

THAMES VALLEY PROBATION BOARD**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2008
AT BICESTER HEAD OFFICE****COMMENCING AT 2 P.M. AND ENDING AT 4.45 P.M.**

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Yashpaul Anderson	
	Hirak Chakravarty	
	Michael Day	Acting Chair (to minute 4)
	Malcolm Fearn	Chair (from minute 5)
	Annette Griffiths	
	Gerry Marshall	Chief Officer
	Ian Menzies-Conacher	
	Michael Nolan	
	Phillip Perlin	
	Sue Seager	
OFFICERS:	Paul Gillbard	Director, Offender Management
	Gaynor Mackenzie	Director, Human Resources
	Sean Quiggin	Director, Interventions
	Malcolm Vine	Treasurer and Director, Finance
	Richard Lawrence-Wilson	Board Secretary

PART 1

At Malcolm Fearn's request, Michael Day took the chair at the beginning of the meeting.

1. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Arif Hussain, Honor Juniper and HHJ Zoe Smith. Malcolm Fearn was attending a Probation Association Council meeting in London.

2. **Minutes of the meeting of 26 June 2008 (TVPB/M4/2008)**
Notes of workshop meeting of 24 July 2008 (TVPB/P45/2008)

The minutes were **agreed** and signed by the Chair.
The notes of the workshop meeting were **noted**.

3. **Matters arising**

Declarations of interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

Action list from the meeting of 26 June 2008

- The Board's comments on the reward scheme had been discussed by senior managers.
- The Board had been provided with copies of the news items that had been added to the intranet and noted the substantial workload involved in its maintenance. It was important to review the intranet but this should be postponed to the January meeting due to the additional work involved in the Sentencers Conference in October.
- A report from HR on staffing in Approved Premises was on the agenda.

- Gerry Marshall said that he had so far visited the CEOs of five local authorities. The general issue addressed was how parties to LAAs can be held to account. Specific examples where TVP needed to be sure of deliverables provided by local authorities were provision of accommodation in Reading and employment support in Slough. The actions on LAAs were carried forward.

4. **Performance report April-July 2008 (TVPB/P46/2008)**

Sean Quiggin presented the paper, highlighting the substantial reduction in the reporting cycle, with reports now becoming available on the 15th of the subsequent month. He paid tribute to the staff effort that had gone into this improvement, which was welcomed by the Board.

Sean Quiggin said that the IPPF was still in flux and at this stage there was no overall grading. Looking ahead, he expected that by the end of 2008-09 TVP would be performing at three-star/green level, but the grading for the whole year would not be that good. The mixed quality of data on OASys-based indicators in the national database was of some concern. He added that the IPPF for the first quarter had been re-issued twice, and some numbers in it had been different in each of the three iterations.

Paul Gillbard clarified that the grading for the full year was expected to be amber. In the Public Protection domain the numbers quoted centrally and by TVP were converging. It was essential to organise data collection in the correct way; for example, a PPO must be closed and reopened for each court appearance or new order, to ensure there is a final risk assessment and TVP statistics are optimised.

Paul Gillbard identified a typical difficulty affecting the figure for timeliness of court reports. For reasons of economy, where a prison is over 50 miles away TVP staff are not allowed to travel to conduct an interview and if the prison has no video-conferencing facilities this creates a built-in performance deficit. Phillip Perlin asked if such factors could mean the 90% target is unattainable and Paul Gillbard felt this could be a possibility. However the targeting was improving and this would lead to improved PSR results.

The performance report was **noted**.

Michael Day relinquished the chair to Malcolm Fearn.

5. **Chairman's and Chief Officer's oral reports**

Reporting from the morning meeting of the Probation Association Council, Malcolm Fearn said that the PA appeared to be recognised as the voice of Boards and Trusts and had a seat on the property forum. The PA will be consulted on IT, bench-marking and costing and there will shortly be a questionnaire about workload. However, NOMS generally is very dominated by the prison service and focused on prison issues, with a command-and-control approach.

Phil Wheatley, head of NOMS, had spoken to the PA Council. He had emphasised efficiency in the context of increased demand with no new money. His view of probation was that there were too many layers of management above SPO and too much time being spent on management.

The tests that will be applied when Trusts are created are currently with Ministers for approval but are expected to reflect this view and will focus on the cost and quality of

management, together with performance and costs. The transition to Trust status may take place whenever a Board is ready and can pass the test. An area that fails the test may be subject to market testing.

Malcolm Fearn expressed his concern that it would be difficult to prove to the Centre that we are doing well. Gerry Marshall was concerned that the complexity of the probation task, for example the complex MAPPA or LAA processes with much liaison required between very different, independent organisations, was not appreciated at the Centre. Board members shared these concerns.

