

Prisoner aftercare - who cares?

Paddy Costall hopes that aftercare for drug-using prisoners will cease to be seen as an optional extra.

Having been involved recently in the successful launch of a report on aftercare for drug using prisoners¹ I want to bring the issue to the attention of a wider audience. I think that it is all the more relevant in the light of current developments in drug treatment and the recent targets announced by Keith Hellawell, the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator, for activities over the next ten years.

Cranstoun undertook the research for the report in order to investigate whether certain perceptions about our particular client group were correct. Our Prisoners Resource Service (PRS) has worked in prisons since 1983 and, together with our other in-prison programmes, deals with over 2,000 clients per year. The rate of recidivism, the so-called revolving door, amongst this group appeared high and anecdotal evidence suggested

that they failed, for whatever reason, to access services in the community following their release from custody.

Our researchers looked at the policy framework and the funding environment, within which services for drug using prisoners operate. We sought the views of prisoners, through questionnaires and focus groups, and the views of purchasers and other providers of services, through structured interviews. We abstracted data from our client monitoring over the past few years and also reviewed available literature and research on the subject.

The first thing that became clear was that everyone believed that this group of prisoners was much larger than the number presenting to in-prison services might suggest. Curiously, when we began to review the literature and research, little was to be found, with the most significant large-scale study having been conducted in Delaware, USA². Obviously there are differences in both the prison systems and approaches to treatment, between the UK and the USA, but the results of the study showed that those receiving the more intensive interventions in prison, followed by support in the community, had lower levels of subsequent drug use (verified by urinalysis) and were less likely to be re-arrested or imprisoned. The results further showed that those only participating in the in-prison therapeutic community phase showed no more reduction in recidivism, compared to the control group who received no treatment whilst in prison.

Smaller-scale investigations, including our own, indicated that prisoners were amenable to using treatment services, but that access was a major stumbling block. The Prison Service has made major advances in facilitating access to treatment for drug using prisoners, since the publication of its first drug strategy³.

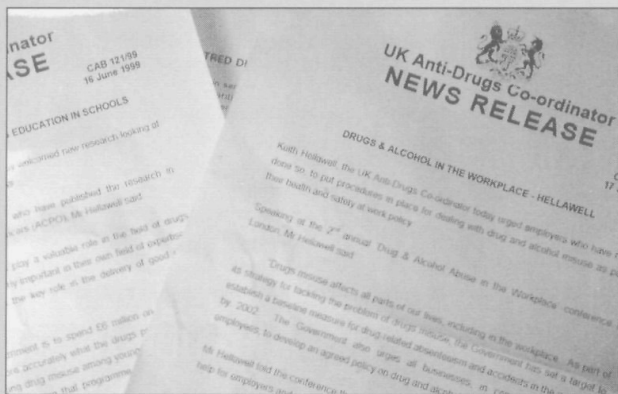
This is soon to be extended further with new treatment programmes and a comprehensive low-threshold service, known as CARAT's⁴, being introduced across all prisons in England and Wales. CARAT services will include a limited after-care element, providing up to eight weeks post-release support but, in reality, this will be restricted by the requirements to attend to the needs of

those still in custody.

In his first annual report Keith Hellawell highlights the attempts made, and those continuing, to ensure that the new orthodoxy of 'joined-up thinking' applies to dealing with drug use and its consequences. He identifies access to services as a major problem and acknowledges that funding mechanisms are partly to blame for this. Prisoners are massively disadvantaged through the current community care system, which is both bureaucratic and inefficient. If the Delaware study is correct in its identification of effective aftercare being key to successful treatment, then the experience of those prisoners responding to our questionnaire shows a major failing in the present system. Sixty per cent of respondents sought help, while in prison, for after release. Of these, 30% failed to access any support services. Even for those who succeeded in gaining service contact in the community, the time taken to access a service ranged from hours to five months. Only 26% had accessed a service in a week or less and by two months only 66% had a service. Money (funding) and waiting lists were cited as the main problems in accessing help.

It would be unfair to say that all the blame lies with those charged with delivering and disbursing resources. The reference to waiting lists can partly be attributed to requirements, in some instances imposed by treatment agencies for those coming from custody to prove their motivation, during a period of liberty, before being admitted to the service. This is in spite of the evidence, demonstrating the primacy of access in developing and maintaining motivation.

