**Minutes**

**Online Meeting of Regional and Intergroup**

**Probation Liaison Officers**

**10:00am on Saturday 7th November 2020**

**(held via ‘Zoom’)**

**Attendees:**

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| Maxine W. | Trustee/Board Member for Probation |
| Neal C. | Sub-committee member |
| Gareth P. | Sub-committee member |
| Tessa S. | Sub-committee member |
| David H. | South West Region |
| Andy Mac L | Highlands & Islands Region |
| Hugh S. | Glasgow Region |
| Darren P. | North East Anglia Intergroup |
| David | North West Glasgow Intergroup |
| Michael O | Chiltern & Thames Intergroup |
| Lee D. | Chiltern & Thames Intergroup |
| Tony W. | Hastings & Rother Intergroup |
| Craig C. | Clydebank & District Intergroup |
| Sarah P. | West Kent (Prison LO) |
| Mike W. | Bournemouth Intergroup |
| Marilyn P. | Hastings and Rother Intergroup (Prison LO) |

**Apologies**

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| Ailsa J. | South Glamorgan Intergroup |
| Cameron W. | Coventry & Warwickshire Intergroup |

1. **Welcome, Preamble, 12-Traditions**
2. **Trustee’s update (Maxine W.)**

Maxine welcomed all to the meeting, letting attendees know that it has been arranged in order to exchange news and experiences. Also, and just as importantly it should help members avoid any sense of isolation, especially during the conditions brought about by Covid-19.

Maxine encouraged members to continue to try to make contacts, it’s better to get something done rather than nothing. Make sure we let other AA disciplines know what we are doing and what has happened. We are doing things and stand ready to do more. Our actions are not ‘results based’, we give people information & support where we can, whether in person or online.

1. **Round-up of recent activity from the Regions and across GB**

**Tony W**. said he is brand new to the Probation Liaison position, a role that wasn’t previously filled in Hastings and Rother Intergroup. Consequently, Tony didn’t have anything to report at this time.

**Mike W**. reported that he took up the post for Bournemouth District Intergroup in August 2020. Using the local where to find, he has attended online meetings and taken the opportunity to talk about the chit system when possible and also liaised with the Telephone LO. Mike has received a supply of chits from GSO, sent an introductory letter (derived from the liaison officers pack) to Bournemouth Probation services along with a pdf version of the ‘message to professionals’. Mike has coordinated with the Intergroup PILO and has plans including a supply of posters/literature to go to a local police station when Covid restrictions lift.

**Marilyn P.** (Prison L.O.), said she finds there is quite an overlap between prison and probation liaison work and therefore keen to participate in the meeting. Marilyn has managed to get share magazines and letters into prisons despite lockdown.

**Craig C.** Took on the role in January 2020 and started to make contacts within the court system. He has been in touch with some contacts; however, lockdown has stalled much of service activity.

**David H.** screen-shared and read from his last report to Region. Selected extracts: -

Contact with all South West Intergroups has been made with support offered by David for activity and encouragement to members to fill vacant posts. David will cover gaps where possible, as required. As he is ‘shielding’, his support of outside agencies and meetings for this discipline within AA will have to be online. The new guidance for the chit system and links to it on the AAGB website (online) has been disseminated. Of the 9 South West Intergroups, the majority have been covering probation activity whether by a Probation Liaison or another Intergroup officer (e.g. PI). Some Intergroups have yet to clarify if an officer is in place and some have not yet passed on the officer’s contact details. Four Intergroup reports have recently been submitted to Region with activity including phone calls and emails to courts, to known probation officers and probation hostels. None of these bodies/establishments are able yet to facilitate visits in person due to Covid. (The full report will accompany these minutes)

**Darren P.** took on Probation Liaison as a vacant role. Prior to lockdown, progress had been made with Cromer police and the local council in East Anglia (forming an ‘operating partnership team’) Posters were supplied. Initially some in this team were amazed AA even existed in the UK. It hasn’t been possible to get an invite to their online team meetings yet. Darren is to send meeting lists, contact cards and starter packs for use in custody suites, for offenders where alcohol was involved e.g. drink-drive (and also for police officer use, as applicable). Posters to be sent to magistrates’ courts. Darren has spoken with a local NPS Responsible Officer, but their Senior Responsible Officer has not engaged with us so far. Still communicating with the CRC team who have said “we’ve got it taken care of”. Darren therefore plans to approach individual CRC officers. North East Anglia Intergroup has a PI sub-committee involved with Suffolk public health drug & alcohol rehabs and Darren will be joining the next video meeting with this PI sub-committee.

