

Paul Harford
Chair – Teesside Probation Board

PH&EL/MC

12 December 2008

Mr N Schneider
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
PO Box 11
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
STOCKTON ON TEES TS18 1LD

Dear Mr Schneider

You may be aware that the Ministry of Justice has confirmed its intention to move forward with a programme of further reform for the Probation Service. This announcement laid out the timeframe for establishing Probation Trusts by April 2010.

The Ministry of Justice and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) have confirmed it will be a matter for Probation Boards to determine the best way forward at an Area level. However, we do know that NOMS considers the financial viability of Probation Areas to be a critical factor in assessing their ability to operate as an independent Trust in a climate where efficient use of public resources will be even more essential.

Following a recent Board meeting in Teesside, a formal agreement has been made to open discussions with NOMS with a view to seeking approval for us, in partnership with County Durham Probation Board, to become a single Probation Trust operating across County Durham and Teesside. While we do not yet know the outcome of these discussions, we are confident our case is a strong one and that our strategy is the correct one.

At the very heart of our strategy is an absolute commitment to continue to work in partnership, at a local level, to maintain and improve the quality and effectiveness of services provided to communities.

In the coming weeks and months we will be in discussions with you about our plans. We are keen to continue our positive working relationships with you and other key stakeholders and to secure your support for our plans which we believe offer us the best opportunity to continue to provide high quality services to our local communities. A copy of our news release is attached for your information.

In the meantime, if you have any immediate queries or comments please contact Elaine Lumley or Paul Harford on 01642 230533.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Paul Harford
Chair

Elaine Lumley
Chief Officer

PRESS RELEASE: 12 DECEMBER 2008

Issued by: National Probation Service – County Durham and National Probation Service – Teesside

Draft release regarding proposed Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust

EMBARGOED UNTIL 10.00 AM FRIDAY 12 DECEMBER 2008

Plans to seek approval to bring together Probation Services in County Durham and Teesside have been announced today.

Already the two Areas collaborate on many aspects of their work. The proposed move to a single structure as part of the Government's programme for establishing new-look Probation Trusts has today been described by the Chairs of the two current County Durham and Teesside Probation Boards as 'evolution rather than revolution'. Its aim is to ensure that together we are better able to deploy our resources to the benefit of front line service delivery.

The new organisation – provisionally called the Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust – would continue to operate at a local level with services based on the relevant local authority or police basic command unit boundaries.

The aim of Probation Trusts is to give local areas greater control over their budgets and provision of services. The first wave of trusts was established in April this year and the Government aims to complete the transition to Trust status across the country by 2010.

It is intended that the proposal for the Durham Tees Valley Trust will be submitted for Government approval in May next year, with the new structure coming into operation in April the following year. A project team to develop the plans is being established and briefings are being organised for staff. Says County Durham Probation Board Chairman Sebert Cox OBE “We see the move to bring our two Areas together under a new Trust as a real opportunity to secure the future of a Probation Service which is viable in organisational terms and delivers increased value for money, yet is still able to reflect local needs and conditions.

“In fact, of course, we are not starting from scratch – as long as 12 years ago we began collaboration in areas such as Human Resources and Staff Development. More recently this has been extended into Finance and Information Technology – and indeed we now have Directors responsible for our front-line services across both County Durham and Teesside.

“So in many respects the proposal we are announcing today is a natural evolution of the process we have been developing over a considerable period. Obviously there is a great deal of preparatory work to undertake before we submit our plans to Government but we are convinced that this is the right way forward is to build in our existing links in order to deliver effective services to our local communities and our partners in the Criminal Justice System”.

Adds Teesside Probation Board Chair Paul Harford “With Trust Status being introduced across the country we have to decide which is the best way forward for our Areas – and only recently the Justice Minister David Hanson made clear in Parliament that the Government would look favourably in locally-initiated proposals for voluntary mergers.

“It is important that as we move forward with our plans we keep our staff and all the many partners we work with – for example judges, magistrates, police, local authorities and local Members of Parliament – involved and informed. Change is always challenging, but we do believe that our long record of working together can make the process very much easier – and it is vital to underline that amongst the most important benefits of the move to a single organisation will be maximising resources for front-line services and removing false geographical barriers, for instance between Hartlepool and Peterlee.

“Already our joint working has reduced administrative overheads by hundreds of thousands of pounds a year – and this should significantly increase with the move to a single trust and management structure. But it is not just about money...what really matters is giving our staff the best possible opportunity to provide a quality service”.

END