

THAMES VALLEY PROBATION BOARD

**NOTES OF A WORKSHOP MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 12 DECEMBER 2008
AT HEAD OFFICE, BICESTER, STARTING AT 10.30 AM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Yashpaul Anderson, Michael Day, Malcolm Fearn (Chair), Honor Juniper, Gerry Marshall (GBM), Ian Menzies-Conacher, Phillip Perlin, Sue Seager.

OFFICERS: Paul Gillbard, Richard Lawrence-Wilson, Gaynor Mackenzie (GM), Sean Quiggin, Malcolm Vine.

APOLOGIES: HIRAK Chakravarty, Annette Griffiths, Arif Hussain, Michael Nolan, HHJ Zoe Smith.

1. **Board Chair's opening remarks**

MF reported that TVP was officially out of 'directed improvement'. This allowed us to apply for Trust status.

Roger Hill would take up his post as DOM (Director of Offender Management) for the South East Region on a part time basis from 2nd January. He had already announced 3 initiatives to be pursued immediately:

- Reduction of costs in his part of the NOMS central structure by 25%
- Preparation of a common regional business plan for Probation and HMPS
- Merger of the existing 2 prison areas.

Roger Hill has set up a regional Board on which John Steele (Sussex) is the representative Board Chair and Gerry Marshall is the representative Chief Officer, along with managers from HMPS. MF said that Gerry's selection was a tribute to the distance TVP had travelled under his leadership, and he deserved congratulations for turning round the performance so far as to be recognised in this way.

MF reported that Peter Chapman, an Oxfordshire magistrate, had received a national LCCS award. Some funding for the extension of LCCS was being provided. Honor Juniper said that TVP's progress and expertise had been recognised and we were training two other Areas.

MF said that there had been a difficult moment at the recent JNCC when he and GBM had had to admit that they had made an error in failing to give the unions advance notice of the details of the latest possibility for the Oxfordshire re-site project, before these details were given to staff. Staff at Banbury were especially alarmed, but he had emphasised that nothing had yet been fixed – indeed, negotiations about the possible building in Botley, central west Oxford had not even begun.

MF added that he had told the JNCC that current budgetary proposals would mean 140 fewer FTE staff by 2011, as explained at the last Board meeting.

GBM said that the confused position on future training of POs and PSOs, with no details or funding plans yet announced for 2009 onwards, needed to be recorded

as a high level risk in the TVP Risk Register. Additionally, the position of the South East Training Consortium, which is jointly funded by the 5 SE Probation Areas, is very challenged.

2. **Finance update**

MV reminded the Board that he had reported in November that we were aiming to reduce spend by £600k by the end of the financial year, intending this to produce an underspend of around £125k to carry forward to help mitigate budgetary problems in 2009-10. The centre were now seeking an underspend from all Areas but his latest view was that TVP was more likely to break even. We were less able to find quick savings because we had put in hand real, relevant actions to commit the additional funding we had received to help reduce the prison population, which had not been done in some parts of the country.

3. **Strategy refresh**

GBM said that on receiving the news about likely funding cuts over the three-year strategy period one might have felt inclined to tear the strategy up. However, he and MF believed it was important to maintain a strategy as a guide to the desired direction of travel. It was not sensible to re-publish it every time there were changes but it would be a cornerstone document when the time came to bid for Trust status, and we should be ready to produce an up to date draft for our partners when required.

GBM said the dates and milestones had been updated. He would need to change the introductory passages relating to finance. MF said that a two-year budget had been promised for January.

MF explained the idea behind the SBC approach (Specification, Benchmarking and Costing). Ongoing work by NOMS would provide the context for our planned application for Trust status, to be submitted in May. First indications from work on SBC are that TVP is assessed as capable of producing savings of £900k in 2009-10, substantially more than the £600-700k we had estimated as our pro rata share of the £20M total reduction. This does not seem to be consistent with other indications that TVP is relatively underfunded for its workload. Members asked if £900k was a definite target; they felt it was very challenging, especially as there was little time to implement changes and no provision for transition costs, which would have to be covered by additional savings. MF said the target was definite but these points could be made in the response.

4. **European excellence model**

GM said that the results of the latest EEM assessment had been positive in all areas, showing steady improvement, especially in the sections relating to leadership and people. However, what was needed now was much more rapid improvement; a step change in efficiency. The business improvement managers need to deliver quickly.

Communication has improved, thanks in part to the intranet and the system of team meetings. We need to find ways of moderating a tendency towards elitism, which has potentially adverse effects on productivity and morale.

MF said that the EEM assessment shows that if we were not faced with cuts we could look forward to steady incremental improvement. Members wondered if it

might not be better to abandon the move to Trust status, but were persuaded that this was not realistic politically. Even if Trusts are little different from Boards the centre will wish to gain reassurance from the test process.

5. **Joint working and business planning**

GBM said that we were working with Hampshire and consultants Ad Esse on proposals for joint working. Ad Esse will also help us with the Trust application, which will be led by Sean Quiggin. A draft will be presented to the Board in March. There will be a regional challenge session in April from Areas that have already applied and been through the test process.

Business Planning for 2009-10 will be completed by 14th January and an outline plan will come to the Board meeting on 22nd January. The Service Level Agreement has to be with the DOM by the end of January, so all timescales are tight. We also need to keep staff informed.

MF summarised:

- The Strategy will be appropriately amended but not re-published.
- We have to plan for reductions of £900k; the management team will determine how.
- We must take the staff along with us.
- There has to be a 3 to 4 year plan, although later years will be more sketchy.

PG said that with staff reductions in view, the timing and nature of communication with staff needs careful thought. He advocated face to face meetings and warned against delays which could allow hares to start running.

6. **Senior staff changes**

GBM advised the Board of changes at Assistant Director level following recent interviews:

Gabriel Amahwe has been selected on promotion to be AD for West Berkshire.
Kilvinder Vigurs moves to take on Milton Keynes.
Steve Czajewski becomes AD for Bucks as well as Approved Premises.

There are no changes in the responsibilities of Sue Cooke, Graham McCartney or Sue Pearce.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm