A change of direction
managing changes in local probation areas
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# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why has this paper been written?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For whom has this paper been written?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research methodology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How should this paper be used?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of this paper</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of the probation service within the criminal justice system</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key issues facing the probation service in England and Wales</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission learning</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission learning on amalgamations and performance management</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating the obstacles on the road to success</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate concerns</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff concerns and issues</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local circumstances</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The demands and expectations of national and local stakeholders</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The performance of local areas</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The capacity to improve performance</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Advisory group and lead commissioners</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: The European Excellence Model</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3: The Better Quality Services Initiative</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4: Some background facts about the probation service</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5: Key tasks carried out by the service</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 6: Offences and sentences</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 7: Success factors for partnership working</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 8: Performance measurement and performance indicators</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful websites</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Why has this paper been written?
1. The probation service is undergoing significant change [BOX A]. As well as changes to its structure, the service also faces significant alterations to its operating environment, such as changes to the sentences it supervises, the establishment of local partnerships to deal with youth justice, crime and disorder, drug action teams, and greater media and public attention to the supervision of high-risk offenders. The Audit Commission has assisted other agencies in the public sector going through similar massive change in recent years. It has commented on the difficulties of merging authorities and on the opportunities presented by new ways of working (Refs. 1, 2 & 3). This paper draws on the Commission’s work with local authorities, the NHS, and police and fire authorities to highlight some practical learning points for those working in the probation service.

For whom has this paper been written?
2. The primary audience for the paper is local probation boards and senior management teams, especially those members and officers taking up office for the first time. The paper also aims to inform the debate among key stakeholders, such as trade unions and staff, local authorities, the courts and local police forces about the management of change and performance management in the probation service.

Research methodology
3. The Commission conducted structured interviews with staff at various levels in both urban and rural probation areas. It facilitated workshops, involving key national stakeholders, on the prioritisation of work and on employee care. It also re-examined its past work with local government and the health service to identify the key learning points for organisations that are managing change and improving performance. An advisory group [APPENDIX 1] provided useful comments and contributions, for which the Commission is grateful. Responsibility for this paper, however, rests solely with the Audit Commission.

BOX A

Changes in the probation service
The probation service is facing changes in its:
• purpose – attention is being refocused on the punishment and rehabilitation of offenders, as family court welfare functions move to the Lord Chancellor’s Department;
• organisational structure – the existing 54 local committees are being re-worked into 42 local boards with a national directorate;
• governance arrangements – the new boards and chief officers will be accountable to parliament via the Home Secretary;
• management arrangements – with the introduction of the European Excellence Model [APPENDIX 2] and the BQS Initiative [APPENDIX 3];
• financial arrangements – the service will move from local government to central government finance rules; and
• professional practice – the ‘What Works’ initiative is introducing accredited programmes for work with offenders (Ref. 4).

Source: Audit Commission
How should this paper be used?

4. This paper is intended to provide local probation boards and management teams with advice to help them to manage change and performance in the probation service.

The structure of this paper

5. The paper has three main sections and a conclusion:

- Section 1 looks at the role of the probation service within the criminal justice system, and at the issues facing the service nationally.
- Section 2 draws on the lessons learned from other organisations.
- Section 3 sets out an agenda for action and suggests checklists for new boards.
- The conclusion sets out the paper’s key points.
1. Background

6. This section outlines the context in which the probation service operates. It has two parts:

• a brief introduction to the role of the probation service within the criminal justice system; and
• an outline of some of the key issues facing the probation service in England and Wales.

The role of the probation service within the criminal justice system

7. The probation service plays a significant role in meeting the aims of the criminal justice system [EXHIBIT 1]. The functions of the probation service span the whole criminal justice process [EXHIBIT 2, overleaf and APPENDICES 4 & 5]. It operates by:

• providing advice to courts on the most appropriate sentence for an offender [APPENDIX 6];
• undertaking a range of functions for courts and prisons, in liaison with local authorities and the police, once sentence has been passed;

EXHIBIT 1
The relationship between the probation service’s priorities and those of the wider criminal justice system

The probation service plays a significant role in meeting the aims of the criminal justice system.

The three aims of the probation service:
1. The protection of the public.
2. The reduction of re-offending.
3. The proper punishment of offenders.

The seven principal aims of the Home Office:
1. Reduction in crime, particularly youth crime, and fear of crime; and the maintenance of public safety and good order.
2. Delivery of justice through effective and efficient investigation, prosecution, trial and sentencing, and through support for victims.
3. Prevention of terrorism, reduction in other organised and international crime, and protection against threats to national security.
4. Effective execution of the sentences of the courts so as to reduce re-offending and protect the public.
5. Helping to build, under a modernised constitution, a fair and prosperous society, in which everyone has a stake, and in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced.
6. Regulation of entry to and settlement in the UK in the interests of social stability and economic growth and facilitation of travel by UK citizens.
7. Reduction in the incidence of fire and related death, injury and damage and ensuring the safety of the public through civil protection.

The two overarching aims of the criminal justice system:
1. To reduce crime and the fear of crime and their social and economic consequences.
2. To dispense justice fairly and efficiently and to promote confidence in the rule of law.

Home Office statement of purpose:
To build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public is maintained.

Source: Audit Commission
EXHIBIT 2

The probation service’s role within the criminal justice system

The functions of the service span the whole criminal justice process

- working with offenders, for example, supervising community service orders, running programmes to challenge offending behaviour, and resettlement work at the end of a custodial sentence;
- seeking to ensure that offenders comply with the sentence passed by the courts, and endeavouring to meet the purpose of that sentence; and
- working with victims of crime.

8. In addition to these functions, that are common to all probation areas, local boards play a key role in their local communities, which inevitably, have different needs. They are strategic partners in crime and disorder partnerships, drug action teams, youth justice boards, and community safety partnerships.
Key issues facing the probation service in England and Wales

9. In its review of prisons and probation the Home Office highlighted the need for the probation service to be (Ref. 5):
   - more accountable to parliament, via ministers;
   - better organised to develop co-operation and partnership-working at both national and local levels;
   - more cost effective; and
   - responsive to technological change.

10. The re-organisation of the service into local boards and a national directorate that is accountable to ministers addresses the issue of accountability to parliament (Ref. 6). The new national standards that set out ministers’ expectations clarify the tasks of the service and how ministers will hold the service to account (Refs. 7 and 8).