**Hugh S.** Said that Craig (as above, from Clydebank & District) has been doing a huge amount to support Glasgow Region. There are 3 Sheriff Courts that we have been attending and supporting up until Covid and this will resume when conditions allow. The judges are not compelling offenders to go to AA but have strongly suggested that they should give AA a chance. Starter packs are frequently distributed. There is ongoing liaison with through Social Work Officers and also with contact at the Scottish Parliament. Things are moving in the right direction, with Probation and Prison teams working closely together, which is vital as prisoners need continuity to help their recovery when released.

# **Neal C.** In the Midlands has had two video meetings with the Director of Probation for the West Midlands which have provided an opportunity to explain (i) about AA and our ability support the offenders they work with who have a problem with alcohol and (ii) the chit system. The Director confirmed her support for the rolling out of a chit system pilot on Coventry & Warwickshire. A subsequent meeting was held with Public Health England’s programme manager for drugs & alcohol (Midlands) along with senior West Midlands NPS managers (one and two levels down from Regional Director) where planning for the chit pilot were fleshed out. Coventry & Warwickshire Intergroup during the Covid-19 restricted conditions have continued to take ‘referrals’ from the Family Drug and Alcohol Court and have also joined an online team meeting of Coventry NPS officers to give more information about AA and the chit system. Referrals for ‘pre-release’ one to one meetings with local prisoners have not been possible since March.

**Andy Mac** **L**. Andy works in the criminal justice system and has only just got back into prisons himself. Consequently, no significant AA service activity has been possible in Inverness Intergroup or Highlands & Islands Region over recent months.

**Gareth P.** read from his report to North East Region. One out of the nine Intergroups has a Probation Liaison Officer in place (Durham and Cleveland). Their report confirms that emails have been sent to offender managers in the area. It is hoped that these, and prior contacts, will have led to new members being encouraged into online meetings. It is hoped that a member in Tyne and Wear Intergroup will soon put their name forward for the Probation LO role. Gareth, as Regional Liaison Officer, has offered his support to Intergroups and availability to attend their online meetings. He also reported into Region the current guidance for the chit system for online meetings. Gareth rotates out in January 2021 and so has asked Region to look for potential applicants to take up the role. An appeal for ideas for the new poster was made.

**Sarah P**. Organised a prison workshop for 20th March that had to be postponed, however this was held online via Zoom in October. Prison visits stopped in March with no date yet for a resumption. Literature has been sent to some solicitor firms in West Kent targeting drink-drive cases. Contacts have also been made with a police college in Maidstone and with local courts.

**Maxine** mentioned that back issues of Share magazine (in particular the prison themed edition) are available at no cost from GSO if being provided to those on probation and in prison – they just need to be requested.

1. **The chit system**

**Gareth P**. shared his screen to read through what the sub-committee advises regarding the chit system at online meetings with the preference to issue a physical chit (with the ‘day-glo’ ink that cannot be replicated even with colour printers). Gareth also mentioned Conferences approval of the chit system in 1987 and again in 2017 when their use was extended to use in areas of health, employment and social services.

Chits can be obtained from GSO through requests by Group, Intergroup or Regional officers and will be sent to those officers addresses so long as they are registered with GSO. It is therefore important that Group Information forms (pink forms) are used to keep up contact details up to date. Also, Intergroups and Regionals should make sure GSO is promptly notified of any officer changes. Gareth said that in the North East, the online meeting Host or Co-Host (one male, one female) would ask the newcomer for their phone number so a conversation can take place after the meeting in order to obtain their address so a chit, starter pack and any other relevant literature can be sent out.

**Neal** added that newcomers requiring chits should find it easier in the current conditions to join online chit-friendly meetings as their distance from the meeting is not so relevant. However; they would clearly need to have suitable technology i.e. smart phone, tablet or computer.

