



**Reducing Reoffending**  
Third Sector Advisory Group

**Reducing Re-offending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) Special Interest Group on effective care and support for people at risk of suicide and self-harm**

**Minutes from 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting: 22 Nov 2016**

**Attendees:**

Linda	Bryant	Together for mental wellbeing (chair)
Hazel	Alcraft	Clinks (secretariat)
Paula	Atherton	Liverpool CVS
Richy	Cunningham	Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead
Christina	Hall	Lincolnshire Action Trust
Robert	Knibbs	Independent Monitoring Board
Jez	Spencer	Fairshares
Caroline	Drummond	Nacro
Charlie	Weinberg	Safe Ground

**Apologies:**

Jabeer	Butt	Race Equality Foundation
Katy	Haigh	Good Vibrations
Andy	Keene-Downs	Pact
Julie	Lowe	Big Red Food Shed
Marguerite	Regan	Mental Health Foundation
Valeria	Villa	Inside Out (Volunteer Centre Kensington & Chelsea)

**1. Summary of prison white paper**

Presentation outlining the key points of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) white paper on Prison Safety and Reform, which was published since the first meeting.

## 2. Reviewing notes and questions from first meeting

The group reviewed the questions addressed in the first meeting, in the light of the prisons white paper and to allow comments from those not at that meeting.

- i. Whose responsibility is it to care for people who are vulnerable in prison?
  - Different people are responsible at different points on a prisoner's journey
    - It may be helpful to break the question above down – whose responsibility at different stages e.g. at reception? On the first night? During sentence planning?
    - Experience at reception is a touchstone for how safe people feel. Prisoners might not meet their offender manager/dedicated officer until they transfer to normal wing, which can be a few days or a week after arrival
  - Response to vulnerability needs to be dynamic
    - Any person/agency coming into contact with someone needs to know what to do if they identify concerns
    - Should all services & contracts (e.g. education, arts etc.) include an aim around safety?
    - Danger in relying only on formal processes; ongoing and informal assessments are also needed
  - Dedicated officer role
    - White paper outlines plans to reintroduce a 'dedicated officer' role, with wing staff working closely with a small number of prisoners. (This was also raised during the first meeting of this special interest group)
    - Do need to exercise caution – what happens if someone doesn't get on with their dedicated officer?
      - Needs to be implemented with flexibility, so prisoners can ask to change if the relationship is not working, without negative comeback
      - Also recognise that people may take against a staff member for very little reason – so may need persistence to overcome this and develop relationship
      - Need to give staff confidence in handling this
    - Some prisons already work in this way; for others, it will need a change of culture across the organisation – that has to start from the governor
    - Are the people being asked to take on this responsibility *equipped* for keeping people safe?
      - Training and support for staff is key
      - Personal officer schemes have worked well in the past where staff provided with training; not so well when they were just told which were 'their' prisoners and expected to get on with it
      - Include specific training on safeguarding e.g. just because someone talks about self-harm or suicide doesn't mean they're immediately going to go off and do it – so need to give staff the confidence continue engagement and know how to respond
  - Need to think about responsibility at both strategic and operational levels

- Remember the wider systemic and environmental pressures – how do we change overall perception of people in prison as people worthy of *care*?
- Responsibility of the Secretary of State
  - White paper sets out intention to clarify the role/responsibility of different people within prison system, including governors and the Secretary of State
  - If improving safety is a key aim for the paper, these roles should explicitly reference people's accountability and responsibility for keeping people safe
  - Secretary of State is ultimately responsible – but need to set out a structure for lines of accountability, oversight and audit