11. The establishment of the national directorate addresses the organisational issues associated with partnership working at the national level and the move from 54 local committees to 42 local boards, with the same boundaries as the police and courts, addresses the structural obstacles to local partnership working (Ref. 6).

12. The drive for greater cost effectiveness is being dealt with on three fronts. First, the Home Office’s ‘What Works’ initiative seeks to research and spread effective practice on how to reduce re-offending, and so eliminate spending on those activities that are not proven to reduce re-offending (Refs. 9, 10 & 11). Second, the Home Office is promoting the European Excellence Model (EEM) as a management tool to help to improve the service’s delivery against its key performance indicators [APPENDIX 2]. And third, the national service operates the Better Quality Services (BQS) initiative which, in the drive to achieve value for money, requires the service to test which of its functions should be abolished, carried out in-house, or bought in from other suppliers [APPENDIX 3].

13. Under the arrangements for the new national probation service, information and communication technology (ICT) issues are addressed at the national level. In developing its approach the service needs to establish itself as an ‘intelligent client’ (Refs. 12 & 13). The priority for probation areas will be to work with the national directorate to develop case management and other core systems to meet operational and performance monitoring needs better, while working towards the migration of all services into common national systems.

14. In addition to the issues outlined in the Prisons–Probation Review (Ref. 5), the new national probation service faces two further challenges, namely to improve its performance on diversity and equality issues (Ref. 14); and to manage the transition to the new national probation service.

15. Drawing on the national aims of the service, the Prison–Probation Review, recent inspection reports, and the challenges associated with the transition to the new national service, we can see what success for the service at a national level might look like. Local boards need to consider how their areas contribute to national success and how success at the national level relates to local priorities [BOX B, overleaf].

I While acknowledging the importance of ICT for the service, this paper does not address ICT in any detail. This is because HM Inspectorate of Probation has produced a series of reports on the management of information and technology in the service, and the National Audit Office is to report on the service’s information system in early 2001.

II At the time of writing the national strategy was in draft form only.
16. In many cases, local ideas of success ‘flesh out’ national ideas. These tend to be drawn from aggregate statistics and abstract goals, which are difficult to use as tools to motivate staff at the local level.

17. Local priorities inevitably vary according to local geography, demography and socio-economic circumstances. Local boards and management teams need to be sensitive to local priorities and take account of the views of key local stakeholders [EXHIBIT 3]. In some instances, local priorities may not relate directly to the national image of success and vice versa.

18. Local boards have to assess the relationship between local priorities and national objectives [BOXES B and C and CASE STUDY 1, overleaf]. They also have to assess the timescales involved in delivering the different aspects of national and local priorities, and the respective resource requirements. They then need to allocate resources and prioritise work to ensure that both the key aspects of the national vision and the key aspects of their vision for their service locally are delivered. The main challenge for boards is in striking the right balance between the pressures from national and local stakeholders [EXHIBIT 4, overleaf]. This challenge can only be met through effective planning and prioritisation. Some objectives are more important than others, and boards and managers should prioritise them – always bearing in mind the importance of reducing crime, protecting the public and punishing offenders.

19. Perhaps one of the toughest challenges facing boards and senior management teams is their assessment of partnership working at both national and local levels. Boards must ensure that their areas’ involvement in partnerships contributes to the delivery of national and local priorities, and that the partnerships are themselves efficient and effective [APPENDIX 7]. Boards should also assess the medium-term implications of partnership working, for example, access to additional resources, and improved sharing of information.
EXHIBIT 3

Local stakeholders

Local boards and management teams need to be sensitive to local priorities and take account of the views of key local stakeholders.

Source: Audit Commission
BOX C

What will success look like at the local level?

Success for the service locally will include:

- the effective use of local regeneration funds to tackle antisocial behaviour to enable the successful rehousing of offenders;
- managing regeneration funds with local partners to enable more intensive work with the victims of crime;
- positive coverage of the service’s work in the local media;
- improving both the courts’ and the public’s confidence in the service locally;
- secondments of staff into partner organisations, such as prisons, local authorities and health authorities in order to improve mutual understanding and joint working between agencies;
- outreach workers raising the profile of services provided to the local community;
- successful local research on what happens to offenders after supervision, which informs staff of their achievements; and
- improved working relationships with the courts, resulting in an increase in magistrates’ confidence in the service’s effective supervision of sentences, and the quality of pre-sentence reports.

Source: Audit Commission

CASE STUDY 1

Balancing national and local pressures

Issue number 1 of the Teesside Probation Service Newsletter, March 2000, illustrates how local areas need to balance national and local needs, and demands, and how the process is communicated to stakeholders.

‘Balancing government standards for probation service performance with the realities of supervising offenders on Teesside is the challenge ahead for the Teesside Probation Service as they prepare this year's business plan.’

Source: Teesside Probation Service (Ref. 15)

It continues...

‘All staff will work to the plan which sets out targets for all aspects of the Service’s work. The plan is also designed to enable the Service to prioritise work under difficult circumstances while ensuring that protection of the public remains the most important aim.’

And concludes with the following statement from the Chief Officer:

‘Our business plan outlines what we have to achieve and how we will do it. Our clear targets mean that we can measure our true performance whilst still being honest about the issues staff face everyday,’
EXHIBIT 4

**National and local resources place conflicting demands on local areas**

The main challenge for boards is in striking the balance between the pressures from national and local stakeholders.

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**National pressures include...**
- Responding to the national strategy
- Meeting national standards
- Achieving key performance targets
- Introducing ‘What Works’/accredited programmes
- Managing the mixed economy of public and private sector providers in the criminal justice economy
- Successfully recruiting into the service, given a tight national labour market
- Making the most of information & communication technology
- Responding effectively to equal opportunities and issues of diversity

**Local boards set...**
- vision
- strategy
- priorities
- plan
- performance indicators
- targets
- delivery
- review
- adaptation

**Local pressures include...**
- Resourcing crime & disorder partnerships
- Resourcing drug action teams
- Resourcing youth offending teams
- Responding effectively to regeneration and social exclusion initiatives
- Helping to deliver crime prevention/education programmes in high crime areas
- Ensuring effective working relationships between local health economies and criminal justice economies, for example, on services to drug users
- Staff training on delivery of accredited programmes
- Staff training on the use of information & communication technology
- Management development on the management of change

*Source: Audit Commission*
2. Commission learning

Commission learning on amalgamations and performance management

20. In recent years, the Audit Commission has assisted other agencies in the public sector going through changes similar to those in the probation service. Its work on mergers is relevant to amalgamating areas [BOX D]. And its work on the introduction of best value in local government is relevant to the whole service, as the best value framework is analogous to the service’s use of the EEM and the BQS Initiative [BOX E, overleaf]. This learning is applied to the current circumstances in the probation service in Section 3.

