

Stakeholder Engagement
Juliet Lyon and John Drew
Prison Reform Trust

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BACKGROUND

The Prison Reform Trust's main objectives are:

1. Reducing unnecessary imprisonment and promoting community solutions to crime.
2. Improving treatment and conditions for prisoners and their families.
3. Promoting equality and human rights in the justice system.

SELF-INFLICTED DEATHS

PRT drew the panel's attention to the 'Tell Them So They Listen' Home Office research study 201, which drew together interviews with 18 – 24 year olds. The report suggests that suicidal ideation was a normal part of life in a YOI at that time. An additional factor is the effect this has on young people who actually see self-harm or a death by suicide.

CHARACTERISTICS OF 18-24 YEAR OLDS

PRT think that this age group has been described as being left out of the system. They are often prolific offenders and challenging to work with. Little happens to help this age group.

Too many of these young people are on remand; they have not been found guilty or sentenced, but they are in an uncertain environment where they feel lonely. It is bleak and noisy and they are frightened. They hear people 'shouting out' at night. This is not a criticism of staff, they do their best in difficult circumstances and a lot of them really care about the young people in their charge. Spending too much time in their cells due to reduced purposeful activity and without anything to do is a problem for young people.¹ There is concern that reductions in staffing levels make it more difficult for them to get fresh air.

It is PRT's view that there is not a hierarchy of risk factors but staff should be sensitive to those risks that are less recognised and easier to cloak. Speech and language difficulties, for example, can lead to a lack of understanding, and attachment disorders are associated with problems when dealing with authority. In the youth estate training has been developed on attachment, in order to develop insight and sympathy for this issue.

Sentence planning and personal officers have a really important role in managing vulnerability and these staff should be kept as a stable presence. Having staff trained together can have a profound effect, an example of which was seen at HMYOI Lancaster

¹ PRT referred to the research that Alison Lieblich's Cambridge team have done on young men and purposeful activity.

Farms, where it created a safe culture and allowed the strategic development of a healthy prison in its early years.

Families are important for this age group. It is difficult for families when young people are held far from home and moved around, and in the main families want to help. Staff need training to engage with families. Sometimes a young adult is terrified of leaving prison if they have started to feel safe there and have no family to return to.

PRT were aware that NOMS has appointed a champion for care leavers who is a governing governor and consider this a good thing. The reality is that most care leavers won't know about care leaver benefits, so a champion is a positive way to gain what they can, respond to the need for advocacy services. Cared for children are disproportionately represented in the CJS, 33% of boys and 61% of girls in custody have been, or are, in care compared to fewer than one per cent of children in the justice system.²

STAFF AND CULTURE IN PRISONS

PRT have been concerned about mixing young people with adults if it is as a cost saving measure. There is a huge amount of pressure on staff, including the burden of keeping young people safe.

Prioritising resources and implementing tools and approaches available to them can be a problem for staff. Suicide and self-harm may be seen as part of the terrain rather than a significant separate issue. There is a huge burden on staff to keep prisoners safe and there is little professional support for staff.

PRT would like staff to get much better support and training, including specific training for governors. Staff need de-briefing after a trauma and it is not clear how good this currently is. There is a sense of disappointment in the Service, which most prison staff feel, that suicides have suddenly increased-it is affecting morale and confidence.

PRT believe things have improved since David Ramsbotham's report 'Suicide is Everyone's Business'.

PRT consider the Listener Scheme to be 'a bright light in a dark landscape'. Listeners are very conscientious, which is needed when they may need to share a cell with someone at risk and listen all night. There is a very variable range of facilities for Listeners and this could be improved. It is very good that the Prison Service allows the principle of confidentiality; it means that people are more likely to speak. PRT would like to see a review of the outcomes of being a Listener to see what its value is to the individual Listener, and to look at ways of support and boosting the service. PRT would like the Samaritans to continue to have a core grant rather than the service being competed at any stage.

The PRT experience is that staff do try to facilitate a prisoner seeing a Listener when they ask to do so, in spite of staff shortages. Prisoners moving on, and the turnover of trusted Listeners may be a problem.

² PRT provided a copy of the Bromley Briefing containing these figures.
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Bromley%20Briefings/Factfile%20Autumn%202014.pdf>

Safer Custody staff and the Samaritans support Listeners. PRT were contacted by Samaritans about the introduction of the IPP (Indeterminate Prison Sentence) as this led to an increase in risk.

The Insiders scheme in the juvenile estate is good. It offers befriending and this could be developed.

ACCT

PRT told the panel that on paper everything that should be in ACCT is, but compliance by staff is still an issue; there are problems with documentation being incomplete and lacking in evidence.

Staff need to be taught to recognise 'cries for help'; there should be more training on this aspect of their role and more senior staff should be available on site to train in this area of work.

INCENTIVES AND EARNED PRIVILEGES SCHEME (IEP)

PRT are concerned that the loss of some purposeful activity and the changes to the IEP scheme are having an effect on prisoners. The change to IEP is vexatious at a time when there are fewer staff and staff are worried about getting the changes wrong so they are not being flexible.

PRT is worried about the Justice Secretary saying that he will take televisions away as they are a good tool for keeping prisoners safe. The punishment of deprivation is problematic; when added to fewer family visits it can increase risk, especially at a time of pressure.

The work of PACT on first night experiences identified practical things that people needed most on their first night and few days. PRT will forward its report 'There when you need them most' to the review team.³

PRT have a report on IEP called 'Punishment without a purpose' and will send this to the Review.⁴

INFORMATION SHARING / VULNERABILITY

PRT told the panel that it can be difficult to identify a prisoner as vulnerable. There are conflicts in balancing care versus control and getting the prisoner adequate support. There are gaps in the tools available for the under 18s but CHAT (Comprehensive Health Assessment Tool) could be applied to adults; compliance is the biggest problem.

There are practical things that could be done that may reduce vulnerability, such as not always leaving women and YPs on the escort vans to be dropped off last. The van journeys

³ PRT will send link to its report on Pact's first night services.

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/there%20when%20you%20need%20them%20most%20a%20review%20of%20pact's%20first%20night%20in%20custody%20services.pdf>

⁴ PRT have a report on IEP called 'Punishment without purpose' and will send this to the Review.

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/punishment%20without%20purpose%20FINAL2941007.pdf>

are too long and arriving at the prison late is not a good thing. Even if staff might be kind, it is difficult all around; it would be better for staff and prisoners if they were dropped off earlier in the day. Assessments for mental health issues, disability and the Cell Sharing Risk Assessment are all under strain due to staff shortages.

LIAISON AND DIVERSION

PRT would like to see more offenders diverted from custody. We are asking too much of our prisons and their staff, who are having to deal with the most difficult people in the country.

PRT said that an initial £75m is being spent by the Department of Health to establish qualified nurses at every police station and court in England to assess mental health and learning disability. There are currently 10 trial sites with full roll-out planned for 2017, which is a good thing. If the needs are great and the level of offending is low, these people should be diverted away from prison. If the offending is more serious they should have their needs recorded and receive initial support as they go through the criminal justice system.