

# Prison Governors Association

Representing: The Prison Governors of the United Kingdom since 1987



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## PRESS RELEASE

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001HRS ON TUESDAY 9 OCTOBER 2018**

### **PRISON GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE – PRESIDENT'S OPENING ADDRESS – THE LEADERSHIP OF OUR PRISONS**

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#### ***Are our leaders good enough?***

This may seem a simple question, but the answer is certainly not simple or straightforward. Prison Safety Statistics published each quarter remain horrendous with records broken around violence, prisoner on prisoner and prisoner on staff. We have an ever growing number of prisons in special measures, performance improvement plans and urgent notification, along with those who don't quite meet any of these criteria but are still struggling on a daily basis to achieve and are often failing to do so. We have crumbling prisons and an inability to give a safe, decent and secure regime to large numbers of men and women in our care due to lack of staff, not fit for purpose contracts and a much more violent, disrespectful, gang and drug affiliated population.

Against this backdrop, there seems to have been a subtle campaign to question the ability of leaders from the Chief Executive Officer to Governors. I often hear the Prisons Minister talk about the qualities of Prison Officers - and I totally agree with him - but very rarely, if ever, about the quality of leadership.

Is the state of our prisons down to the quality of leadership within the Service, at Prison and Executive Board level? The first two or three years of this decade, we probably had the best performing prison system ever, even though we remained overcrowded in many of our establishments.

Whilst I have waxed lyrical over the years about Government austerity measures in prisons, it cannot be ignored or dressed up in any other way, our prisons are in the state they are in due to dis-investment and a complete failure to react to the crisis in a timely manner by Government. What this has reaped is the state we are in and the immense struggle we are facing in trying to pull ourselves out of the mire. A constant irritation of mine is that the Government do not have the humility to admit that they got their policy completely wrong this decade in our prisons. Instead the criticism seems to be levelled at our leadership. There has not been some catastrophic failure in the competence of our leaders in the past five years. The majority of Governors are the same people, competent, committed and brave. Our determination to try and keep prisons functioning against a 25% cut in budgets without a reduction in prison population and virtually no capital investment has prevented the whole system totally imploding.

There seems to be a naivety from Ministers that the piecemeal funding we have received the last couple of years will make a difference at speed. It will not. We need time to implement a long term strategy without

reactive short termism and I believe the strategy HMPPS is currently embarking on is the right one and the green shoots of recovery, however small, are showing.

It is then of concern that the Permanent Secretary has taken the decision to remove a dedicated and competent CEO who knows our business intimately at such a critical time. The last thing we need is another change of direction. Without a doubt, lack of continuity this decade has contributed to instability in our prisons. Is it any wonder leaders in our organisation who ricochet from one change to another with limited resources struggle to achieve sustained improvement?

That said there is a more positive feel in our prisons, however fragile. Development of high level strategy around security and safety is beginning to be implemented into prisons, but this will take time to have a significant impact. Staffing has increased and we have achieved the recruitment target set by Liz Truss for the Offender Management in Custody Model. The new model is gradually being rolled out across the Estate. That said, attrition rates amongst new staff remains higher than HMPPS would want due to the volatile working environment. The simple fact is that new staff will take time to become confident and competent in their jail craft, and as long as we are able to keep these recruits in the Service. The hope is that over time and experience, the positive cultural impact of new staff will support the drive to stabilise our prisons, but Governors must have the time to invest in and mentor new staff. In some prisons this is proving difficult due to the sheer pace of day to day life and these are generally our most challenging and poor performing prisons.

The Ten Prisons Project which attracted £10 million with personal oversight from the Prisons Minister is an interesting project. The Minister expects improvements although how much is unknown by 1st August 2019. The funding is not recurring and must be spent this financial year. As we all know, setting up governance structures of such projects takes time. Our procurement rules mean the ability to purchase expensive bits of kit and make them operational takes time. Consultation and training of staff takes time. It seems to me that time may not be on the side of the Governors who run these 10 jails. If this funding and project does not have the impact the Minister desires, will the criticism once again be levelled at our leadership? Is this one of those short term will o' the wisp projects, or is it one which will bring about fundamental change in the funding of all of our prisons? Time will tell.

I once again repeat what I have said many times. The only way our prisons will achieve sustained improvement is if there is a will in Government to fund us appropriately and that will only happen if they accept that their austerity strategy has been the catalyst for the current situation. Scapegoating leaders will not help and in fact could hinder. Bits of money for this project or that project is not efficient and will not achieve the results so desperately needed. The prison population needs to be reduced and the purpose of prisons clearly defined and funded appropriately. There needs to be massive capital investment in our buildings infrastructure to make them fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The role of the Minister is to lobby Treasury and fight the corner of our beleaguered Service.

When politicians are brave enough to do this, the quality of our leadership will be given the platform to shine again. My cautious word is that stabilising and improving our prisons must be a long term project and any expectation that it can be achieved quickly must be scotched right now. Give us the tools and the time and we will deliver because as leaders in prisons we are the best!

I would like to finish with a quote from Teddy Roosevelt that sums up critics and also the brave leadership of Governors.

***"It is not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."***

That quote has just described you!

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Note for editors:

The Prison Governors Association was founded in October 1987 to represent the higher operational managers in the Prison Service in England and Wales. The PGA was placed on the register of Trade Unions on 6 November 1987 (No. 639T). On 28 July 1988 the Certification Officer under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974 issued the Prison Governors Association with a Certificate of Independence. The status of the Prison Governors Association is that of an independent registered Trade Union. For more information contact the President, Andrea Albutt on 07966 114773 or James Bryant, PGA Office Manager, on 07884 434814.

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### PGA Annual Conference Agenda 2018

Day 1 – Tuesday 9 October, 2018

- 0800 - 0945 Registration / Tea / Coffee
- 0945 Welcome by Conference Chair, Dave Taylor
- 0950 President's Opening Address – Andrea Albutt
- 1005 Standing Orders' Committee Chair – Procedures and Rules of Debate
- 1010 Resolutions
- 1030 Tea / Coffee
- 1050 National Officers' Report
- 1130 Scotland Report
- 1145 Northern Ireland Report
- 1215 Resolutions
- 1230 Lunch
- 1330 Guest Speaker: Prof Nick Hardwick, former Chief Inspector and Chair of the Parole Board
- 1400 Resolutions
- 1500 Tea / Coffee / Room Check-In
- 1545 Guest Speaker: Ian Lawrence, General Secretary, NAPO
- 1605 Finance Officer's Report
- 1620 Resolutions
- 1650 Personal Case Report
- 1700 Conference Charity
- 1715 Membership Report – Kevin Billson
- 1730 Close

Day 2 – Wednesday 10 October, 2018

0915 Resolutions

0930 Guest Speaker: Phil Wheatley C.B., former Director General, HM Prison Service

1000 Tea / Coffee

1030 Resolutions

1200 Lunch

1300 Resolutions

1430 Rory Stewart MP, Prisons Minister

1530 approx. Closing Remarks: Andrea Albutt, PGA President