21. Drawing on its work with local government, the Commission suggests to incoming boards a general agenda for action, providing a framework for responding to the challenges that they face. This agenda suggests some ‘staging posts’ on the journey to improved services, based on the premise that all boards should produce:

- a local vision of the probation service in the future;
- aims and objectives for the area;
- a strategy with a 3- to 5-year timescale that maps how they will achieve their vision;
- a business plan with a 12-month timescale setting out the priorities for the year;
- short- and medium-term targets based on measures of performance, using well-defined performance indicators that are reviewed and kept relevant to the service’s key tasks and objectives; and
- efficient and effective monitoring and review processes, that involve the board and enable it to maintain the momentum of improvement. II

22. Boards may find the development of such a process difficult. For example, Audit Commission fieldwork suggests that local probation areas currently collect information on costs, budget control, absenteeism, workforce training, labour turnover, quality control based on performance against national standards, and productivity based on caseloads. But they do not set targets for all the categories of information that they collect, and data are often not analysed systematically. Furthermore, HM Inspectorate of Probation’s thematic inspection work has identified that in many areas essential management information is not always available in an accurate and timely fashion (Ref. 12).

I Changes to professional practice, through the ‘What Works’ programme, are not directly addressed in this paper. However, the implications of the changes in professional practice for the management of career structures etc are discussed.

II Performance indicators and the EEM should help boards in this activity.
BOX D

**Issues shown to be important when organisations handover their functions to successor bodies**

The Commission’s previous learning emphasises:

- the importance of establishing clear leadership at an early stage;
- the need to develop strategic aims and values, which need to be consciously developed with staff and other key stakeholders;
- the need to reassure staff who are going to stay after the changes by taking action that is both quick and fair;
- the need to identify and maintain systems that are critical to service delivery;
- the need to ensure the continuity of service, while planning for the future; and
- the need to plan in order to effect cultural change.

There are three key challenges for both out-going and in-coming bodies.

For out-going bodies the challenges are to:

- deliver services up to the last day;
- operate against a short-term planning horizon; and
- avoid inadequate records adversely affecting a smooth handover.

For in-coming bodies the challenges are how to:

- deal with constraints on financial or operational flexibility left by out-going bodies;
- respond to medium-term issues effectively in the face of short-term pressures associated with the transition to a new body; and
- operate if records are not adequate at the point of handover.

*Source: Audit Commission (Ref. 1)*
Some of the Commission’s key learning points from the first year of best value

Recommendations for authorities:

• Move to a single planning, action and review cycle that incorporates budget planning and any changes flowing from the introduction of best value. Best value should become the performance framework of the council and not be an add-on or a second system.

• Revisit review programmes, especially to:
  – combine or repackage smaller reviews to ensure that the resources invested are more likely to address the big issues and result in significant improvement;
  – direct resources to where they can have the most impact on the local area and the lives of local people;
  – identify opportunities for working more closely with neighbouring authorities;
  – amend local priorities in the light of the results of wider community planning activities;
  – ensure that mechanisms exist for completing reviews promptly and for adopting and implementing proposals that are tied to regular budget and service review cycles; and
  – move on from considering how to conduct reviews to concentrating on how to use the results of reviews to implement change and to deliver improved local services.

Recommendations for the umbrella groups supporting local authorities:

• Concentrate on supporting local authorities in areas of current weakness, including setting and achieving targets, developing performance management and improving procurement strategies.

Recommendations for government:

• Continue to monitor closely the balance between prescription, consistency and the encouragement of local innovation.

• Keep targets under review, especially where there are concerns that these might lead to poor decisions on the local balance between cost and quality.

• Balance changes that are intended to improve the system against the danger of distracting councils into process changes.

• Continue to consider what incentives can be offered to encourage officers and members to commit themselves fully to the best value programme, and to overcome the lack of interest and hostility still evident in some areas.

Source: Audit Commission (Ref. 16)
3. Negotiating the obstacles on the road to success

23. Local boards and their senior management teams are responsible for delivering a raft of changes in the service. The changes will not be easily digested in all areas. Therefore, boards and senior management teams need to prioritise activities, to keep changes manageable, to ensure that service delivery is not adversely affected. Boards and senior management teams must understand and respond to:

- immediate concerns, such as maintaining service delivery during the start-up phase of new boards;
- staff concerns and issues;
- local circumstances, such as the level and types of local crime, and the quality and quantity of the services provided by local partners;
- the demands and expectations placed on the service by national and local stakeholders, such as Home Office targets, and local residents’ concerns about public safety;
- performance against national and local demands and expectations, in particular, the area’s performance compared with that of other areas; and
- the area’s capacity to improve.

24. Some boards and senior management teams are likely to experience a series of obstacles or challenges as changes occur. For example:

- excessive workloads for some staff;
- initiative overload at board level;
- poor quality information that makes it difficult to measure progress accurately; and
- changes to their operating environment, such as changed political priorities at national and/or local levels.

25. The effect of these challenges on the service may show up in, for example:

- adverse changes in staff morale;
- difficulties in recruitment and retention;
- demands for additional resources to implement changes;
- the need to justify all partnership working before continuing to resource it;
- difficulties in delivering ‘efficiency gains’; and
- problems in planning and deploying funds ‘ringfenced’ for specific activities, such as those for drug treatment and testing orders.

Immediate concerns

26. Boards and senior management teams in many cases have inherited a situation where there has been some uncertainty surrounding leadership in their area, and many chiefs and chairs are new to their roles. New leaders must work quickly to establish themselves with key internal and external stakeholders. They need to establish their ambitions for the area, communicate these to staff and local partners, and modify them to take account of consultations. They also have to establish effective two-way communication with the new national directorate.

