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PROBATION BOARD

13th July 2006

10.00 a.m. to 1.05 p.m.

PRESENT: S. Harrison (Chair, Items 56 – 63, part, only)
K. Wyatt (Chair, Items 63, part, - 75 only)
D. Clark, O. Gleadall, H. Harker, J. Hinchcliffe,
M. Ismail, A. Khayum, B. Maslen, H. Redhead,
H. Williams.

Also in attendance: J. Fox, B. Kerslake, M. Wright and D. Thomas.

56. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from A. Abbasi, F. McCready, M. Murphy and L. Taylor.

57. Chairing this meeting

S. Harrison said that she would have to leave at 11.00 a.m. to travel to London for the SY Chief Officer interviews and K. Wyatt would chair the remainder of the meeting.

58. Heather Harker

S. Harrison said that this would be Heather's last Board meeting. She had been an excellent Chief Officer, a pleasure to work with and had done sterling service for SY. In October she would have completed 30 years with the Probation Service and she wished her well for the future in Australia.

Heather thanked Shirley and the Board for their kind words and wishes and said she had enjoyed her time as Chief Officer and working with the Board. The Board had always posed an appropriate challenge both to herself and the senior managers and she hoped that she had acted in line with the Board's wishes. She wished the Members well in the future.

59. Declarations of interest

No interests were declared.

60. Items to be considered in the absence of the public

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded during consideration of the Regional Pathfinder Project. (Minute 74 refers).

61. Minutes of last meeting

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RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd June 2006 be approved, subject to the following amendment to the minutes of the meeting held on 25th May 2006:

Deletion of the first resolution in Minute 26 (Transport and Bank Holiday Tuesdays) and substitution of the following:

RESOLVED: That the Bank Holiday Tuesdays, when they become Service days, be consolidated into staff annual leave.

62. Matters arising

i) Mark O'Neill (Minute 38)

H. Harker gave more detail about the death of Mark and said that both offenders and staff from the Rotherham Division were to contribute to a book to be presented to his mother in his memory.

ii) Recruitment of new Chief Officer (Minute 44(iv))

Replying to a question from O. Gleadall on responses to the advertisement of the vacancy, S. Harrison said two candidates had applied. She reminded Members that only experienced, substantive Chief Officers had been eligible to apply.

iii) Offender Learning Skills Service (OLASS) (Minute 48)

B. Kerslake referred to meetings the previous day which had progressed several issues, and commented on the challenges which lay ahead. He undertook to report on developments to an appropriate future Board meeting.

iv) Probation Centenary (Minute 51(ii))

S. Harrison said she had been contacted by Linda Meadows, Sheffield Hallam University, who wished to discuss proposals to celebrate the Centenary and would meet her on 20th July together with K. Wyatt and J. Tarr.

63. Effective Supervision Inspection (ESI)

H. Harker said both she and A. Smith, Lead Inspector, had been disappointed with the results of the follow-up inspection and that SY had not made more progress, particularly in view of the effort which had gone into it. There had been some progress, but not as much as had been hoped for, and in many areas performance had slipped. She commented on the main findings and was thankful that management of risk of harm was one of the areas where performance had improved.

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The re-inspection had been based on only 30 cases and she had asked for a full re-inspection of them. The Divisional Managers (DMs), who had been involved in the re-inspection, had found it a very salutary experience. She reminded the Board of the wider circumstances in which the follow-up had taken place. SY was implementing Offender Management and also the split from Interventions. This had involved a phenomenal amount of planning, briefing and training. She emphasised that she was not using this as an excuse, neither was she blaming the DMs; it was a corporate responsibility and the clear message was that SY needed to be much sharper in terms of local management.

At this point S. Harrison left the meeting and K. Wyatt took over as Chair.

D. Thomas said that H. Harker's summary was a fair reflection of events. M. Wright commented on some of the steps taken to check on progress and to improve performance. She noted that prior to the follow-up the NPD had contacted all Areas and offered to work with them on anything which might prove beneficial. The NPD Unit would visit SY on 21st July.

The Officers answered Members' questions and noted their very real concerns about the areas of falling performance.

H. Harker said she did not wish to appear complacent but noted that the follow-up 30 cases were a very small proportion of the total caseload which was approaching 8,000. She added that she had read two Serious Further Offence cases recently and both had been managed in a first class manner.

D. Thomas commented briefly on the way the follow-up had been carried out and noted that failure on one of the several variables applied to each question meant that the whole question was classed as a failure. In his view there were systematic failures as well as failures by individual practitioners. He added that there was also a small number of managers disproportionately responsible and this was being followed up. He asked the Board also to bear in mind that whilst the follow-up was taking place SY staff were also trying to ensure that the Area reached its year-end Key Performance Indicator targets. Managers had now been made aware of the critical need to focus on performance and particularly on the timings involved.

M. Wright said the draft Action Plan was different to the one formulated after the initial inspection. The first one had concentrated on strategy and the latest one was linked to front-line practice. It would be launched at the forthcoming County Managers' Meeting (CMM) and would then cascade down to individual teams via the Divisional Management Meetings. Staff had to be told what they needed to concentrate on and there needed to be individual ownership. H.

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Harker said the CMM would be told of the Board's views and their disappointment and concerns about the results of the follow-up. S. Harrison said she was to attend the CMM and she would also speak on the Board's behalf.