Sue Seager asked about the position on Directed Improvement. Malcolm Fearn said that as the decision on this had been due to be related to the IPPF score, and IPPF was itself changing, the position was unclear. However, sustainability of improved performance is the key. He hoped to learn more from Phil Wheatley at a meeting of all Board and Trust Chairs on 25th September.

Gerry Marshall listed additional points from the Chief Officer's perspective:

- Business planning would begin again with a Strategy Group meeting in 2 weeks time
- He had complained to Roger Hill about lack of progress on the Oxford accommodation project. He was advised that the business case had been accepted but more information was required from the Centre. There was an urgent need to obtain permission for a go-ahead next year so that talks can begin with prospective landlords.

Action GBM/MV

- A new management structure had been announced to staff – as featured in the intranet news recently circulated to the Board. A new structure chart will be issued when all moves of individuals have been agreed.

6. **Unit Costing (TVPB/P47/2008)**

Malcolm Vine explained that the unit costings presented were the final version of 2007-08 budget figures, excluding the additional £40 million (TVP £1,360k). Comparable costings for all 42 probation areas will become available in due course, and costings will be recalculated using actuals for the year. In general TVP costs look below average and this may be attributable to a high caseload with lower cash than average. Significant variations now need to be investigated. Some may arise from the way costs have been allocated by different areas, which Malcolm Vine hoped would emerge at meetings with other Treasurers.

Hirak Chakravarty expressed doubt as to whether differences between areas could ever be sufficiently well understood to make comparisons meaningful. In his view the main use of the costings would be to chart year-by-year progress within TVP, once a time series had been established. Ian Menzies-Conacher agreed. Malcolm Fearn commended the work as a good step in the right direction and the Board noted the report.

7. **Year to date finance report (TVPB/P48/2008)**

Malcolm Vine said that the underspend shown in the year-to-date report was no surprise. Expenditure that was skewed towards the end of the year, such as staff salaries and trainee costs, would bring the spend and budget back towards balance.

The report was **noted**.

8. **Annual audit letter (TVPB/P49/2008)**

Malcolm Vine reported that recent advice from NOMS indicated that the international reporting standards would not be fully applied for 2008-09 and only 'shadow figures' would be required.

Ian Menzies-Conacher explained the problems inherent in assessing the provision to be accrued for annual leave, because every member of TVP staff has a personal leave year. Moving to a system with a common leave year would create operational problems. The Audit Committee had discussed the risk that the accrual might change significantly from year to year, with an impact on funding. There were several options for dealing with this and Malcolm Fearn asked for a statement on these so that he could consider writing to the Probation Association raising questions about how NOMS would be handling the matter.

Action

The annual audit letter was **received and noted**.

9. **Health and Safety Report for 2007-2008 (TVPB/P50/2008)**

Lesley Hudson reported that in the absence of a Health and Safety Officer the annual report was briefer than usual and there had not been time to collate and analyse the statistics. She was pleased to report that an appointment had recently been made and Mr Eddie Eaves would be taking up his post towards the end of November.

Lesley Hudson said that whilst the post had been vacant she and Gaynor MacKenzie had been dealing personally with Health and Safety issues and this had given them useful fresh insight into the recording of incidents and related aspects of management.

The stress survey had been a major piece of work and a fuller report on that would go to the Health and Safety Committee and the Workforce Group. Operational issues had included review of the group size of programmes and the need for receptionists, and the introduction of 3-day IOSH-accredited courses for management. Key job security systems had been a big issue around the changeover of facilities management contractor, but all difficulties had eventually been resolved.

The report was **noted**.

10. **Communications strategy (TVPB/P51/2008)**

Introducing the strategy document, Gerry Marshall gave apologies from Fiona Tarrant. He said that current pressures arising from the forthcoming Sentencers Conference and the introduction of the intranet had slowed progress. Action plans flowing from the strategy would follow once the conference was over.

Sue Seager said that the strategy made perfect sense. Careful forward planning was essential, as resources were slim. The long term effort required to maintain the intranet had not been assessed, although she was confident that it would deliver savings and efficiency gains compared with paper-based systems. There would certainly be a permanent need for editorial overview.

Yashpaul Anderson wondered whether a new post of editor might be needed. Gerry Marshall said that even half a post would be a very substantial increase in the resources devoted to communications, currently 1.5 posts. TVP was already

deploying somewhat more than average resources, for example Surrey and Sussex each have just one communications person. However, he acknowledged that the service as a whole had benefited from TVP's investment, regionally and even nationwide, through use of material originated by Fiona Tarrant at very low cost. The information pack produced for Magistrates' retiring rooms was one example.