27. In reaching the goal of improved services, the first thing that boards and senior management teams must do is to assess what shape they are in after the handover from the out-going body. The priority must be to ‘keep the show on the road’. They then have to take stock of the immediate demands placed on them by national and local stakeholders,
such as the Home Office, and their own employees. They will have to assess their capacity to respond to these demands and improve performance. A major element of their capacity to respond relates to how well staff are supported while delivering the changes.

28. Boards and senior management teams face a range of risks, for example, financial, operational and public relations risks. These risks need to be managed in the run up to, during and after the transition. They mean that some boards may have immediate tasks to deal with, such as those associated with the transfer of staff, and resources from out-going committees. In particular, boards need to assess the area’s capacity to deliver its key external functions, such as its supervision of ‘high-risk’ offenders, and the delivery of community service. The operation of its key internal processes, such as receipt of income, and the payment of suppliers and staff salaries is also vital. Boards should ask a series of questions to assess their basic position [BOX F].

**Staff concerns and issues**

29. The staff are the probation service. The service’s performance depends on how well staff deliver often complex ‘person-to-person’ tasks. The changes in the service and the changes in its operating environment mean that boards and senior managers face a difficult job in managing their people. They need to maintain a productive working environment, if performance is not to dip. They also need to operate effective two-way

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**BOX F**

Checklist of questions for boards taking stock of immediate concerns

- How well was service delivery maintained during the transition?
  - For example, was access to buildings and facilities problem-free for staff and users?

- Are there any immediate steps that need to be taken to ensure that the delivery of key services is maintained?
  - For example, access to records.

- Are the records we received from the out-going committee(s) of sufficient quality?
  - For example, do case files meet national standards?

- If records are not of sufficient quality, what steps need to be taken to address the issue, by whom, and over what timescale?

- Are there any immediate steps that need to be taken to ensure that key internal systems, such as payroll, and payments to suppliers, operate smoothly?

- Are the concerns of key internal and external stakeholders known and have they been addressed?

- If immediate steps are required: what are they? Who is responsible for taking them? What is the timescale for delivering them?

- In areas where services are amalgamating, is the timetable for moving to a single area manageable, and will service be maintained while the changes take place?

*Source: Audit Commission*
communication between staff and managers if changes are to be implemented in a timely fashion.

30. Employees’ achievements can be said to depend on:
   - the way that work is organised;
   - the allocation of roles and tasks;
   - the overall working environment in an organisation, such as its reward systems; and
   - the specific attributes of the staff concerned, such as their skills, experience and personal motivation (Ref. 22).

31. The probation service starts from a strong position. Commission fieldwork suggests that staff currently experience a high degree of job satisfaction, such as a sense of achievement and personal growth in jobs that are seen to offer variety and a high degree of personal control over the way work is carried out. This positive position offers local boards a good base from which to develop, but it also means that staff may see significant changes to probation practice as a threat to job satisfaction. Line managers need to be sensitive to these concerns.

32. The service is changing how work is carried out and how tasks are allocated as part of the ‘What Works’ programme. Furthermore, operational processes will change as a result of the outcomes of the EEM process and the BQS Initiative. And the structural re-organisation of the service changes the overall working environment of many staff. Research shows that any one of these changes is likely to affect staff morale, attitudes to personal development, and ultimately, the delivery of services (Ref. 22).

33. Local boards and senior management teams have, in particular, to consider the implications of the changes for career structures, personal development and future recruitment. They also have to consider staff’s views of the changes on their likely career paths, and the impact these views are likely to have on staff morale, and ultimately, performance.

34. Staff’s views of the changes will vary according to the job they do, as different roles in the service will experience the various aspects of modernisation in different ways. Furthermore, responses may well vary between certain groups and individuals in the same types of job. Line managers should be sensitive to these issues, and respond to them in a manner that ensures the equal and fair treatment of all staff, while maintaining performance. Local boards and senior management teams should support line managers in this activity, and seek training and support for themselves, where necessary.

35. One way in which boards may wish to promote development, and positive approaches to new working arrangements is by facilitating ‘communities of practice’, or peer groups of practitioners within an area, a region or nationally. This spreads good practice among professionals without relying on line managers, trade union representatives and newsletters as the main channels of communication.

36. Boards can ask themselves a series of questions to assess how well staff are being involved in the changes [BOX G, overleaf].

I In recent stakeholder consultations, conducted by MORI on behalf of the Commission, recruitment and retention was one of the top three concerns of managers in probation.

II Staff’s views of the likely impact of the changes may differ from that of boards and senior management teams.

III Boards and senior management teams may seek to monitor attitudes and to design appropriate responses to those attitudes by using staff surveys, exit interviews, staff appraisal systems and information on common concerns arising from independent staff guidance and counselling services – where they are available to staff.

IV Commission fieldwork suggests that many staff in the probation service are isolated, and that communication is heavily reliant on line managers and trade union representatives, rather than peers.
**Local circumstances**

37. Boards need to take stock of local circumstances. They will have some factors that are relatively certain, such as demographic and crime trends in their area; some factors that they do not have information about but can discover, for example, the technical capabilities of suppliers and equipment; and some factors that are simply unknowable. They need to be assured of the accuracy of factors that are known, that they have minimised the amount of relevant information that they could know but don’t; and that they have the flexibility to respond to trends and events that cannot be predicted with any certainty. Local knowledge is a key component of this work, if boards are to respond effectively to local needs within the context of core standards of service. The collection of such local knowledge is essential for assessing operational needs and for strategy development.

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**BOX G**

**Checklist of questions for boards to ask when considering employees’ involvement in the changes faced by the service**

- Have we established a communication strategy that takes account of varied, two-way channels of communication, reinforces our key messages, and has targets that enable the board to review its impact on our main audiences, and allows us to make changes where necessary?

- What steps have been taken to prepare staff to deliver services in the future? For example, are we and staff clear how the re-training and/or recruitment of staff to deliver accredited programmes is to be carried out in the area?

- Have we understood and shared with staff the impact of the changes in the service on future career paths?

- Do we know what impact the changes will have on the working environment, and how this might affect performance in the short and medium term? For example, in amalgamating areas do staff feel promotion opportunities are less likely, as a result of re-organisation, and how are they responding to this?

- Have we engaged staff sufficiently in managing the changes required of the service, and prioritising the work of the area? For example, are there any outstanding requests from the relevant trade unions to deal with the prioritisation of work and employee care?