D. Thomas said that if current timescales were maintained, at around July 2007 SY would be in the midst of implementing C-NOMIS, the new computerised offender management information system, and it would be necessary to change the administrative processes in order to free up Offender Managers.

RESOLVED:

1. That the content of the Action Plan be noted.
2. That progress reports be submitted in October 2006, January and April 2007 and the latter meeting agree future reporting intervals.

64. JNCC held on 22nd June 2006

J. Hinchcliffe gave a verbal report on the matters discussed in the JNCC and said that it had been a positive meeting in a good atmosphere. He noted that the Unions appeared keen to be involved in the contestability issue. B. Kerslake said he was conscious that this may be an area in which the Board would appreciate a briefing. H. Harker said that she detected a shift in the Unions' understanding of contestability.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report on the JNCC be noted.
2. That a presentation on contestability be given towards the end of the September Board meeting and the Unions be invited to send representatives for that item.

65. Chair's diary

RESOLVED: That the diary be noted.

66. Annual Report

B. Kerslake said some comments had been received from Members and amendments had been made to the draft. Subject to their agreement later today, the Annual Accounts would be included in Part B and the revised version would be submitted to the NPD.

67. Divisional Diversity Events 2006

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H. Harker said the report reflected discussions in the Board, the Diversity Management Committee and other meetings. Diversity events in recent years had had a chequered history in terms of effectiveness. She outlined the rationale behind the proposed structure of events in 2006 and undertook to discuss with J. Tarr the suggestions put forward.

RESOLVED: That the proposed arrangements for diversity events in 2006, and the further suggestions made, be noted.

68. Statement of Accounts

B. Kerslake said the Audit Committee had considered the Accounts and the District Auditor had indicated that she would include two unqualified opinions on the Accounts themselves and on the arrangements in place to ensure the effective use of resources.

J. Hinchcliffe said the Auditor had made some very complimentary remarks about the work of Brian and Bob Linley in particular. As Chair of the Audit Committee, J. Hinchcliffe recorded his own thanks to Brian and his staff and commended the Accounts to the Board.

RESOLVED: That on the recommendation of the Audit Committee, the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2006, be approved.

69. Expenditure Monitoring Report – Quarter 1, 2006/07

B. Kerslake submitted a report on expenditure incurred over the first quarter of the financial year, comparing actual expenditure to the profiled budget (the expected expenditure) for that period. The Area budget was analysed between the Offender Management and Interventions categories that comprised the two SLAs signed with the Regional Offender Manager.

RESOLVED: That the expenditure position as at the end of the first quarter of the financial year be noted.

70. Approved Premises Annual Report

B. Kerslake picked out the main points from the report prepared by J. Kerr and particularly the closing of the female beds at Norfolk Park Approved Premise. Replying to a question from B. Maslen, he said the Service was in discussions with the NPD about their use to accommodate male residents and those with disabilities.

H. Harker said the Service was coming under increasing pressure to introduce double waking night cover in Approved Premises and B. Kerslake said a progress report would be submitted to the October Board meeting.

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H. Harker said she would pass on to J. Kerr the suggestions made to cover those residents who came to Approved Premises from prisons and who needed to bring appropriate medication with them.

J. Fox undertook to send a note on behalf of the Board to staff in the Approved Premises Division thanking them for their excellent work during the last few weeks, when individual premises had come under intense media scrutiny regarding the accommodation of sex offenders.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report be noted.

71. Audit Committee on 20th June 2006

J. Hinchcliffe submitted a report on the business conducted and referred particularly to the review of two self-assessment exercises on the arrangements for securing the efficient and effective use of the Board's resources (referred to in Minute 67 above) and the effectiveness of the system of internal controls operated across the whole range of the Service's systems and processes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

72. Reports back from Members and Working Groups

i) Ninth Annual Bill McWilliams lecture

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

ii) PBA General Meeting, Conference and Lecture

D. Clark gave a verbal report on the meeting, conference and lecture and commented particularly on the speech by G. Sutcliffe, Home Office Minister, who had attended in place of the Home Secretary. J. Fox undertook to circulate to Members a copy of the two documents on governance to which D. Clark had referred. D. Clark added that many of the other papers to which she had referred were available on the PBA website.

73. Chief Officers' Report

i) PBA Conference 29th June 2006

RESOLVED: That the opening address by J. Raine, Chair of the PBA, be noted.

ii) JNCC on 28th September 2006

D. Clark, J. Hinchcliffe, B. Maslen and H. Redhead indicated that they were available to represent the Board at the JNCC.

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iii) South Yorkshire Criminal Justice Board (CJB)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the CJB held on 21st June 2006 be noted.

iv) Schedule of likely Board agenda items - September to December 2006.

RESOLVED: That the schedule be noted.

74. Investors in People – re-assessment

J. Fox said he would write to Members inviting them to be interviewed in September as part of the re-assessment process.

75. Regional PathFinder Project

B. Kerslake submitted a report on a proposal, jointly agreed between the Area and the Regional Offender Manager, and now signed off by the National Offender Manager and the National Director of Probation, for a Regional PathFinder Project on Bail Information Services. He noted that the Region had the best developed proposal and that it was the only Project to have achieved this status.

RESOLVED: That the current Regional PathFinder position be noted.

76. Next Meeting: 10.00 a.m. Thursday 28th September 2006 in the Board Room, Division Street, Sheffield.

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