

Prison Governors Association

Representing: The Prison Governors of the United Kingdom since 1987



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Bulletin 850

21 December 2022

Dear Colleagues,

This short bulletin contains updates on the following:

- One HMPPS; HQ
- Future Regime Design (FRD)
- Recruitment and Retention
- Overcrowding
- Job Evaluation
- Equalities and Diversity
- End of Year Message
- Office Closure

The One HMPPS and HQ review programmes continue, and we remain actively engaged. Although we see much work being undertaken in preparing the groundwork, much of what we have seen is probably best described as being abstract at this stage.

We are aware of the intended purpose of One HMPPS and the potential direction of travel it is likely to take, what we are lacking is the detail of how the objectives of the programme will be achieved.

We remain supportive of the wider principles of protecting frontline delivery, but we are becoming concerned that what we have seen so far could be best described as a lift and shift of current work and responsibilities from one part of HMPPS to another. We are not sure that the scale of the changes has been decided yet, as we have not been informed of any work or projects which have been determined as not being essential in supporting frontline delivery.

As an association, our membership reach extends across all parts of HQ as well as establishments, and although at this time there is a strong narrative that One HMPPS will protect frontline delivery, it is not clear in reality how this will happen. We are aware that we have had limited feedback from those parts of the organisation which are most likely to be impacted during the early stages of One HMPPS, and as such we will be looking to facilitate

some targeted engagement sessions with our existing branch reps within PGD and HQ early in the new year. James will be in touch to make these arrangements.

Future Regime Design (FReD – we love acronyms...) Out of the many change programmes that the PGA have been engaged with, FReD has been one that feels like it has the most potential for prisons. We would also like to single it out as being the project which feels like we have had the best engagement with. One of our observations with FReD though, is it is not a magic bullet – although it may stimulate prisons to look at regime design and delivery through fresh eyes, it does not bring with it additional resources, nor indeed do we think it gives prisons or governors any additional freedoms.

When we engaged with HMPPS in preparation to exit from the national framework, our strong message to HMPPS was that this should be a reset moment for prisons, that whatever our new norms were going to be, we must not revert to a position where time out of cell was at the expense of safety of colleagues or those in our care. We remain confident that the concepts being developed by FReD will support safer regime delivery, but this will only be fully realised when prisons have enough boots on the ground to delivery consistent regimes. One of the constant themes in our engagement with FReD is that it is governors and their teams who know their establishments better than anyone else – it must be the professional judgement of the governor at the prison what is deemed safe, whilst ensuring opportunities for a rehabilitative culture is exploited. While we do remain supportive of FReD, we remain strongly opposed to any proposals which undermines the safety of those who live and work in our prisons.

Recruitment and Retention remains the greatest concern of the PGA. Without having the right people in the right places at the right time, all the work taking place to support prisons will, to some degree, feel futile.

The view of the PGA has remained constant, that what we are now seeing is the culmination of lack on investment in our workforce – whether this is in pay, in training or of wellbeing, the consequences have been the same. Fewer people have wanted to join us, and those that have, have not stayed with us long enough. We are seeing some fantastic initiatives taking place to help improve the experiences of the colleagues within your prisons and workplaces – some of these are nationally delivered, and we are hearing of more and more examples where local initiatives are taking place which are having a positive impact on staff retention.

Whilst positive, we do think there is much more which could be done. We need to see a much clearer and deliverable strategy coming from both MoJ and HMPPS which will demonstrate how they intend to rapidly increase the availability of ‘boots on the ground’. We need to see a deliverable strategy about how the ever-increasing number of vacancies being filled on ‘temp cover’ arrangements can be permanently filled. Although we remain confident that HMPPS is fully aware of the scale of the retention problem, we do not believe that it is within their control to solve the many issues which routinely see more than 30% of an already depleted staffing complement not being available for frontline duties. We need to see long term investment from Government into our workforce for things to get better.

Overcrowding and the use of Safeguard is avoidable, and the reasons they exist are symptoms of a system which has not had sufficient investment in its buildings for decades. The publication of the Woolf report was clear that overcrowding must cease - this was a recommendation made to Government back in 1991, and it has been a recommendation that successive Governments have not addressed.

