must get a real understanding of what the commissioners are looking for from their supplier, and what they value the most.

In order to facilitate this process, BDU will be approaching commissioners to probe how they envisage working with probation and what they wish to achieve.

A report will then be provided to the Regional Boards and teams. This can be a key document for focusing regional business development strategies and related activities.

BUSINESS EFFICIENCY INITIATIVES

A project has commenced on business process re-engineering supported by NPS Information Communications and Technology (ICT). This will initially focus on supporting the implementation of National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS) and working with NOMS on high level business processes to ensure Areas can maximise the realisation of benefits from NOMIS and other ICT.

This will apply learning from similar initiatives in other government departments and agencies.

VALUE FOR MONEY (VFM) PROJECT

The Value for Money project is an important element of the NPS core business, with clear links to the preparation for contestability. Changes as a consequence of VFM activity allow reinvestment in front line services and are central in Regional/Area business plans for 2006/07.

Following the pilot carried out in Staffordshire Probation Area, the next rollout will be across three regions; West Midlands, East Midlands and London.

BUSINESS ALLIANCES PROJECT

The Government has given a clear and consistent message on the importance of a “plurality of providers” in public services. In order to meet this Government policy the NPS is launching an initiative to increase engagement with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the private sector. As part of this initiative areas have been advised that

5% of the main resource grant (excluding Approved Premises and TPO grant in England and Wales, and also Basic skills in Wales) should be spent on services provided by the VCS. See PC07/2006 for details.

Probation areas are required to include within their business plans arrangements to achieve the 5% target and undertake monitoring and reporting in accordance with PC07/2006. To support areas in this activity NPD has established a Private and VCS Engagement project. As part of this project a National NPD Alliances group has been established to draw on the considerable knowledge of NPS staff and a project manager has now been appointed to lead this work.

COMPETITOR INTELLIGENCE PROJECT

Probation is focusing a real effort on the development of competitive advantage through effective bidding and innovation in service delivery, in addition NPD are putting in place the beginnings of a competitive information strategy.

A competitive information strategy is an area that can deliver competitive advantage in its own right, an advantage that is achieved outside of the service delivery innovation. In order to facilitate this process a competitor intelligence database is being set up which will include information on a range of competitors.

Among other objectives of the competitor intelligence project, the database will provide a mechanism to increase the awareness of NPS staff on market intelligence and issues that affect them and their competitive positioning with the ROMS.

UNIT COSTINGS

This year the BDU is leading for the first time on the national costing exercise. It is intended to introduce a software package as used by most police forces. This package will enable more accurate apportioning of overheads.

A reference group of treasurer/finance managers has been established, chaired by Ben Emm (Chief Officer of Bedfordshire Probation Area) which links into the Project Group chaired by the project manager, Avril Hall (NPD).

It is hoped that the national exercise will allow results to be published before the end of October 2006 to inform Service Level Agreements (SLA) planning and budgeting for the following financial year.

The costing exercise will in the future move towards a more process driven approach to ensure accurate pricing of responses to tenders as we enter the contestability arena.

BEST VALUE PILOT

Two regions, the North West and North East are conducting a Best Value review of unpaid work in preparation for contestability.

The Best Value approach uses the four C's methodology of "Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete". This methodology has been used within Local Authorities and the Police and Fire authorities of England and Wales. Its primary aim is to secure continuous improvement, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Outcomes from the exercise are to be used within Regions to inform best practice and also to feed into the National agenda. In addition linkages have been made with the mock contestability exercises to ensure that maximum results are obtained from the effort and that duplication is avoided.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For information about any of the above projects contact:

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

Further Briefings like this one will be produced as necessary and will be posted on the National Probation Service website at: www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk>News and Updates>Briefings
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