1. **New Probation Poster**

**Maxine** askedfor ideas for a more up to date poster for use in cells, police stations, and courts. You don’t need to be an artist – concepts are more important. **Gareth** suggested the wording “would you have done what you did if you hadn’t been drunk” or “would you be here if you hadn’t been drunk” **Sarah P.** suggested two sets of circles containing triangles (similar to the AA logo). The first with the three words “drink-offend-prison” on each side of the triangle. The second circle/triangle with the words “stop drinking-go to meetings-get on programme of recovery”. Sarah also suggested a bottle(or bottles) with handcuffs and words “The 12 step programme can set you free”.

**Maxine** reminded about possible death from withdrawal fits and a need for offender managers to have an awareness of this. Maxine posed the question - how can we get this across in places where alcoholics are ‘held’ that they could die in custody unless offender managers have this knowledge. Maxine hear at least 2 people in her area have died recently. Accepting that we cannot dictate to outside organisations we but can inform. **David H.** commented that a while ago he had completed ‘arrest referral officer training’. He suggested that promoting harm reduction in a custody suite setting would fall under the remit of these officers who have similar training. Perhaps we could approach these people either individually or collectively via an association (if there is one) or their training organisations in order to promote awareness of these critical issues?

**Maxine** suggested the words ‘key to your freedom’ and then asked that any ideas from Region, Intergroup or Groups should be emailed to Neal.

1. **Website**

**Gareth** mentioned that the Electronic Communication sub-committee have sent out an email saying some of contact details are wrong - so can we all check these?

Gareth went through a screen-share demo of the website areas relating to Probation, including: document library, past minutes, Probation/CJS handbook, stories, videos.

**Maxine** confirmed that the Board has agreed to employ a webmaster rather than carry on using an external company for this function. The last two ‘volunteer’ webmasters left due to workload so a paid position may fix this. This position will be open to any suitable candidates whether AA members or not and would join GSO staff. The role will be advertised in AA Service News, the website and externally. Cost will be covered by reducing the charges made by the current contractors for this function. The aim is to develop a more AA user friendly website.

**Maxine** reminded the meeting that we all have a potential input to the website. If we see something wrong or have suggestions for improvement let us know (can send via Neal).

1. **Recruiting and supporting Probation Liaison Officers**

**Maxine** asked the officers attending what help and support they want - both from her as Trustee and also from the sub-committee. If we know, we will do all we can to provide it.

Sponsorship is generally the most effective way to recruit. Attendees were encouraged to show other members the AAGB website and literature. Recruitment and motivation can take place at Regional Assemblies, at Intergroup and meetings of sub-groups. Attendees were reminded to ensure contact details are kept up to date.

1. **Safeguarding**

**Maxine** said that a Board sub-committee has been meeting for over a year to update our Safeguarding document. The proliferation of Zoom meetings has added yet more factors to consider and the work across all disciplines and literature is extensive. It is hoped that the new document will be endorsed by Conference in April 2021. If Conference does not take place, another way will have to be found to seek its approval.

In the meantime, please use common sense to protect other people and protect ourselves. Don’t reveal more about ourselves than we have to. Clearly extra care is needed for vulnerable people. It was pointed out that our safeguarding policy document can help us to secure a place in certain premises. It may be that if we can say that we do have a policy document, we might not necessarily have to actually produce it.

1. **Confirmation of future meetings/events**

Apart from the Zonal meetings already scheduled for 2021 (see details below), it was agreed that another meeting of Regional Liaison and Intergroup liaison officers should be held on a Saturday Morning in early February 2021. Neal was asked to check with staff at GSO to make sure this won’t clash with anything.

1. **A.O.B.** - None
2. **Close and Serenity Prayer** (12:00)

***Postscript:***

Date for next meeting of Regional and Intergroup Probation CJS officers: ***Saturday 6th February 2021 (morning)***

**Zonal meetings for 2021 are planned as follows:-**

Location: **Warrington**

Meeting Date: 7th March 2021

Venue: Hallmark Hotel, Knutsford Old Road, Warrington

Location: **Cambridge**

Meeting Date: 25th July 2021

Venue: Best Western, Bar Hill, Cambridge

Location: **Stirling**

Meeting Date: 26th September 2021

Venue: Stirling Court Hotel, University of Stirling, Airthrey Road, Stirling

Location: **Bristol**

Meeting Date: 24th October 2021

Venue: Holiday Inn, Filton Road, Bristol

***Trustee and Subcommittee contact details***

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