

THAMES VALLEY PROBATION BOARD**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 14 JUNE 2007
AT GREYFRIARS HOUSE, READING****COMMENCING AT 1.30 P.M. AND ENDING AT 4.50 P.M.**

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Yashpaul Anderson	
	Hirak Chakravarty	
	Michael Day	
	Robert Evans	
	Malcolm Fearn	Chair
	Honor Juniper	
	Ian Menzies-Conacher	
	Michael Nolan	
	Phillip Perlin	
	Sue Seager	
IN ATTENDANCE:	Michael Yeats	External auditor (to minute 7)
OFFICERS:	Paul Gillbard	Director, Offender Management
	Richard Lawrence-Wilson	Board Secretary
	Gaynor Mackenzie	Director, Human Resources
	Sean Quiggin	Director, Interventions
	Riana Taylor	Deputy Chief Officer
	Malcolm Vine	Treasurer and Director, Finance

PART 1**1. Apologies**

There were apologies from Annette Griffiths, Gerry Marshall, Zoe Smith and Richard Stokes.

2. Opening remarks

The Chair said that nationally probation performance in 2006-2007 had been the best ever and Thames Valley had moved up to 25th place in the 'league table' of 45 Areas, having started the year amongst the bottom 6 Areas that were subject to 'special measures'. This was a dramatic improvement and he thanked and congratulated the staff. He would write a letter to staff after the meeting he was due to have with the National Director of Probation on 19th June, when he hoped that 'special measures' would be terminated.

Action

He informed the Board that Riana Taylor, Deputy Chief Officer, would be leaving the Area before the next Board meeting in September. She would be sorely missed and he thanked her for all the work she had done in her time with Thames Valley. He was grateful to her for delaying her departure until after the OM Inspection in July.

The Chair said that new Board Members in some other Areas had had the opportunity to shadow an offender manager for a day as part of their induction

training. In Thames Valley he had agreed that this should be postponed until after the OM Inspection but now that the inspectors had identified the sample of cases to be examined it should be possible to pair Members with managers who would not be involved in the inspection. He asked the Board Secretary to work with Paul Gillbard on arranging for this.

Action

3. **Minutes of the meeting of 26 April 2007 (TVPB/M4/2007)**

Sean Quiggin asked for the words “*hostel managers and*” to be added to minute 17 specifying roles to be reviewed as part of the review of Approved Premises. Subject to this addition the minutes were agreed as a correct record. A copy was amended, and signed by the Chair.

4. **Matters arising**

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Action list from the meeting of 26 April 2007

The Chair and Board Secretary reviewed the action list.

- As already mentioned the Chair would write a letter to staff after his meeting with the National Director of Probation on 19th June.
- (*Secretary's note*) The 2007-08 Business Plan has been added to the TVPA website.
- No Members had expressed concern about the tasks allocated to them.

Link Members

The Chair said that there would be an opportunity at each meeting for link members to bring current issues to the attention of the Board. He asked whether link members had made contact with their respective lead officers. About half had done so.

5. **Performance**

National performance report 24: end-of-year 2006-2007 (TVPB/P70/2007)

Riana Taylor presented the report, which she said was overall good news for TVPA. The results had been reported and discussed in some detail at the April meeting. The key area of concern remained the timeliness of court reports and the Board was already aware of the Action Plan being followed to address this.

Ian Menzies-Conacher pointed out that probation Areas were of many different sizes, which was likely to affect performance. Riana Taylor agreed. She said that attempts had been made to take account of size but they had been abandoned. Size was one of many differences that might be felt to invalidate direct comparison of performance between Areas.

Local performance reporting (TVPB/P71/2007)

Riana Taylor circulated a draft Board Report comprising a summary sheet focused on financial incentive scheme items, backed up by comments and action points, and examples of supporting graphs that could be produced. She

said that this could be aligned to the new Integrated Probation Performance Framework (IPPF) as that was developed in the coming year.

The Chair said that the actual targets to be included in the report would be derived from the national IPPF. Michael Day commended the format and said it was very useful to have direct and frank comments in such a report. It was agreed that graphs should be restricted to the two or three measures that were currently of most importance. The Chair asked if Board Members were content with the new format and there was general assent.

'IPPF Lite' (TVPB/P87/2007)

The Chair explained that 'Lite' was intended to indicate that the new system was unfinished. Additional items were likely to be brought in during the year. However the Thames Valley position for 2006-07 in IPPF had been established using an initial set of measures and the Area was defined as being in the one-star group. This would apply for the whole of the coming year. The reason that the new system placed Thames Valley back in the lowest group was weakness in performance against national standards, as distinct from government targets.

Michael Day asked if the national standards were stable. Riana said that new standards are awaited although not much change is expected. The set of standards is very bulky, running to many pages, and we need to analyse which ones are most important in the new performance regime and to identify any quick wins. The Chair agreed that as standards had replaced the weighted scorecard we would need to re-prioritise.

