

# Prison Governors Association

Representing: The Prison Governors of the United Kingdom since 1987



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Dear Colleagues,

### A Personal Message from the President

I thought it really important that I write to you about the current crisis in our prisons and acknowledge the unacceptable stress and anxiety you face on a daily basis. I want you to know that the PGA is constantly fighting your corner, escalating all issues up to and including the Secretary of State.

The recent increase in concerted indiscipline is of grave concern. The rise in our population, unforeseen by the statisticians in MOJ, has left us with virtually no headroom in prison spaces. This has coincided with summer peak leave period putting further strain on limited staffing resources. I know that governor grades are spending more and more time on landings bolstering numbers so some kind of regime can be delivered. The instability we are seeing is clearly linked to a poor regime. Further loss of accommodation, like those lost during the current, ongoing incidents at The Mount over the last couple of days, means drafts of prisoners are being moved across the country, compromising the Families Pathway and de-stabilising the receiving prisons as they try to maintain order amongst disaffected displaced men. This toxic mix does not have a quick fix and the future looks like more of the same.

REFORM is the answer to all our woes and wouldn't it be great if that was the case. Members are telling me that they have seen nothing tangible coming out of MOJ to ease the burden to date. The decision to separate policy from operations seems a perverse one and certainly not cost effective when we are given messages that budgets remain very stretched. MOJ Prison Reform Programme consists of a Chief Executive Officer, Justin Russell who has a team of around 20 Directors/Deputy Directors, supported by approximately 450 other grades of staff. As the policy leads are predominantly generalist civil servants from other government departments, it leaves a gaping hole in operational knowledge. How has this hole been filled? By taking operational experts (our grades) out of prisons and putting them into MOJ. At a time when SMT's in prisons need competence, resilience and stability to deal with the intolerable pressure they are under, we are finding that temporary promotion into SMT's could be as high as 30%. I put this whole argument to Richard Heaton, Permanent Secretary, last week. His response was less than satisfactory and the example he gave a poor one. He stated he made no

apologies for having IT experts working on IT Reform! An example of the madness of the split is recruitment. MOJ deal with all recruitment, up until the point when new staff are booked onto POELT courses then it is passed over to HMPPS. Why? Governor development also sits in MOJ and is headed by people who have absolutely no concept of what being a Governor means and requires; it is so much more than general leadership.

The issue of Recruitment remains critical. In the year 16/17 there was a net increase of only 75 prison officers. This year it is ramping up, but with that comes further issues as members tell me that they have concerns about their new recruits. They say that the selection process is allowing many unsuitable people through, and the quality of training is poor. It has been said that large numbers of new recruits can actually add to the instability in prisons rather than improve it. I suppose it is understandable that when trying to increase numbers at speed, quality may be compromised. However, the attrition rate is high and increasing, so MOJ and HMPPS need to do something to stop this very expensive recruitment campaign turning into a complete damp squib. Recent media coverage of quarterly statistics show the highest violence ever, this along with concerted indiscipline in our prisons is not an advert to join or stay.

Empowerment has yet to gain any traction. The Deregulation Project stuttered and stumbled to a halt and failed totally to release Governors from the bureaucratic chains of 100's of PSI's. I understand that it is to be revitalised, so let's hope the review of IEP policy is not the speed of future deregulation. Members are informing us that rather than being enabled to work in an empowered way, they are seeing more assurance and monitoring as they now serve two machines. This is confusing and the rub between both partners is obvious when as a professional association we are required to deal with both. Who are the decision makers? This is probably one of the PGA's most asked questions and we still aren't clear!

We know many prisons are in crisis and I deliberately use that term, because it can't be dressed up in any other way. We have 40 prisons of concern, 10 of which are very concerning. Of the ones that don't fit this criteria, they are still a distance away from where we were in the Golden Years pre austerity. The PGA will continue to voice concern and ramp up pressure on MOJ Prison Reform Programme in particular to start delivering and reacting in a much more timely manner to the situation we are in. That said, I remain firmly of the belief that you cannot separate policy and delivery when dealing with such a complex environment as ours. I will lobby Ministers on this very topic in October when we meet with Sam Gyimah for the first time since the Election.

Whilst devastated at the complete decline of our Service, in a perverse way, these difficult times are often our finest hour as the total commitment of our members is so obvious when grappling with the day to day trials and tribulations of operational life. We will continue with pride to serve the membership as directed and deliver the very difficult messages you are unable to.

Andrea