

**THAMES VALLEY PROBATION BOARD**

**NOTES OF A WORKSHOP MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 28 MAY 2009  
AT BICESTER HEAD OFFICE**

**commencing at 10.30 am and ending at 1 pm**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Yashpaul Anderson, Hiram Chakravarty, Michael Day, Malcolm Fearn (Chair), Honor Juniper, Gerry Marshall, Ian Menzies-Conacher, Michael Nolan, Phillip Perlin, Sue Seager,

**APOLOGIES:** Arif Hussain, Zoe Smith

**OFFICERS:** Richard Lawrence-Wilson, Sean Quiggin

**1. Opening remarks from Chair and Chief**

**Performance**

MF reported that he had sent a note of congratulations to all TVP staff following the good news of the Area's green rating for 2008-09. In addition he had congratulated the staff at Slough Office on achieving their first green, and staff at Temple Cottage for their handling of the recent stabbing incident.

**Contacts with MPs etc**

Following individual meetings with MPs Evan Harris (Lib Dem, Oxford West and Abingdon), Andrew Smith (Lab, East Oxford) and Tony Baldry (Con, Banbury) MF and GBM had travelled to Westminster to meet Labour MPs Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes SW) and Martin Salter (Reading). Fiona MacTaggart (Slough) had sent an assistant to represent her. He hoped to meet Conservative MPs on 22 June.

MF said that we should consider whether and how to set up a system of regular meetings or contacts with Thames Valley MPs and Councillors. We do not, as a general rule, tell them when we have plans that may affect their constituencies or wards. Should we? We do contact MPs several times a year, sending them annual reports, the DVD etc., but generally they are uninterested. Our main link to the community is via LAAs, LSPs and CDRPs.

SS said local authorities are developing community cohesion groups and wondered if we should get involved. HJ suggested a quarterly bulletin, but acknowledged that people tend to be interested only in items very local to them. We need to identify the purpose of communication – is it defensive or proactive, or both?

MF felt that the invitation currently sent to the MP of a constituency in which the Board meets could be extended to appropriate local authority members or officers. We should produce a 10 minute presentation, perhaps run the DVD, and could offer a 10 minute reciprocal slot, before the Board meeting begins.

SQ sounded a note of caution, it would be important not to be political, not to damage existing relationships, and to be well prepared beforehand on what TVP is delivering in the specific location being visited.

GBM advised the Board that MPs are offered the opportunity of receiving information about SFOs in their area and most wish to know only the basic facts, simply so as not to be unsighted, rather than receiving the fuller briefing that is available.

MD asked if there were any community-related meetings at which the presence of a Board Member might be appropriate. GBM said that due to lack of senior staff resources he had said that TVP could not provide anyone to attend LSP (local strategic partnership) meetings. Now that we have identified Board Members to take an interest in specific areas within TV, they could attend meetings of the 9 LSPs. Currently he felt that only Slough and Reading are well connected with TVP.

It was agreed that GBM should pursue ways of using bulletins as a vehicle while MF would discuss with RLW how the role of Board meetings could be enhanced.

**Action**

### **Oxford resite project**

MF said that the offer made around the end of April to meet Mill Street residents had not yet been taken up. His most recent meeting had been with the minister (David Hanson), Evan Harris MP, Councillors and residents' representatives. Unfortunately some misinformation had been circulated following this meeting. He did not believe it would be practical to correct every error in detail.

A judicial review was being talked about but it was unclear what its basis would be, as such reviews usually examined due process, which we had followed.

A room had been booked in Oxford Town Hall on 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2-7 pm, to mount a display relating to the project and more widely to TVP's work as a whole. Invitations would be sent to MPs, Councillors and partner agencies, and there would be press advertisements to attract the general public. Board members would be very welcome. A demonstration against the Mill Street proposal may be mounted outside the Town Hall.

MF gave some background information to supplement the Q&A on the TVP website. He intended that TVP should continue to deal openly with the numerous letters, emails and requests for information under the FoI Act that continued to flow in. GBM said he thought there was a possibility that Oxford City Council might intervene. The problem is, that TVP has nowhere else to go.

## **2. Application to become a Trust**

The trust bid working group was due to meet immediately after the workshop. MF said the key dates for a July application were now known. The points made by Board members at the special meeting on 14 May were on record and being addressed.

IMC expressed concern about the effect of change of status on pension fund liabilities. The pension scheme deficit was currently enormous. Clarification was needed as to whether it would have to be funded when the Board became a Trust, and, if so, how this could be achieved. Very recently there had been an email from the Probation Association to Anne Whitworth and himself, which he had not had time to take on board.

## **3. Performance monitoring group**

HC said he had sat in on a meeting of the group on the previous day. It had been an uplifting experience and he had been highly impressed by the quality of discussion and the enthusiasm of all present, and especially by the staff attending in place of Directors and

Assistant Directors. The IPPF template was in use for each subdivision and managers could identify where individual incidents were contributing to poor performance. HC said that he understood staff frustration with the rules about input of data. He brought three points to the attention of the Board. Firstly, focus was needed on the interface with other agencies – for example the Courts Service. We must intervene when the time lines and processes of other organisations do not fit. Secondly, he highlighted the importance of having the same template on performance improvement for every office. Thirdly, the Board should be aware that unplanned absences could indirectly depress performance in related areas, for example an absence in our referral unit has depressed our occupancy rate in APs.

HC said that overall the meeting had been a valuable and impressive experience. GBM said that it had been SQ's vision to be able to drill down to individuals to diagnose problems, and this was moving towards fruition.

MD would attend the next meeting of the performance monitoring group on 24 June.

#### **4. NOMS ICT strategic event 11 May**

YA said that there had been presentations from users, NOMS and Steria. He had put his name forward to sit on the ICT Board but this was not yet agreed.

The messages he had brought back were

- NOMS ICT is almost wholly driven by the needs of the Prison Service, with Probation as a very low priority add-on.
- Due to Prison Service commitments and timetables we would be stuck with Steria until 2012 for sure and possibly until 2015.
- It is not clear whether the migration from ICMS to PCMS is to be via Delius (SQ said there was a question mark over funding).
- There is no suggestion that Trusts will be able to opt out and choose their own ICT

SQ explained the proposals for a new national data centre, which seemed to increase the risk of failure compared to the current robustness offered by multiple centres. On the plus side, outdated desktop kit is due to be replaced later in 2009.

MF thanked YA for his report, and supported by other Board Members encouraged him to continue to press to join the NOMS ICT Board.

#### **5. Training event on 6 May**

SS introduced the notes of this meeting, which she had collated with contributions from PP, MD and AH. She felt that the TVP Board was already operating like a Trust.

A key message had been that the driver from NOMS to focus simply on IPPF and cuts is not necessarily accepted by the Inspectorate. We want to maintain a green score but we must not lose sight of the fundamental purpose of the probation service.

#### **6. Any other business**

GBM reported that a consultation on training proposals had been announced by Jack Straw. We will meet the Trade Union Side to work out the implications for TVP and it was

suggested that a Board Member from the workforce group should attend.

GBM updated the Board that the anticipated outturn for 2008-09 was an underspend of £173k, of which £125k could be carried forward.

The meeting ended at 1 pm.