Honor Juniper expressed concern that after so much hard work on successfully raising performance against the previous targets, we now looked bad against the new ones. This was not good for morale. The Chair agreed that staff had worked hard and successfully to meet previous targets. Riana said that a training session would be held once the OM Inspection was over. Hiram Chakravarty warned that focussing on specific problem categories may not necessarily raise overall performance.

Sean Quiggin said the new system bore a strong resemblance to the system introduced for the police from 1999 onwards. This has eventually been seen as an effective driver of performance. Mike Nolan warned that people can start to manage targets not workloads, and the Chair agreed this was a danger. He undertook to come back quickly to the Board with a new report.

Action

The reports on performance were **noted**.

6. Annual report and accounts (TVPB/P75/2007) and Annual Governance Report (TVPB/P76/2007)

Malcolm Vine introduced the annual report and accounts, mentioning difficulties that had been faced due to the retirement of the Finance Manager in December. He thanked staff in the finance section for their hard work, which had enabled today's deadline to be met. He added that there remained work to be done to improve the risk register and to address value-for-money issues. These were the areas for improvement in the forthcoming year. Robert Evans said that recognition should be given to the Finance Team for meeting the ever tighter deadline for the annual accounts, particularly with the currently reduced level of staff.

Michael Yeats from the Audit Commission, TVPA's external auditor, presented the auditor's draft Annual Governance Report. He explained that two external auditor's opinions were given each year, one on the accounts and one on the use of resources, or value-for-money. These reports have to be presented to 'those charged with governance'. He drew the Board's attention to three key messages, set out on page 5, all positive. Firstly, there would be an unqualified opinion on the accounts; secondly he expected to have no issues to bring to the attention of the Board; and thirdly the opinion on the Use of Resources would also be unqualified.

Michael Yeats went on to highlight concerns about the need for an adequately resourced finance function, and the importance of activity-based costing being correctly set up from the beginning. He said these concerns were important, but not material in terms of the audit opinion. Robert Evans noted the comment about the lack of SLAs to cover secondment to prisons and asked whether this applied in other parts of the budget. Malcolm Vine replied that historic agreements have been rolled over but it is time for a radical review across the whole Area. Phillip Perlin said that agreements he had seen were not as detailed as they should be, and Gaynor Mackenzie agreed that some were very old and out of date. Sean Quiggin added that the Prison Service is becoming interested in this and starting to ask exactly what the Probation Service deliver against its payments.

The Board **approved** the Annual Report and Accounts and the Management Letter of Representation for signing by the Chair, Chief Officer and Treasurer, subject to any final amendments from external audit, NOMS Finance or from the audit sign-off of the pension administrators' accounts.

7. **Finance report: budget for 2007-08**

Malcolm Vine said that he would usually report on the first two months of expenditure in the third week of June. Today was too early, but he could advise the Board on staff costs, which are by far the largest component of spend. They were underspent by £30k in April and by a little less in May. However, TPOs (trainee probation officers) would be taken on in the autumn, which would increase the salary bill. Overall the position was reasonably comfortable, with some savings due to staff vacancies and the cautiousness of managers in a tight year.

The oral finance report was **noted**.

8. **Gender equality scheme (TVPB/P77/2007)**

Gaynor Mackenzie introduced the draft scheme, which aimed to satisfy new duties under the Equality Act 2006. She said that amongst employment aspects of the scheme there was concern at the low proportion of men in the probation service workforce nationwide, especially as the opposite is true of offenders. A strategy and action plan for working with women offenders has been developed at regional level, led by Sue Pearce.

All specified equality factors will be monitored and the resulting statistics will be considered at the Board's Diversity Group.

Michael Day said that the gender imbalance in the probation workforce was longstanding and he wondered if anything could be done to address it. Gaynor replied that recruitment efforts were already targeted. Ian Menzies-Conacher said that it was difficult to identify specific targets in the paper. Gaynor Mackenzie said that there were underlying aims including, for example, to

increase the number of men employed, but it was not felt wise to set specific targets.

Robert Evans drew attention to the requirement that gender equality principles must be applied to voluntary and private sector partners when contracting out.

There was some unease amongst Board Members about the format and content of the document. Gaynor Mackenzie explained that a template issued by NOMS had been followed. Sean Quiggin said that a quick check of other published schemes showed a similar format, suggesting that the format may flow from the way the Disability Discrimination Act is drafted. The Chair suggested that the first five pages might be omitted. Gaynor said that they might be put into an annex and the Chair agreed that this should be discussed outside the meeting.

Action

It was suggested that the Regional Women Offenders Strategy at appendix B should be prioritised and Gaynor said that actions would be put in priority order by Sue Pearce by the autumn.