## ii. What do you do if you come across someone who is vulnerable and at risk?

- Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs)
  - Reference to IMBs in the white paper is positive
  - Discussion at last meeting about how IMBs can support the voluntary sector felt quite significant
  - *Action: Clinks to contact IMB national council about raising awareness of IMBs with the voluntary sector*
- Learning from the Youth Justice Board (YJB)
  - What can we learn from the experience of YJB in cutting numbers and safeguarding
  - Proportionally, time and money spent both higher than for adults
  - Also work with young people is more palatable to the public, so easier politically
  - But are still principles which can apply e.g. focus on early help and preventative programmes, and working with families
  - Think about impact of trauma; Beyond Youth Custody report into resettlement for young people found young people in custody experience disproportionate levels of trauma – same is true for adults
- Working with families
  - E.g. HMP Liverpool - time spent working with families brings improvements for prisoners, but also knock-on benefits for staff (as prisoners are more content), and better relationships between families and staff – all contributes to keeping people safe
  - Prison reform white paper only includes 4 bullet points about families
  - Prison building programme could work against family contact

## iii. Who do we need to influence in order to achieve change?

- Prison reform driving towards decentralising, devolving power from MoJ/NOMS to prison governors
  - In which case the people we need to influence are new governors & larger service providers (drugs, education, etc.)
  - Need to plan seeds now to inform future plans
- Do still need support from MoJ or NOMS as well – 'stamp of approval' for what saying to governors
- Group appreciated Anne Fox's Guardian blog on the prison white paper – highlighting need to listen to the voluntary sector

- Sam Gimyah/MoJ are still really interested in the numbers – data & economic arguments
- Comparing the cost of what works
  - Howard League report on the [cost of prison suicide](#) – good in highlighting *what* the various impacts and costs are – but only goes part of the way
  - Now want to look at a direct comparison – how much would it cost to implement strategies we know work, v. the cost of current situation – to show to prison governors
  - Look at prisons where numbers are low to see what is working well there and cost those out
  - e.g. East Sutton Park pride themselves in the fact they've had no suicides, and low rates of self-harm
  - Also draw on other sources – e.g. National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance report on value of arts in the criminal justice system
  - Could approach Howard League to see if they would write this
- Prison Governors Association and Prison Officers Union could be useful allies to work with
- Also need to think about influencing wider context and public opinion e.g. Charities Act increasing disqualifications for people with convictions, so making it more difficult for people to change – all of this has an impact on people in prisons.

iv. What would you want to be able to do for people? What would make the difference for people in that situation?

- Have regular progress meetings with all prisoners (involving prison staff & other services) to help to pick up on changes in emotional state
- Improved training
  - Mental health awareness / mental health first aid training should be mandatory for prison officers – would help to change culture of acceptance/openness around mental health. Doesn't need in-depth professional qualifications
  - Training in using trauma-informed approaches for all staff
  - Offer joint training to prison officers and voluntary sector e.g. IMB members currently take part in ACCT (Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork) training alongside prison officers – builds relationships and encourages to work in partnership
- Ongoing support/supervision
  - Don't just need induction or initial training - staff also need ongoing support in how to apply it e.g. listening and responding to prisoners' stories appropriately
  - Some prison training gives unhelpful messages e.g. anti-grooming for working with sex offenders; presuming manipulation instead of recognising mental health issues
  - Offer external clinical supervision to prison staff?
- Making use of people's lived experience
  - Learn from the voluntary sector around involving and employing people with lived experience
  - Prison sector generally very risk averse around this – in services or as volunteers etc., as well as employing staff

- Also about having confidence to speak about/use it – must be staff who *do* have lived experience of recovery from mental health, addictions etc. - what supports prison officers to speak up about issues?
- Need to see lived experience as an engagement tool, not a weakness - why should this be different in prison to how it is in the community?
- Building confidence about raising concerns
  - Need to raise confidence among staff/volunteers that their observations about mental health will be accepted/taken seriously – and treated supportively
  - Reticence to raise issues around changes in someone’s mental state – worry that could be challenged on their perception because they’re not experts
  - Also concerns that prisoners may not want issues raising as it could affect risk assessments for ROTL etc. – so what happens if comments are fed back to them
- Partnership working and wider safeguarding
  - Prisons should have same duty for adult safeguarding as other agencies
  - Need to move towards better partnership working with community services and voluntary sector on safeguarding issues
  - And use existing frameworks/strategies to work towards – e.g. PIPE standards from royal college of psychiatrists
  - Draw on examples where this is happening already e.g. HMP Lincoln are part of the crisis care concordat; HMP Emley included in local suicide prevention strategy