Sue Seager said that in contrast to probation's modest resources the Thames Valley Police employ 35 staff in their communications section.

The strategy was **adopted**.

11. **Information security update (TVPB/P52/2007)**

Sean Quiggin said that it was necessary to improve security practices in TVP to meet government standards and mitigate the reputational and other risks of data loss and leakage of restricted information. IT systems were reasonably secure but hard copy papers and files were less easy to control. He was conducting a campaign aimed at achieving a cultural shift across the whole organisation. Unannounced inspections of offices were already having an effect in encouraging compliance with the clear desk policy and secure storage of documents.

Richard Lawrence-Wilson mentioned the problems created by unnecessary use of security markings. He would aim to minimise the number of Board papers and other documents that were classified as restricted, to avoid the special transit and storage requirements that apply. Board members agreed that restricted papers should no longer be sent out and instead should be available in hard copy on the day of the meeting, to be read before business commenced and to be collected for shredding at the end of the meeting.

The report was **noted**.

12. **Serious further offences – interim report**

In view of the details in the report, which could lead to individuals being identified, the Board decided that it should be restricted and that future reports on SFOs should appear in Part 2 of the Agenda.

13. **Audit Committee – minutes of meeting of 5 September and Risk Register (TVPB/P54 and 55/2008)**

Ian Menzies-Conacher introduced these papers, advising the Board that the Risk Register was work-in-progress and the Audit Committee had noted that changes would be needed, partly due to the continuing implementation of the new 4risk system. Future iterations should introduce a numeric scale to assess the likelihood and impact of risks, and should include details of mitigation that had reduced the level of risk so that there would be an audit trail leading to the residual risk that the Board was asked to accept. Gerry Marshall said that it was hard to determine the level of explanation to be provided – for example, quite different, separate risks relating to a number of buildings were rolled up into one corporate risk.

The Register will be updated and brought back to the Board via the Audit Committee.

Action

Yashpaul Anderson had alerted the Audit Committee to a statement from NOMS IT Section that the IT system contract contained no explicit provision for disaster recovery. The Committee was continuing to take a close interest in IT.

Ian Menzies-Conacher drew the Board's attention to the comment of the auditors that members of the public who were present in an area where an Unpaid Work team was working could easily be mistaken for slackers. Sean Quiggin explained that there were reasons why high visibility clothing was not used except for safety purposes. Other ways of mitigating the reputational risk were preferable.

The minutes of the Audit Committee and the Risk Register were **noted**.

14. **JNCC meeting of 15 September 2008**

Malcolm Fearn reported orally from the recent JNCC meeting. He said that discussions were continuing on the 2008 pay settlement. It had been hoped that agreement would be reached before the end of the week but this now seemed unlikely. Similarly no conclusion had been reached on the national workload measurement tool. Other issues discussed at the meeting had included the stress survey and sickness absence policy.

15. **Knowledge Management (TVPB/P57/2008)**

Board members noted the paper and asked officers to maintain a watching brief. They did not favour any deployment of TVP resources.

16. **Probation Chiefs Association (TVPB/P58/2008)**
Probation Association – Response to consultation on Titan Prisons (TVPB/P59/2008)
Probation Association – Report & Accounts for 2007/08
Probation Circulars issued since 26 June 2008 (TVPB/P60/2008)

These papers and reports were **noted**.

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

Audit of Approved Premises

It was noted that this would take place shortly, in accordance with Probation Circular 13/2008, and would be moderated by Hampshire. A score of 28 or 29 out of a maximum 30 was expected.

Reports from link members

Phillip Perlin reported that prison officers at Woodhill were contributing to OASys as part of the joined-up offender management arrangements, which he felt was a vote of confidence. IT links to prison-based staff remained a problem; for example, they cannot access the intranet, which would be very useful both for its content and as a channel of communication. He said there was a need to co-ordinate all prison secondments and suggested that Gerry Marshall might do another prison-focused event.

Unpaid Work – update (TVPB/P61/2008)

Sean Quiggin asked the Board to delete the second and third sentences of paragraph 20 of the report. The contract with Rainer Crime Concern is being funded from savings in staff salaries.

The report was **noted**.

Forthcoming meetings

Workshop meeting: Talisman House, Bicester; 10.30 am Thursday 16th October.

Next public meeting: 27th November at 1.30 pm at Newbury.

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:

- Minutes 18, 19 and 20 relate to matters concerning identifiable members of the public or decisions affecting individual members of TVP staff.