

**THAMES VALLEY PROBATION BOARD**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24 JANUARY 2008  
AT MILTON KEYNES PROBATION OFFICE**

**COMMENCING AT 1.30 P.M. AND ENDING AT 4.30 P.M.**

<b>MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	Yashpaul Anderson	
	Hirak Chakravarty	
	Michael Day	
	Robert Evans	
	Malcolm Fearn	Chair
	Honor Juniper	
	Ian Menzies-Conacher	
	Michael Nolan	
	Phillip Perlin	
	Sue Seager	
	Zoe Smith	
 <b>OFFICERS:</b>	 Paul Gillbard	 Director, Offender Management (Acting Chief Officer)
	Richard Lawrence-Wilson	Board Secretary
	Lesley Hudson	Director, Human Resources
	Sean Quiggin	Director, Interventions
	Malcolm Vine	Treasurer and Director, Finance

**PART 1**

In the morning Board Members visited Great Holm Approved Premises.

1. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Annette Griffiths, Gerry Marshall and Richard Stokes.

2. **Opening remarks**

Malcolm Fearn reported that he and Gerry Marshall had completed their round of 'roadshow' visits just before Christmas. A few staff who had been unable to attend any of the 26 visits had been emailed with the notes of the presentation; these had also been circulated to Board Members.

**Probation Trusts**

Malcolm Fearn said that his strong preference was for Thames Valley to become a Trust in the second wave. His exchange of letters with Roger Hill on this topic had been circulated. Members felt that Roger Hill's response had been unduly negative. Malcolm explained that whilst NPD acknowledged and welcomed TV's current, improved performance, they remained sceptical about it because previous improvements had not been sustained. He personally felt that the improvements were now well grounded. In addition, unlike several of the Areas in the first wave, we had a strategy and business plan showing how we would make further progress. We must however be wary of focusing too much on process.

As previously noted, a positive and convincing self assessment together with a good score on IPPF are prerequisites if we are to persuade Roger Hill that Thames Valley is ready for wave 2.

Malcolm Fearn added that no further information was yet forthcoming about the freedoms and constraints that would be available to trusts, but this should be clear before the next Board meeting as the trust contract was due to be issued and it would be possible to identify the differences between it and our SLAs.

### **Budget for 2008-09**

Malcolm Fearn drew the Board's attention to a paper from Napo titled '*Probation budget crisis*' setting out the position as they saw it Area by Area and forecasting deep service cuts. Lesley Hudson said that she knew from contacts with colleagues in other Areas that much of the paper was inaccurate but the statements about TV were relatively close to the truth. Hiram Chakravarty expressed concern about the effect on staff morale. Malcolm pointed out that he and Gerry Marshall had been very open in their presentations and staff bulletins. There was no bad news hidden anywhere.

Paul Gillbard, speaking as Acting Chief Officer, said that Directors were already giving staff information about the budget. The reality is not as bad as Napo is making out and the increased openness of communication is mitigating the potential for adverse reactions.

3. **Minutes of the meeting of 29 November 2007 (TVPB/M7/2007) and Notes of the workshop of 13 December 2007 (TVPB/P1/2008)**

Honor Juniper said that she had shadowed an offender manager before 29 November (minute 4). Subject to noting the need to correct this point the minutes were **agreed** and signed by the Chair.

The notes of the workshop were **noted**.

4. **Matters arising**

#### **Declarations of interest**

There were no new declarations of interest.

#### **Action list from the meeting of 29 November 2007**

Malcolm Fearn reviewed the action list.

- He had written to congratulate Sue Pearce.
- He had copied the notes of his roadshow to Board members.
- The final strategy document and HR policies were on today's agenda.

The Board Secretary apologised for not having circulated the web references of recent CJS reports and offered to try to identify any in which members had a particular interest.

5. **Performance report (TVPB/P2/2008)**

Sean Quiggin presented the performance report, which had been prepared on an exception basis. He said that the trend was one of continued steady improvement, with 'hot spots' now limited to a few identified activities.

