

## **Stakeholder Engagement 16 Prison Governors' Association Represented by Dave Hoskins, Jag Mavi and Mark Ike**

**6<sup>th</sup> November 2014, 102 Petty France, London**

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### **Background**

The Prison Governors' Association (PGA) was formed in October 1987 to represent the interests of senior Prison Service grades. The aims of the PGA, as outlined within its manifesto includes, '*promote excellence in public sector prison delivery, assuring safety, security, decency and substantive regimes*'. Dave Hoskins is one of three governor grades from the Prison Service working at HMP Birmingham which is a private prison run by G4S. Jag Mavi is the Regional Safer Custody lead for the West Midlands and Mark Ike is the Head of Residence at HMP Swaleside.

The PGA apologised for not making a formal submission to the Review, which was due to a transition in leadership due to retirement at the time of the submission request.

### **RESTRICTED REGIME**

It is the view of the PGA that recent issues with recruitment and retention and lack of staff may have had an effect on the number of self-inflicted deaths. It is felt that ACCT reviews have been affected; for example they need to be booked in advance rather than when needed.

It is the experience of the PGA that there is a connection between self-harming and violence in terms of restricted regimes.

The current restricted regime at Swaleside means that only half the prison at a time is unlocked and prisoners will either be on association or the regime, which means less time for prisoners to make calls to family and friends. This loss of 'time out of cell' can increase the spiral of depression for some prisoners. At the same time, at adjudication it has been noticed that the restricted regime contributes to disorder. As well as this, prisoner's mail is held up too due to staff shortages. Activities such as education and work don't always occur.

Staff are faced with the decision of whether to unlock the wing or do their core job which will probably include an ACCT review; they are not comfortable making these decisions.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF 18-24 YEAR OLDS**

The PGA view is that Young Adults (YAs), 18 – 20 year olds should be held separately to older adults. A key reason for this is that working with young adults should be developed as a specialism, with staff getting specialist training.

## **STAFF AND CULTURE IN PRISONS**

Currently the level of staff resource is very difficult, which is leading to regime restrictions. Senior staff know that managing safety and ACCT are vital, but these are very hard to do properly with limited resource. There has also been an impact on training. At present, only mandatory Control & Restraint (C&R) training tends to run, which is having an impact on skill levels. There is not one prison in England and Wales that is yet working at their full staffing level following benchmarking.

There are 1,700 officer vacancies at present, which makes day to day working very difficult. Recruitment is particularly difficult in the South East, where economic realities exacerbate the recruitment issues. It takes 27 weeks to recruit and train a new officer and 19% of recruits are lost in the first six months.

Health care staff are also under resourced, which directly affects the support and guidance they should be providing to prison staff. It is felt that this is particularly the case for ACCTs and for managing the high level of mental health issues in the prison population. Where a prisoner also has communication and/or intellectual difficulties, this lack of support means that it is easy to miss underlying issues and this may have serious consequences.

The level of pay and the work of a prisoner officer make the job unattractive to many. The starting rate of pay is £20,000 per annum and there is no sign post for promotion. In terms of safety and security and regular hours, this job is unlikely to appeal to many people.

The Prison Officer Level Entry Training (POELT) is by NVQ. The PGA is in favour of following the example of the Norwegian Prison Service and having a much longer and more developed training. The Scottish Prison Service is considering this approach. It is a different era for the Prison Service and it is felt that the best people are needed to lead the organisation; graduate level or equivalent would reflect the level of complexity and professionalism required for the job now.

In September 2012 a wing would be staffed by a Senior Officer and eight or nine officers. In 2013 there is no Senior Officer, so there is a void where a manager used to be.

The Personal Officer scheme is effectively dissolved and there are staff on detached duty who don't know the prisoners. Other issues that contribute to the lack of understanding between prison officers and prisoners include a rise in the prison population, many prisoners being moved far from home, problems with gangs, and a lack of understanding of the psychology of prisoners.

Detached duty is an expensive option. The reality is that it only buys an officer who can cover the level of staffing required for Health and Safety to allow for unlock. Safety is improved by relationships and networking and detached duty staff can't offer this.

There is no training for prison governors in mental health issues. They learn by experience and rely on their relationship with the mental health team. It would be a useful professional development to have mental health training so that they have the tools to keep prisoners alive and safe.

Governors tend to create their own learning and development opportunities. The only professional development for governors is the 'Suitable to be in Charge' (SOM), development which is required to progress to Governing Governor or Deputy Governor. This is mostly in the form of a self-evaluating work book. There is no formal evaluation of this, and governors tend to use their network contacts to talk about issues and solve problems, relying on friendships and connections.

There is a vocational element to the job and there are very limited opportunities to acquire leadership skills due to a lack of time and money.

The only training for governors is C&R, which they have to keep up to date as governors are increasingly being required to work at weekends to cover a shortage of officers.

Staff should be able to train to specialise before they can work with vulnerable groups such as young adults or women. This approach would encourage the recruitment of the right staff and other professionals.