- Have we reviewed and, where appropriate, altered our human resources policies with staff-side agreement? For example, on early retirement, recruitment and retention, and staff development policies to make sure that with staff-side agreement they are compatible with our current needs and resources, and are agreed with staff?

- Is there a plan of joint work with the relevant trade unions to help to manage the changes?

*Source: Audit Commission*
The demands and expectations of national and local stakeholders

38. Having established the main features of their local circumstances, boards and senior managers need to specify the demands and expectations placed on them by key stakeholders, for example:
   - expectations from the National Directorate – as set out in the national strategy;
   - the Home Secretary’s targets;
   - national standards;
   - local targets, such as those set out in local crime and disorder and community safety strategies; and
   - the aspirations of staff.

39. Boards could ask themselves a series of questions to establish whether their area is aware of the expectations placed on it [BOX H].

The performance of local areas

40. Once boards and senior management teams have:
   - clarified and dealt with the immediate concerns associated with the transition from the out-going committee to the new board;
   - tested staff engagement in delivering the changes;
   - developed a good understanding of local conditions and circumstances; and
   - established the key demands and expectations of national and local stakeholders;
   they need to establish a clear picture of how well their area is performing against national and local expectations.

41. There is marked variation in performance between, and within, areas. For example, HM Inspectorate of Probation’s performance inspection programme suggests that there is significant variation in performance between areas. In the first 28 inspections in 1999 and 2000, 11 areas were found to require a full follow-up inspection, which means their weaknesses outweighed their strengths, 9 areas were judged to need a standard follow-up, and 8 warranted a light-touch, paper-based inspection.

42. The performance inspection programme has also produced evidence of variations between

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**BOX H**

Questions boards should ask in order to understand the demands and expectations of key stakeholders

- What are the key demands or requirements of our services from the Home Office?
  - For example, enforcement.

- What are the key demands or requirements of our services from local organisations?
  - For example, work in schools.

- What are the key demands or requirements of our services from local people?
  - For example, the monitoring of high-risk offenders.

- What are the key demands or requirements of our services from our staff?
  - For example, prioritisation of work.

*Source: Audit Commission*
areas in their performance against national standards. For example, the percentage of first appointments taking place within the first five days of a probation order varied from 92 per cent to 63 per cent, and the percentage of probation orders where an assessment of the risk of re-offending had been carried out varied from 92 per cent to 50 per cent (Ref. 25).

43. This variation suggests that there is room for improvement in some areas, and suggests the good practice in finding ways to improve the service in some areas could be transferred to others.

44. In seeking to drive up performance and reduce variation between probation areas, there are parallels with the first year of best value in local government. The best value framework is underpinned by a series of performance indicators – defined by central government – to measure local authorities' relative performance. These indicators cover specific inputs, outputs and outcomes, and set targets for improved performance over five years. They require authorities to set local targets where appropriate. In addition to the national indicators of comparative performance, local authorities operate benchmarking activities to address relative performance in specific service areas. This is similar to the structure in the national probation service, with national measures of performance set by central government, targets set for key performance indicators, and local targets set within areas.

45. Furthermore, the best value regime encourages local authorities to review the performance of their whole organisation through an annual best value performance plan, backed up by a five-year programme of best value reviews of all functions. This is similar to the national probation service’s annual use of the EEM to measure the performance of the whole organisation, and the review of each function under the BQS Initiative over five years.

46. In conducting the reviews of functions, local authorities challenge why they carry out a function, compare their performance to that of others, consult stakeholders and conduct a test of competitiveness. The reviews should result in an action plan that sets out how improvements will be delivered. And authorities are encouraged to focus their efforts on the services and functions with the poorest performance as they offer the greatest room for improvement, and are also likely to be the areas that undermine public confidence.

47. When prioritising work, boards may find it useful to take a view on which parts of their area’s operations offer the greatest room for improvement in terms of delivering against key outcomes and objectives. This should assist them in allocating resources to achieve the maximum improvement in their performance against their key objectives [BOX I].
When looking at an area’s capacity to improve its performance, boards need to address:

- the prioritisation of reviews based on the need to focus effort on the functions and processes that offer the greatest room for improvement against the board’s key objectives;
- the area’s capacity to conduct the review programmes – this is determined by the availability of staff and non-staff resources, and of external suppliers, such as consultants;
- the area’s capacity to respond to recommendations, which is affected by the availability of in-house, and external expertise;
- constraints on/enhancements to the area’s capacity to improve their performance, due to local contracts and the relationships inherited from out-going committees; and
- constraints on/enhancements to the area’s capacity to improve performance due to national and regional arrangements in the new national probation service.

Boards and senior management teams need to establish their local review programmes based on annual

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**BOX I**

**Question for boards seeking to improve their area’s performance against key objectives**

- What is our current performance against national standards in comparison with other areas?  
  ![Checkmark] ![X]

- What is our current performance against Home Office key performance indicators compared to other areas?  
  ![Checkmark] ![X]

- What is our performance against key local indicators, relative to the targets?  
  ![Checkmark] ![X]

- What is our performance in those areas that concern staff the most?  
  ![Checkmark] ![X]

- Which functions and processes offer the greatest scope for improvement in meeting the demands of our key stakeholders and so require priority action?  
  ![Checkmark] ![X]

Source: Audit Commission
whole-organisation assessments using the EEM, and reviews of functions under the BQS Initiative.¹

50. In its work on the first year of best value in local government, the Commission recommended that local authorities should not run ‘old’ business planning and review systems alongside the best value framework, and that review programmes should, ideally, be packaged so that they are manageable and allow authorities to tackle the areas of greatest concern.

51. If boards and senior management teams in the probation service follow this advice, they should minimise the resources taken up by internal processes and procedures. And they should ensure that their area’s capacity to respond to improvement plans is not adversely affected by early commitments to deliver changes in functions that do not have a significant impact on improving the area’s performance against its key objectives. Box J sets out a checklist for boards testing their capacity to improve.

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BOX J

**Checklist of questions for boards that are seeking to test capacity to improve performance against their key objectives**

- Does our review programme focus on the functions and processes that offer the most room for improvement?
  - Yes
  - No

- What staff and non-staff resources are available to carry out the review programme?
  - Yes
  - No

- What resources are available to deliver improved performance to meet stakeholders’ demands?
  - Yes
  - No
  - For example, what impact will unauthorised absences, unfilled vacancies and the quality of IT have on our ability to deliver improvements?

