

Statement from Thames Valley Probation

Issued: July 31, 2009

Gerry Marshall, Chief Officer of Thames Valley Probation, said today:

'I am aware that some members of the WOCAMP campaign group have quoted the examples of Kitts Green probation office in Birmingham and a local probation office in Blackburn – near to the constituency office of Jack Straw, the Minister of Justice – to argue that our move to Trajan House will inevitably lead to an increase in vandalism and anti-social behaviour by probationers attending the office and that they may assault local residents and threaten local security.

'Campaigners applied to the police in both Lancashire and the West Midlands, with FoI requests about criminal incidents relating to both these offices and were sent comprehensive replies. The Minister of State for Probation, Maria Eagle MP, is responding to a WOCAMP member and will outline the details of the police findings, which have also been shared with us*. (* this letter was sent in early September).

'I am pleased to say that the replies do not substantiate claims from certain WOCAMP protesters that crime will increase if the probation office is sited at the end of Mill Street.

'Let me share the detail of the other probation office incidents with you: West Midlands Police reported 15 incidents classified as either 'Public Safety / Welfare' (6), 'Recorded Crime' (4) or Anti-Social Behaviour' (5) at Centenary House, Kitts Green, between June 2007 and May 2009.

'Four of the incidents could have occurred in any office; a theft from a desk (a member of staff was the principal suspect), a drunk in reception, a burglar alarm sounding and the district manager reporting a man walking down the dual carriageway in his pyjamas.

'There were five instances where police were called to arrest different offenders who had either been suspected of committing an offence elsewhere or because of reported concerns about domestic violence. This is very normal practice in a probation office and does not affect anyone in the local vicinity.

'The police were called to assist probation staff with one probationer who became upset when told that he was going to be breached but there is nothing to suggest that this behaviour continued outside the building.

'Indeed, one public order incident and possibly three cases of vandalism were linked to the campaign against Centenary House being used as a Probation office.

'There was also an assault on the office security guard by two passers-by, but neither the nature of the offence, nor the reason for it, nor the identity of the perpetrators is

known. None of the instances involve offences committed by probationers in the vicinity of the building.

'Moving to Wellington Street in Blackburn, there were 2 incidents where the police were called for misbehaviour or violence inside the probation office, one incident of someone not paying for a taxi (probation was not involved) and one incident in which a knife was taken from an elderly man with mental health problems.

'Again, there is no evidence of criminal or anti-social activity by people on probation on their way to or from probation appointments. This is similar to our own experiences at all of our offices in Thames Valley and the crimes are not particular to the siting of a probation office as most could – and indeed do – happen anywhere.

'On July 22, myself, our board chair Malcolm Fearn and two board members walked around several sites in Oxford with members of WOCAMP and they subsequently sent us a letter suggesting properties, which we have submitted into the search.

'It was a productive and amicable morning and the protesters were able to report to us that they are in regular contact with the local agent appointed to the search and they expressed satisfaction with his local knowledge.

'I hope this information on security measures we might take and the news that we can now support our previous statements that there are no grounds for claims that crime or anti-social behaviour would increase near a new probation office will go some way to reassuring the residents of Mill Street and other surrounding streets.

'I still believe our presence – wherever that may be – will create a safer environment, not one with increased crime and fear.'

ENDS

Notes for Editors

For national enquiries about probation property:

Press Office, Ministry of Justice
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For local enquiries about Thames Valley Probation:

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Additional information

Thames Valley Probation works with adult offenders, supervising them through their Community Orders and assisting with rehabilitation. We also supervise offenders released from prison on licence and work with victims of serious crime. The main aim of the service is to increase public protection and reduce the re-offending rate. Community Payback is the name and logo used for the Unpaid Work that offenders carry out. It has been designed to highlight the work of offenders to put something back into communities in which they've offended.

For more information, visit our website at: www.thamesvalleyprobation.gov.uk