The panel asked the PGA if they felt that staffing levels at night were adequate and at the right grade, the PGA said that this is an organisational political issue and the PGA could not answer questions about this.

In some prisons staff still have a problem referring to prisoners by their first name but this is improving. It is hard sometimes to know a prisoner's first name – or preferred name - because of the churn; a prison may have 1,700 receptions per month and staff only get to know the preferred names of the long term prisoners.

The Prison Service has improved in its approach to minority groups. The PGA feel that there is a more professional approach and staff are more tuned in to what is not appropriate and will challenge inappropriate behaviour sooner. Culture may be a bigger problem than race and tensions between religions could also be a bigger problem than race.

### **INFORMATION SHARING**

It can be difficult for Prison Service staff to communicate with external agencies about individual prisoners and as a result of this it is possible that this can lead to distress and other motivating factors for self-harm.

At Birmingham prison for example, there will be 40 or 50 prisoners arriving in Reception in an evening. Where there is no information about the prisoner arriving with them, the staff are reliant on self-report for the first night when they are risk-assessing each individual. This increases the risk because a prisoner is unlikely to say that he is a self-harm risk.

### **ACCT**

ACCT is a great thing but it is only as good as who is using it. If there is no understanding of the person on the ACCT and awareness of their issues it is a waste of time. The process is being followed by staff in prisons, but there is no substance to it.

The ACCT process needs *interaction* more than *observation* and this needs to be led from the top, through line managers and should be reinforced all times. There is

some poor recording of ACCT information, and this needs to be challenged. The PGA believe that the organisation is capable of the cultural change to make this happen. Leadership at all levels should make sure that the ACCT process is carried out properly. If staff are reluctant to commit something to paper or entries are banal, then they should be questioned and challenged if necessary.

At Dovegate prison there is a system of peer challenge and this has been found to drive up standards.

None of the professionals who need to be involved with the ACCT process have enough resources to fulfil ACCT processes effectively. The timing of ACCT Reviews where there is a restricted regime is difficult. Operational staff complain that that healthcare staff are not available to take part in ACCT reviews, but the PGA recognise that both parties struggle to find the time for these.

Some healthcare providers have more agency staff than others and these staff don't understand the prison environment or ACCT. This means that there might not be enough healthcare staff on duty with the right skills. This is exacerbated by the fact the Governor doesn't commission healthcare and has no direct management over the staff. This will be even harder to manage when CRCs come in, because there will be so many different providers who should be involved.

Staff need to have the competence to identify who should be on an ACCT; people at risk are being missed. Staff also need to be able to identify those who are just manipulating.

Those who no longer need to be on an ACCT should have it closed, but staff become scared to close an ACCT. Sometimes an ACCT will be closed without the care plan being completed, which is a result of poor management and leadership.

ACCT is better than the previous F2052SH system for looking after at-risk prisoners. However, there is a huge gulf between the PSI and the actual delivery of ACCT, it is yet to be seen how effective it is when there are no longer the staffing shortages.

A positive action is that NOMS HQ have appointed safer custody leads to share good practice.

## **INTERVENTIONS**

With current resource pressures, only high intensity interventions are running, those at a lower level and of low intensity are not running. Prisoners are 'crying out' to get on a course. Being out of cell doing something like this can reduce their risk of self-harm and self-inflicted death.

The PGA feels there is a strong link between safety and offence type. The High Security Estate (HSE) has been largely protected from the cuts. The benchmarking process is just beginning for the HSE, but they will always have more staff. It is known for a prisoner to move into the HSE to get on the interventions (programmes) they need.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Prisoners who are diagnosed with mental health issues may have increased risk of self-harm and violence because of longer periods locked in cell. This could be managed better; *“Jail life at the moment is a violent environment.”*

## **FOLLOWING A SELF-INFLICTED DEATH**

Any self-inflicted death is horrendous for staff and prisoners, especially when someone dies while you are trying to save them.

Notifying the next of kin is the worst part of the job.

When someone takes their life the area and the body becomes a crime scene and so this has to be managed by staff.

The processes following a death take too long. It is a drawn out process which is worse for the family who can't reach closure. It can take three or four years sometimes and so the family suffers unnecessarily.

There is not enough professional support for staff following a death.

Regulation 28 reports from the Coroner are responded to from headquarters. At a local level, staff do make time to respond to recommendations because it is personal and staff will need closure for themselves particularly where they have met the family.

## **IEP SCHEME**

The changes to the IEP scheme are unfathomable. For a new entrant to prison the austere entry level is not helpful.

When a prisoner changes from remand to sentenced status, they will be put on the 'entry' level of the scheme, which is between the basic and standard level. For all prisoners who are not on basic, this means a drop in standard. This does not fit in with the ethos of the scheme, which is supposed to be partly incentive. It causes unnecessary tension between staff and prisoners. The PGA have told the Minister their views on this.

Staff need to have the training and skills to manage the 'care versus control' dilemma. If a prisoner's behaviour is not understood or recognised, then staff fail the person and he/she may be punished when this is not the right thing to do.