We have seen such paltry levels of investment in building maintenance over recent years that has seen a backlog of repairs and general upkeep which would require £500million per year being allocated for the next decade just to get on top of this dire situation. These are issues outside of our members' control. We have seen a lack of political ambition resulting in a continued high use of custody when there are so many alternatives to custody available for low-risk offenders which successive Governments have failed to exploit.

But as overcrowding increases, what we do see is the herculean efforts of all colleagues across HMPPS to maximise the spaces which are available, whether this is in HQ or within prisons. Whilst it may be seen as a success story not using police cells to house prisoners, we recognise that this comes at a cost. Examples of the cost of this failure of policy are that each time there is a late 'bus' or overcrowding draft – our colleagues are frequently left overseeing reception and first night processes late into the night, not leaving work until 2300hrs or even after midnight. We hear of screening processes being rushed or delayed due to lack of specialist staff being available, we hear of an ever-increasing exhausted workforce who are just managing to get through the day. Having not to use police cells is not a success story for Government, the real success would be to see an end to overcrowding and a significant reduction in the prison population.

We continue to raise our concerns at the highest levels within our organisation and with ministers.

Job Evaluation - We would like to bring to members' attention that work continues with HMPPS to finalise the JES Operational Guidance document – this piece of work has been outstanding for some time, but we hope that HMPPS will be in a position to publish a final version early in the New Year.

The purpose of this document is to pull together in one place all the rules and principles which must be applied when operationalising JES – It should bring clarity to a number of processes and practices, which in the past has given us concern. What is made clear, and has always been the case, that any proposed changes to roles, structures or working practices which impact operational managers must be consulted on prior to changes taking place.

Consultation involving PGA members must always take place at a national level as there is no recognised mechanism for local consultation or negotiation at a local level.

Equality and Diversity - There have been some amazing experiences for us during this year, having the opportunity to see so many new, and returning faces at conference is always our highlight. But as we look forward to a New Year, we must not forget that we don't always get things right, either as individuals or as an organisation.

It is sad that even though our communities become more diverse, that there are still parts of our workforce who don't show each other the levels of care, compassion or decency we all

profess to uphold. We have seen tragic examples of misogynistic behaviour being deemed as rife within other public sector organisations. We have also seen the recent HMIP Thematic review, describing the very hurtful experiences that some of our colleagues have been subjected to. All these are horrible experiences whether in or outside of work.

When supporting individual members in personal casework, we see the extremes in how our members are treated. There have been some caring and compassionate examples where individuals have been cared for and supported, and in the main this is the norm. However, we also see examples of racist and misogynistic behaviour, and other examples where discrimination has taken place against our members. We believe that our employer still has much to do to help celebrate the richness contained within its workforce, but this work is not limited to HMPPS.

We had a 'decency' wakeup call within prisons. Martin Narey was the catalyst for many of the improvements in how we treat prisoners –we hope that HMIP Thematic review will provide the same catalyst to help make our workplace respectful for us all. We are considering a fuller response to the HMIP Thematic Review of the experiences of Black Prisoners and Black Staff, and we intend to reach out to members in the new year seeking their views on what we can do as an Association to help shape HMPPS response. We are here for any member who wishes to speak in confidence about any of the experiences they have gone through, good or bad. We are here to support.

End of Year Message - In finishing off this bulletin, we ask that people take some time to think about those who we have lost during this last year, whether these are friends, colleagues or family members, there will be people special to you who you will be missing over the Christmas and New Year break.

We would like to thank all our members for the immense support you have shown us throughout the year, and we genuinely hope that we are fulfilling your needs, however full or limited that these may have been over the last 12 months. We look forward to the next 12 months with some trepidation, as there is a likelihood that things are going to remain tough for some time yet.

This is not a unique position we find ourselves in, but we remain confident that with the direction and mandates given to us from conference, that we will continue to ensure the voice of our members are heard. On behalf of your entire NEC, we wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, you all remain our #HiddenHeroes.

Office Closure - The PGA Office will close for routine business on the 24th of December, re-opening on the 3rd of January, outside of the Bank Holiday and Weekend dates, emails addressed to PGA@Justice.gov.uk will be attended to.

Alternative contact details for out of hours contact are contained within your PGA diaries.
Thank you.

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President**

**Mitch Albutt
National Officer**

**Carl Davies
National Officer**

**Adrian Turner
Vice President**

**Shaun Williamson
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**Dave Taylor
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**Lorraine Roughan
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**Richard Taylor
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**Kevin Bettles
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