He alerted the Board to problems with data reconciliation, which could lead to embarrassing disagreements. The IPPF comes out quarterly and is accurate, but well out of date by the time it is circulated. In contrast, monthly PROMT data are timelier but are much less accurate. The two sources of data can show different pictures and the distinction between them is not always recognised, especially when comments are made at senior level. One example in the paper was the figure for *Tier 1-3 OASys assessments excluding PPOs completed in 15 days* where PROMT showed a score of 60%, declining, whereas local figures were 79-82% and improving. Members felt that such differences would inevitably undermine confidence in our claim to be producing a good and sustainable performance, but discussion about how to address them was inconclusive.

Malcolm Fearn pointed out that the decision on which Areas will become Trusts in the second wave will be taken on the basis of accurate year-end data, not PROMT.

Sean Quiggin advised the Board that the figure of 9.9 days per head per annum shown for staff sickness absence in December should have been 8.9, the first time the target of 9.0 had been met for some years. Lesley Hudson said that the new sickness policy was being operated effectively although the unions were unhappy and seeking legal advice. Some of the improvement was due to better record-keeping, particularly on return to work. Mike Nolan congratulated managers on a good and successful effort, which he said compared favourably with his experience in the private sector.

Concluding his presentation on performance, Sean Quiggin explained that *Sex Offender Treatment Programme Completions* showed as 5 and not 27 (year to date) because completions only count once the computer system is updated to show that post-programme review reports have been completed. Sean also noted that the rate of unpaid work stand downs was falling rapidly as a result of remedial action and if re-calculated in accordance with PC39/2007 showed a year to date rate of 9.5%.

The performance report was **noted**.

6. **Thames Valley Probation Strategy 2008- 2011 (tabled paper TVPB/P3/2008)**

Malcolm Fearn presented the final version of the strategy document to the Board for approval, prior to its publication and issue to all staff. He said that it set out the vision and mission for TVP for the next three years and would be used for presentations to stakeholders. He acknowledged the help received from Adesse Consultants, paid for centrally, and praised the work of the Directors assisted by several Board Members.

Malcolm proposed to establish a small group to keep an eye on progress and ensure that the strategy is kept on track.

Yashpaul Anderson asked whether the strategy was affordable, given the poor budgetary prospects for the three year period ahead. Malcolm Fearn said that the Treasurer had been closely involved in its preparation and although there was inevitably an element of risk, members could be assured that this was at an acceptable level.

The Strategy was **adopted**.

7. **Capability Assessment Framework (TVPB/P4/2008)**

Sean Quiggin outlined the current position on completion of the self assessment, due for submission by the end of January. A comprehensive first draft had been completed in the style of a contract bid. The draft was now being checked to ensure that sufficient evidence exists to fully support identified strengths, and also that we can live with the expectations that will be engendered – a reality check.

Sean Quiggin said that he would be discussing the completed document with Malcolm Fearn on Monday 28 January. Malcolm said that he would be interesting himself in the star ratings. To be in the frame for the second wave we would need mostly 3 stars with some 4s and not too many 2s. He would focus on whether 4 star ratings are justified and whether 2 star areas can be improved. Michael Day asked if this assessment approach was in use anywhere else and Sean Quiggin said it had much in common with the European Excellence Model, used in Thames Valley and many other Probation Areas.

It was agreed that the completed assessment, as submitted to NPD, would be copied to the Board. Malcolm Fearn felt that the assessment document need not be confidential, but he agreed to Ian Menzies-Conacher's suggestion that this should be checked with NOMS. It would be made available to staff on the intranet.

**Actions**

8. **Finance report (TVPB/P5/2008)**

Malcolm Vine advised the Board that the latest forecast was a modest underspend, within the carry-forward limit.

He was still awaiting unit costing data.

He outlined the assistance being given by Adesse Consulting, who were working on translating the 3 year strategy into a business plan by identifying the overall aims and objectives and then working backwards to establish what needed to happen in years 2 and 1 for these to be achieved by the end of year 3. Managers had completed business cases for all activities, enabling completion of the allocation of resources for 2008-09. He anticipated that the main risks arising from the anticipated limit on resources would relate to increased caseloads and the need for quality improvement.

A review of the offender management Business Plan had been completed and this would be followed by a review of interventions on 11 February, when the business plan would be drawn up. The resources for interventions and support services would be reduced, but he anticipated no need for an announcement of redundancies. The timetable for completion of the business plan was being followed, aiming for approval at the March meeting of the Board.