### 3. Other issues arising from the prisons white paper

- Governor autonomy
  - Could be good that governors are being given more accountability – but could also be used as scapegoats
  - May change the relationship between prisons and voluntary sector, depending on attitude of individual governor
- Measuring rates of self-harm
  - How can you set a target for incidents of self-harm? 1 is too many.
  - But equally can’t just set a zero tolerance target - if a person has ongoing history of self-harm, chances are they will do so again at some point. So how can you hold governors to account for that?
  - Fall into perverse incentives whenever you put in targets around vulnerability e.g. danger that governors will refuse to accept prisoner transfers for people who have record of self-harm
  - Does at least focus governor’s minds on improving safety and reducing incident – but it is more about the culture of how a prison delivers
  - Use positive targets instead, for interventions/strategies we know work e.g. mental health training or health and social care qualifications for staff; numbers of peer supporters deployed; etc.
- Prison league tables
  - Who does the league table incentivise? Don’t get to choose which prison you go to, and not comparing like for like in different settings
  - Could impact on recruiting no. 1 governors if a prison appears low down in the table

- Transparency is needed so that prisoners & families know what's happening to them – but as have no power to influence it, league tables could just increase anxiety
- What the white paper doesn't say... we just need to reduce the no. of people in prisons!

#### 4. Key messages

The group discussed creating a series of 'key messages' from points raised over the course of both meetings, to use to inform further conversations with other stakeholders and groups working on this issue. These included:

- New roles being outlined for the Secretary of State, governors and others should include formal lines of accountability for prison safety
- Break down prisoners' journeys – different people are responsible for keeping people safe at different points
  - Reception & first night staff
  - Personal officer
  - Every contact (and every relationship) counts
  - Peer supporters
- Journey is also different for different people
  - Response to environment is very different for e.g. people on repeat short-term sentences v. historic sex offenders
  - But remember actually each person is different, no homogenous groups
  - When resources are tight, temptation is to look at the most common, easiest to meet journey, and ignore the others – don't allow minimum standards to become the norm
- Resurrection not innovation
  - Look at the many initiatives which have worked well in the past, and what could be revived or scaled-up – don't reinvent the wheel
  - Lots of the things which would help are already in place, but people don't always know that they're happening
- Build on the Howard League 'Cost of prison suicide' report – comparing this with the cost of doing what works well
- Prison officers need training to take on dedicated officer roles...
  - Which should include equipping them for safeguarding / responding to people at risk
- ...and ongoing supervision for prison officers' own health & wellbeing and how to apply their training
  - Look after the people who look after the people
  - Understand that there are different ways to impact service users – looking after your staff well is one of them
- Targets to reduce self-harm or suicide could create perverse incentives – instead, measure and give governors targets to increase what works
  - e.g. no. of peer supporters, health and social care qualifications for prison staff
- Voluntary sector services are a key part of the solution
  - Should be seen as part of the staffing, incorporated in all the training, etc.
- Action and responsibility are needed at both operational and strategic levels

- Acknowledging the wider context and public opinion in which prisons operate

## 5. Next steps

- Clinks to circulate notes from this meeting and draft key message statement to this group (including those who gave apologies)
- Group to agree key messages via email
- These will be used to approach other individuals/agencies to discuss the issues and how we could work with them, such as:
  - NHS England - task group on suicide prevention
  - Public Health England
  - Independent advisory panel on deaths in custody (Juliet Lyon)
  - Inquest
  - National Audit Office – group currently looking at mental health in prisons
  - NICE – group developing guidance on suicide prevention in community and custody
  - Police and Crime Commissioners (link to prison governors & local suicide prevention strategies)
  - Prison Officers Union
  - Prison Governors Association
  - IMB could take /use in discussions with ministers
  - HMIP - consultation on inspection criteria
  - Prison & Probation Ombudsman
  - Centre for Mental Health / Howard League
- Linda Bryant to work with Anne Fox (Clinks) to agree approach to future influencing work
- Further meetings of this group, or invitations for group members to attend meetings with other stakeholders, to follow as appropriate depending on outcome from the above