Action

The draft Gender Equality Scheme was **approved** subject to minor amendments to be made following further discussion outside the meeting.

9. **Stress management policy (TVPB/P78/2007)**

Gaynor Mackenzie said that sickness, stress and workloads were all inter-related issues and a stress management policy provides managers with an essential tool. She said that associated training for managers had been discussed and agreed at the Health and Safety Committee.

Minor corrections of the last two bullet points on the first page were noted and 'NPS – Thames Valley' would be altered to Thames Valley Probation Area.

The policy was **approved**.

10. **Oral report from the JNCC meeting of 7 June**

The Chair reported that the JNCC had considered the Area's new sickness management policy. NAPO had agreed to a trial of the proposed management system but Unison had registered a failure to agree. The new policy was consistent with the recently issued national policy but went further in some respects. Management had pointed out that the national policy was only a model but Unison wished to stick to it.

On the issue of workloads, the national model assesses each task in hours while TVPA has adopted a points based system. The unions are not happy with this. NAPO has notified Gerry Marshall that we are in dispute with them, as part of a national campaign. Gerry has received letters from individual members of staff saying that their workload is too high, and he is obtaining a specific response to each letter from the relevant manager. Gaynor Mackenzie explained that once 12 letters have been received NAPO will write to the HSE. The HSE will expect to see evidence from management showing what has been done in each case.

The Chair said that he could see no prospect of a reduction in workload. Gaynor Mackenzie felt that NAPO were hoping for an offer of more money.

Riana Taylor said that each letter was being looked at to identify any health and safety issues. These may be referred onwards to the occupational health service, or may serve to identify 'hot spots' that require intervention.

Phillip Perlin said that the HSE will need to know that we have a policy, what action it specifies and that managers understand what they have to do. They will not get involved directly in assessing or setting workloads.

The Chair concluded his oral report from the JNCC by mentioning the review of the system of essential user car allowances, which are currently paid to staff on certain grades independent of need.

The report was **noted**.

11. **Health and Safety Annual Report (TVPB/P79/2007)**
Health and Safety Committee minutes, 19 April 2007 (TVPB/P80/2007)

It was reported that Hiram Chakravarty had agreed to represent the Board on the Health and Safety Committee, in succession to Dr Gillian Cohen.

The Annual Report and minutes were **noted**.

12. **Value for money and subcontracting (TVPB/P81/2007)**

Malcolm Vine reported that he had attended a meeting with the ROM at which Areas had been encouraged to look for new possibilities for contracting out. This had been further discussed at a meeting of Treasurers from the region. There was a feeling that insistence on contracting out was weakening.

He said he expected Thames Valley to have contracted out in excess of 5% of the budget in 2006-07 and he anticipated that this would exceed 8.5% and possibly approach 10% in 2007-08. The Chair said that NOMS were now talking about introducing Best Value reviews.

The paper was **noted**.

13. **Thames Valley Probation and Sentencers Forum (TVPB/P82/2007)**

Michael Day, Chair of the Forum, said that it remained a very valuable channel for communication and a forum for debate.

14. **Probation Circulars issued since 1 January 2007 (TVPB/P83/2007)**

Noted.

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

The Chair said that this would be the point in the meeting at which he would in future ask Chairs of groups, and Link Members, to report. He said that apart from the Audit Committee and the JNCC the agenda of groups would be set by the lead officer, with Board Members attending to advise, assist and report back to the Board.

The Chair reported on his attendance at the second day of an induction programme for new Board Members. He had learned that some Boards receive a regular dossier of media reports and he had contacted Fiona Tarrant to ask whether this would be feasible in Thames Valley. Sue Seager added that the information coming to the Board could include material that has gone

out since the last Board meeting, such as internal newsletters and external publications.

The Chair said that it would be desirable to continue and develop the practice whereby Board Members attend final sessions of accredited programmes to present completion certificates. He said that Honor Juniper and Sue Seager are keen on helping to get magistrates and other Board Members involved.

Regarding training, he said that the Area needed to concentrate on ensuring that junior and middle managers are equipped to pursue the Area's objectives. He would review what we currently do.

Honor Juniper drew attention to the diverse list of audiences for LCCS presentations and asked Board Members to provide contact details for further audiences.

Action

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 16 (Agenda item15): Relates to negotiations with the Board's employees

Minute 17 (Agenda item 16): Application of the Home Office standard that Audit Committee minutes shall be confidential.

The meeting closed at 4.50 p.m.

16. **Forthcoming meetings**

Workshop meeting: **Thursday 26 July** at Revelstoke House, Slough, starting at 10.30 a.m.

Next public meeting: **Thursday 27 September 2007** at the Guildhall, Abingdon, starting at 1.30 p.m.

SignedMalcolm Fearn..... Dated: 27 September 2007
CHAIR