- Does the EEM or BQS review drive improvement?
  - Yes
  - No

- Are the aims of the EEM or BQS review clear and challenging?
  - Yes
  - No
  - For example, will the review have met our demands if the recommendations are implemented successfully?

- Is our operational and financial flexibility constrained or enhanced by the decisions of the out-going committee(s)?
  - Yes
  - No
  - For example, were contracts that involve financial penalties entered into, and if so, how does this affect the area’s ability to improve services in the short and medium term?

- Is our operational and financial flexibility constrained or enhanced by relations with the new national directorate?
  - Yes
  - No
  - For example, our ability to buy certain goods and services.

- Have we reviewed and, where appropriate, altered our procurement policies so that we can buy in skilled and specialist expertise where there is no in-house capacity?
  - Yes
  - No

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¹ Areas’ review programmes may well need to be negotiated with the national directorate and HM Inspectorate of Probation, as some BQS reviews may offer greater scope for improvement if they are conducted by a number of, or all, areas at the same time.
Conclusions

52. This paper recognises that the probation service is experiencing significant change in its:
- purpose;
- structure;
- governance arrangements;
- management arrangements;
- finance arrangements
- professional practice; and
- operating environment.

53. If the service is successful in the next three to five years it can expect to:
- reduce re-offending;
- increase public confidence in the service's ability to protect the public;
- improve local performance against national standards and key performance indicators;
- manage diversity and equality issues within the service effectively;
- radically improve its use of ICT; and
- strengthen partnership working at national and local levels, in pursuit of the service's overall aims.

54. Local boards’ basic tasks are to:
- raise the service's performance overall; and
- manage change successfully.

55. Boards should work with key internal and external stakeholders in order to develop:
- a local vision of the service in the future;
- aims and objectives for their area;
- a strategy with a 3- to 5-year timescale that maps how the area is to achieve the vision;
- a business plan with a 12-month timescale, setting out the priorities for the year; and
- short- and medium term targets based on measures of performance, using well-defined performance indicators that are reviewed and kept relevant to the service's key tasks.

56. This work is to be carried out within the context of the national strategy for the service, and the immediate local circumstances. In coming to terms with, and responding to, these twin pressures, the paper advises boards to:
- take stock of the service that they have inherited;
- make sure that staff and trade unions are 'on board' using effective two-way communication, and involving them in the management of change in the area;
- identify the demands placed on the area by key national and local stakeholders;
- map the area's performance in relation to the demands of key stakeholders, and compare this to other areas;
- establish their ambitions and key objectives for the area, based on the demands of their key stakeholders;
- prioritise work based on the area's key objectives, and the need to target effort on those functions and processes that offer the greatest opportunity to improve performance against the board's key objectives; and
- make sure that programmes to improve performance are challenging but manageable and realistic, given the resources available.
Appendix 1: Advisory group and lead commissioners

Membership of the advisory group
Peter Bowyer, National Association of Probation Officers
Rodney Carroll, Central Probation Council
Jill Goldsmith, National Audit Office
Joe Kuipers, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation
Sarah Merchant, Home Office
Heather Munroe, Association of Chief Officers of Probation
Kash Pandya, District Audit

Lead commissioners
Julie Baddeley
Councillor Sir Ron Watson, CBE
Appendix 2: The European Excellence Model

A brief introduction to the European Excellence Model

The EEM is produced, and its application is overseen by the European Quality Foundation, which is a membership-based organisation founded in 1988, and endorsed by the then President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors. The model has evolved from what was the Business Excellence Model, which was based on the drive for Total Quality Management.

The original model consisted of five ‘enabling factors’, namely, leadership, policy and strategy, people management, resources, and processes; and four ‘results’ categories, customer satisfaction, people satisfaction, impact on society and business results. The model was revised in 1999. The new ‘enablers’ are leadership, policy and strategy, people, partnerships and resources, and processes. The new ‘results’ categories are customer results, people results, society results and key performance results [EXHIBIT 5].

EXHIBIT 5
The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model

Source: European Foundation for Quality Management (Ref. 28)
A scoring methodology was developed to establish winners of an annual award. However, over time it became apparent that organisations were using the EEM process as a performance management tool, to compare and contrast performance between organisations. The model measures how well an organisation is performing on the basis of eight concepts: results orientation, customer focus, leadership and constancy of purpose, management by processes and facts, continuous learning, innovation and improvement, partnership development, and public responsibility.

The scoring system operates on RADAR (Results, Approach, Deployment, Assessment and Review) methodology. This requires an organisation to:

- determine the results it wishes to achieve;
- plan and develop the approaches it is to use;
- systematically deploy resources to those approaches;
- assess and review the approaches; and
- prioritise, plan and implement improvements.

The scoring process allocates 500 points in ‘enabler’ modules and 500 in ‘results’ categories, the percentages shown in the exhibit show the relative weighting attached to each module. The scores are awarded at one of five levels:

- 0% for no evidence;
- 25% indicates ‘getting started’;
- 50% shows ‘some progress’ being made;
- 75% means ‘considerable progress’ is being made; and
- 100% is for excellence (which is to be achieved over a five-year period).

Note: In order to assist areas, the Home Office will issue a guide on how to apply the model to the service. In addition to the guide, areas should receive advice on the data required to measure the service’s performance. This should include copies of the relevant Home Office circulars defining the data requirements.
Appendix 3: The Better Quality Services Initiative

The BQS Initiative is part of the Government’s efforts to modernise central government. It is based less on the distinctions between public and private sector provision and more on the attainment of value for money in the provision of services to the public.

The guidance for the BQS Initiative defines value for money as ‘better quality services at optimal cost’. It states:

‘Better quality at optimal cost should be pursued strategically: within a Department – looking at the Department’s long-term objectives and relationships to other services; and across Departments – looking at the Government’s objectives as a whole and, where appropriate, seeking complementary value for money with other Departments.’

It identifies that central government departments need to ‘routinely review their services, decide how best to improve value for money in the circumstances and carry out the improvement programme’.