Malcolm Fearn noted that Adesse are also working on communication of the business plan and on guidelines that will have wide application across the Probation Service nationwide. There will be an update at the workshop meeting in February.

**Action**

The finance report was **noted**.

9. **Risk register (TVPB/P6/2008)**

Malcolm Vine said that the register had been updated as part of preparation of the business plan. Ian Menzies-Conacher added that variations to the register had been discussed at the Audit Committee, focusing in particular on risks associated with national IT contracts and contracts with prisons. In his view the IT-related risks were quite severe and needed identifying separately. This would be reviewed again at the next meeting of the Committee.

The register and associated assurance stocktake were **approved** and **adopted**.

10. **Human resources policies :**  
**Disciplinary and Grievance procedures (TVPB/P7/2008)**  
**Mobility, Redeployment and Redundancy policy (TVPB/P8/2008)**

Lesley Hudson introduced these three policy/procedural documents, explaining that they had been discussed at the JNCC and checked with a barrister specialising in employment law. She now asked the Board to approve them. Robert Evans and others commended the texts for their clarity.

The policies were **approved** and **adopted**.

11. **JNCC minutes, 17 December 2007 (TVPB/P9/2007)**

The minutes were **noted** for the record.

12. **PBA paper: Boards and the Probation Estate (TVPB/P10/2008)**

Malcolm Fearn said that despite the widespread dissatisfaction that was evident from the PBA's survey there seemed to be no prospect of radical change to centralised arrangements for managing the estate, and even Trusts were not expecting to gain freedom to own and control property.

The report was **noted**.

13. **Probation Circulars issued since 29 November 2007 (TVPB/P11/2008)**

The list of circulars was **noted**.

14. **Any other business (part 1)**

**Oral reports from link members**

Yashpaul Anderson reported that he had attended a meeting of the management committee of Elizabeth Fry Hostel for women offenders. They offer a service that is unique in our area and their situation as an independent, voluntary body funded by Government is a sensitive one. Steve Czajewski is working in support of them following recent changes of personnel.

Hirak Chakravarty said he would be reporting on some Health and Safety issues at the next meeting.

Phillip Perlin said that he had completed visits to meet the probation teams at all the prisons in the Thames Valley. He had seen a variety of ways of working and had been struck by the extent to which the effectiveness of the probation

contribution depends on the attitude of prison service management, which can change without warning at any time.

### **Thames Valley Probation logo**

Malcolm Fearn advised the Board that there had been some criticism from the centre of the Board's decision to clarify its role in the Thames Valley community by modifying the national logo to emphasise the word 'Probation' and the local name. He felt that the logo agreed by the Board was a good solution that achieved this aim, enabling the national design and style to be maintained while permitting local and central functions to be distinguished from each other. He would take this line if challenged. Members agreed, and re-iterated their approval of the logo.

### **Service level agreements for 2008-09**

Sean Quiggin reported that there had been two discussions with officers from the ROM's office. An alarming development was the apparent decision of NOMS that national standards, which had previously been aspirational with success being achieved (for example) by meeting 90% or 95% of a standard, were now to be regarded as minima with any performance less than 100% being recast as failure. This change was being hotly argued.

SLAs were on target for completion by early March. Sean agreed to provide an update at the February workshop.

**Action**

### **Internal audit services**

Ian Menzies-Conacher said that he had received a document setting out a framework for the delivery of internal audit services. This could either be adopted as it stood or supplemented with a local SLA. He proposed to put this choice to the next meeting of the Audit Committee for discussion. The Board **agreed**.

### **Forthcoming meetings**

The Board Secretary reminded the Board that the next meeting would be a workshop starting at 10.30 am on Thursday 21 February at Bicester Head Office. The next public meeting would be on 27 March at 1.30 pm. The venue would be Slough Town Hall, by kind invitation of Richard Stokes.

There was no other part 1 business.

### **A resolution to meet in private session was proposed and seconded, and agreed by the Board, by virtue of the nature of the business to be transacted:**

Minute 15: Application of the Home Office standard that Audit Committee minutes and business shall be confidential.

Minute 16 relates to named individual offenders.

Minute 17 relates to decisions about the terms and conditions of employment of the Board's employees.

The meeting closed at 4.30 p.m.