Key steps to Better Quality Services

The key stages of a BQS programme are to:

- **review** services and activities – over five years with requirements set as outputs and outcomes not processes;
- **set challenging performance standards** – covering costs and quality;
- **appraise the options** –
  - continue or abolish?
  - continue in-house (with benchmarking and restructuring); or
  - buy-in through:
    - a strategic decision to contract out;
    - the outcome of market testing; or
    - privatisation;
- **scope** (procurement strategy and specification) and research the feasibility of achieving the required quality at optimal cost;
- **hold a ‘competition’**;
- **manage contracts**;
- **evaluate performance**; and
- **launch retendering** when appropriate.

*Source: HM Government (Refs. 29 & 30)*
Appendix 4: Some background facts about the probation service

- The probation service attracts around £500 million a year.
- This represents 4 per cent of spending on the criminal justice system.
- Staff account for nearly 75 per cent of costs.
- The overall level of staff in the service is approximately 13,000.
- Around 50 per cent of all staff are probation officers.
- The total number of staff has fluctuated over the last eight years between a low of approximately 12,500 in 1997 from a peak of nearly 14,000 in 1995.
- Numbers are planned to rise to approximately 17,000 by 2003/04.
- There is considerable variation in the level of Home Office resources allocated to areas – from between £5,000–£5,499 per 1,000 head of population aged 15-29 in Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Cambridgeshire to £12,500–£12,999 per 1,000 head of population aged 15-29 in Cumbria and Merseyside.
- Under new arrangements resources will be allocated on the basis of need and performance.
- HM Inspectorate of Probation has found wide variation in performance between areas, and no direct correlation between resource levels and performance (Ref. 25).
- The service supervises nearly 200,000 people a year, and writes approximately 250,000 pre-sentence reports for the courts.
- One of the service’s key measures of performance is the two-year reconviction rate. The Home Office’s most recent research indicates that 56 per cent of all males, and 45 per cent of all females were reconvicted within two years of finishing their supervision by the service.
- The 1998 British Crime Survey shows that around 25 per cent of adults in the UK rate probation, prisons and judges as poor or very poor.
- It shows also that around 80 per cent of the public believe there is a need for tougher sentences, but that the public has no desire to pay for more prisons.

EXHIBIT 6

- 63% Fieldwork
- 12% Community service
- 7% Family court welfare
- 8% Approved hostels
- 6% Prison welfare
- 2% New probation officer training
- 2% Non-grant earning expenditure

Source: (Ref. 26)
Appendix 5: Key tasks carried out by the service

Roles and tasks carried out for the courts

Offender assessments before sentence:

Bail information reports:
- provide objective, factual and impartial information on the offender, including relevant details, such as employment and accommodation status; and
- where there is a risk of serious harm to the public, police, health and social services receive copies of the report.

Pre-Sentence Reports (PSRs) contain:
- An offence analysis that:
  - reviews the offences before the court, and the circumstances in which they were committed;
  - assesses the offender’s culpability and level of premeditation;
  - assesses the consequences of the crime; and
  - indicates whether the offender has made any steps to make reparation, or address offending behaviour.

- An offender assessment that:
  - states the offender’s status in relation to literacy and numeracy, accommodation, and employment;
  - assesses the implication of any special circumstances, for example, family crisis, or mental illness;
  - evaluates and assesses patterns of offending behaviour and the impact of previous supervision;
  - details any substance misuse;
  - details the impact of racism, where relevant; and
  - provides relevant personal background.

- An assessment of the risk of harm to the public and the likelihood of re-offending.

- A conclusion that states explicitly whether an offender is suitable for a community sentence. The report should detail the programme of supervision with a statement of the desired outcomes, along with any specific conditions placed on the order.

Specific Sentence Reports:
- Perform the same functions as PSRs, but offer a speedier service to courts.
- They are used where no more than 100 hours of community service, or probation with no conditions is envisaged.

Sentence and supervision planning

In cases of custody:
- probation officers provide receiving prisons with any information they have on the offender;
- in serious sexual or violent offences the service offers contact to the victims or the victim’s families;
- where probation staff are seconded into prisons, local protocols on roles and responsibilities between the prison and probation service are established;
- probation staff work with prison staff and parole boards on risk assessments, required for decisions on Release on Temporary Licence; Home Detention Curfew; Parole; Non-Parole Release; and notify the
Home Office of the release of dangerous offenders.

For community sentences and supervision in the community:

- all offenders should have risk assessments carried out;
- all offenders should be aware of the supervision plan and its goals;
- offending behaviour should be challenged, either in one-to-one sessions, or structured group programmes;
- offenders should be motivated and assisted toward achieving a greater sense of personal responsibility and discipline;
- the work should not interfere with an offender’s ability to undertake paid employment; and
- on termination of the supervision order, the offender should be made aware of the final review, and the prison service is given feedback on resettlement work, when required.

In hostels:

- Probation staff provide an enhanced level of supervision, by imposing curfews, undertaking assessments of attitude and behaviour, and providing a programme of support and monitoring in order to tackle offending behaviour and reduce risks.

Enforcement

- Where offenders fail to comply with the terms of a community sentence, parole or licence, probation staff must follow set procedures for issuing warnings to offenders, and, where necessary, returning them to the courts for a breach of the order.
- This requires officers to report to the courts and provide evidence of the breach that occurred.

Source: Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (Ref. 7)
Appendix 6: Offences and sentences

Offences within court groupings

*Indictable offences*, such as arson, robbery etc must be tried in Crown Court.

*Triable either way*, offences that may be tried in magistrates courts or in Crown Court, if a defendant elects to do so.

*Summary offences*, normally tried in magistrates courts.

Sentences

*Community sentences* is an umbrella term, which covers probation orders, supervision orders, combination orders, community service orders, attendance centre orders and curfew orders.

- *Probation orders/community rehabilitation orders* can be applied to those who are aged 16 or over. The offender is supervised by the probation service for a period between 6 months and 3 years. The court may include certain requirements on offenders, such as treatments for drug dependency. Those aged 17 or under may be sentenced to an equivalent order, called a supervision order.

- *Community service orders/community punishment orders* can be applied to offenders aged 16 or over, and require a minimum of 40 hours and a maximum of 240 hours of unpaid work to be undertaken on behalf of the community.

- *Combination orders/community punishment and rehabilitation orders* can be applied to those 16 and over. They are joint orders consisting of 1 to 3 years probation with an element of community service, between 40 and 100 hours.

- *Attendance centre orders* apply to offenders under 21 years of age, and require attendance at structured programmes on Saturday afternoons over a number of weeks.

- *Curfew orders* require an offender to remain in a specific place for a certain period.

- *Exclusion orders* prohibit an offender from entering a specified place, at specified times for up to 2 years.

- *Drug abstinence orders* may be applied by courts to offenders aged 18 or over for between 6 months and 3 years.

*Fully suspended sentence* where an adult’s offence is sufficiently serious to warrant a sentence of up to two years imprisonment. It may be suspended for between one and two years, any offence committed while the sentence is suspended may result in the sentence being activated.

*Fines* may be levied by magistrates courts and the Crown Court, collection is the responsibility of the magistrates courts.

*Discharge* an offender may be discharged either absolutely or conditionally, subject to their not re-offending for a period of up to three years.

*Immediate custody* includes young offender institutions and unsuspended imprisonment. The Crown Court may impose a sentence of imprisonment for up to the maximum set out in legislation. Magistrates’ courts are restricted to sentences of imprisonment between five days and six months for any one offence.

*Supervision by the probation service*

*Criminal supervision* covers the supervision of an offender for a fixed period.

*Pre- and post-release supervision* covers the supervision of offenders pre- or post-release from custody; this may be statutory or voluntary.

*Source:* (Refs. 6 and 27).
Appendix 7: Success factors for partnership working

To be effective, partnerships need a number of factors:
1. A clear vision and leadership.
2. Shared objectives.
3. Mutual understanding.
4. Transparent lines of accountability.

Effective partnership working requires a number of factors:
1. Time.
2. Trust.
3. Commitment.
4. Negotiation skills.
5. Team work.

Boards should:
• review how a decision to get involved in, or sustain involvement in, a partnership is arrived at;
• ensure that there is clarity on what the start-up requirements of the partnership are;
• understand the minimum requirement for effective and efficient partnership working;
and
• establish review procedures to ensure that partnerships are working.

Source: Audit Commission (Ref. 31)
Appendix 8: Performance measurement and performance indicators

There are six key principles underlying effective performance measurement:
1. Clarity of purpose – it should be clear for whom the information is produced.
2. Focus – performance information should focus on organisational priorities.
3. Alignment – performance measurement systems should be aligned with the objective setting and performance review processes of the organisation.
4. Balance – the indicators should give a balanced picture of performance.
5. Regular refinement – indicators should be kept up to date, to ensure that they meet changing needs.
6. Robust performance indicators – should have a detailed definition.

There are four key aspects of the performance measurement process:
1. Service objectives.
2. Indicators.
3. Targets.
4. Results.

There are 14 criteria for setting robust performance indicators:
1. Relevancy.
2. A clear definition.
3. Ease of understanding and use.
4. Comparability.
5. Verifiability.
7. Unambiguity.
8. Attributable.
9. Responsiveness.
10. Avoiding perverse incentives.
11. Allowing innovation.
13. Timeliness.
14. Assessment of the importance of criteria, ie, balancing the relative importance of the above criteria when defining indicators.

When developing performance indicators it is important to bear in mind which audience the indicator is for [EXHIBIT 7].

EXHIBIT 7
The different users and uses of indicators

Indicators should form a coherent set, with operational indicators supporting the publication of local and national indicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public &amp; stakeholders, local</td>
<td>Monitor key priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politicians &amp; senior managers</td>
<td>National publication Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public &amp; stakeholders, government,</td>
<td>Setting &amp; meeting local objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politicians &amp; senior managers</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers and staff</td>
<td>Day-to-day management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management information indicators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Audit Commission (Refs. 18 and 19)
References


Useful Websites

www.audit-commission.gov.uk – for information about audit arrangements, and electronic access to recent publications from the Commission

www.cabinet-office.gov.uk – for information on the BQS Initiative, leadership in the public sector, the social exclusion unit and modernisation of government

www.cipfa.com – for information on public sector accountancy standards

www.crimereduction.gov.uk – for information on the crime reduction policies

www.detr.gov.uk – for information on regeneration projects, local funding opportunities, housing issues and partnerships

www.dfee.gov.uk – for information on education employment initiatives, funding opportunities and local learning and skills councils

www.efqm.org – for information on the EEM

www.europa.eu.int – for information on the work of the European Union

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk – for information on public service agreements

www.home-office.gov.uk – for information on HM Inspectorate of Probation, national standards, Home Office circulars on probation, research on crime, and crime and disorder partnerships

www.nao.gov.uk – for information on the work of the National Audit Office

www.open.gov.uk/lcd/lcdhome.htm – for information on the Lord Chancellor’s Department
The Audit Commission has produced a number of studies covering related issues. The following may be of interest to readers of this paper:

**Misspent Youth**  
*Young People and Crime*  
With 2 out of every 5 offenders in 1994 aged under 21 years, the subject of this study is high on the public agenda. *Misspent Youth* explores how effectively £1 billion a year is distributed between the police, youth justice services, probation, legal aid, the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts and prison service, and considers how resources might be better used to reduce offending.


**A Fruitful Partnership**  
*Effective Partnership Working*  
Partnership working with other organisations is a potentially powerful tool allowing organisations to achieve more efficient and effective use of scarce resources. But making partnerships work well is a tough challenge. This helpful paper examines the main stages in the lifecycle of a partnership, highlighting the likely problems and ways of overcoming them.


**Performance Measurement titles**  
The Audit Commission produced three publications in 2000 looking at how performance measurement can be used to improve service delivery. *Aiming to Improve* is aimed at helping managers to develop and use performance measurement as a key component of their overall strategic and operational management. *On Target* gives detailed advice on devising and evaluating robust performance indicators, which are essential for effective performance measurement. *Getting Better All the Time* analyses the use of benchmarking to evaluate performance, and discusses the factors that lead to successful benchmarking.


For a full catalogue of Audit Commission publications, please contact the Communications Department, Audit Commission, 1 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PN, Telephone 0171 828 1212.

To order Audit Commission publications, please telephone 0800 502030, or write to Bookpoint Ltd, 39 Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4TD.
The probation service in England and Wales is undergoing massive changes. *A Change of Direction* outlines the key features of those changes, and provides probation boards and senior management teams with guidance and advice on how they might manage those changes, while improving the overall performance of the service.

The paper highlights the difficulties that boards face in finding the right balance between national and local priorities, and in prioritising work in their areas. It goes on to suggest that boards should prioritise the tasks and processes that offer the greatest opportunity to improve performance against their objectives.