Mr Hellawell has set some ambitious targets in his plan for the next decade. Reducing the damage to individuals, and society as a whole, from crime related to drug use is a priority. His stated aim of reducing repeat offending by drug users by 25% (by 2005) and by 50% (by 2008) is supported by resources for treatment both within and without prisons, including those mentioned above, as well as the new diversionary measures, such as Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTO's). He wants to see the caseloads for CARAT services reach 20,000 each year, with 5,000 prisoners taking part in more



formal treatment programmes.

Cranstoun, along with other providers of drug services, welcomes Mr Hellawell's ambitious approach. Our main plea is for an end to the episodic approach to dealing with the problems faced and posed by drug users, with after-care being seen as integral to the effectiveness of treatment, not optional.

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1 "After-care for Drug Using Prisoners in London". A report by Cranstoun Drug Services, prepared for the Baring Foundation, launched 22nd April 1999. Copies available for £3.50p from Cranstoun Drug Services.

2 "An Effective Model of Prison-based Treatment for Drug-involved Offenders", James A Incardi, et al (Journal of Drug Issues 27(2), 261-278 1997).

3 Drug Misuse in Prison, May 1995.

4 Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare.

Eve Saville Memorial Lecture

Taking the Prison Service into the 21st century

Martin Narey outlined his vision for the Prison Service as it approaches the Millennium. Some of his speech is reproduced here.

Leadership in the Prison Service requires personal and moral courage. This is not a job that can or should be done in a detached or neutral way. We must never be unmoved by a prisoner's premature death, by the sight of a teenager arriving from court alone and afraid, or by the sight of staff putting their personal safety on the line for the benefit of their colleagues and the prisoners they care for. There is an inescapable moral dimension to the Service's work. Those of us who aspire to lead within it have to know what we believe to be right and to trust that instinct both in moments of crisis and in charting a strategy for the future.

But the moral instincts of those of us in the Service may not be enough. So the informed, objective scrutiny of those who understand and care about our prisons is vital. I very much welcome a strong, independent Inspectorate. David Ramsbotham has shown the way on the care of women, in the care of the under-eighteens and on reducing suicides. He and I will disagree from time to time, but much more of the time we will be at one in wanting to improve the care of prisoners. I welcome a Youth Justice Board that will demand high standards of us and I will say more about that later. I want Boards of Visitors that really get under the skin of an establishment, by listening to prisoners and asking uncomfortable questions from a basis of close knowledge. I want

all visitors to expect and receive high standards of courtesy and efficiency. I want a Service that welcomes the recruitment and secondment of people with a range of different experience. Above all, I want a Service which is safe and decent for all of those in our care.

Last summer, the Home Secretary delivered the annual Prison Reform Trust lecture. He called it *Making Prisons Work*. What he set out was a challenge to the Prison Service to protect the public and, in close concert with others, to reduce re-offending. Let me start with protecting the public. Last year 28 people escaped from prison custody, compared with 232 in 1992. This is the bedrock of our credibility and it is right that it should be so. I do not intend to lose the gains made in this key area. Every police officer, every prosecutor, every magistrate and judge and, most of all, every victim of crime has a right to expect that the sentences passed by the courts will be enforced. The second element of the Home Secretary's challenge - to reduce offending - is of course an extension of the public protection goal. For the overwhelming majority of prisoners, custody is an interruption in their lives rather than a final destination. So it is perhaps surprising that the task of helping to protect the public from crimes committed following release has sometimes been portrayed as an optional extra. In fact it must be a core element of our work. It is the reason most of

us joined this Service.

What is new, however, is an explicit objective to reduce re-offending. The rate at which prisoners re-offend following release has been remarkably constant for as long as researchers have measured it. It has fostered a 'nothing works' attitude that, in my view, is both sterile and manifestly ill-founded. Of course prison has educated some to commit more crime and removed the practical and social support that might have helped others to go straight. But prison has always helped some offenders to avoid a return to crime on release and for too long we have failed to demonstrate that the investments in work and education, which are considerable, have made any real difference.

I welcome the Home Secretary's challenge to reduce offending. It is an opportunity to be seized. I am not so starry eyed as to believe that we can achieve a reduction that is either quick or dramatically large, but I am convinced we can and will make a measurable difference. The key view is to make that difference while not losing our grip on security. There is no pendulum swinging between security and making prisons constructive places. Security, and the public and ministerial confidence it delivers, is the bedrock on which constructive regimes will be built.

I would like to suggest three starting points for a strategy which can, for the foreseeable future, deliver the balanced, purposeful penal policy which the Home Secretary described as 'Making Prisons Work'.

First, we must bring the same discipline and skill to the task of reducing re-offending as we have to preventing escape and maintaining good order. That requires us to be much more scrupulous in learning from the evidence of what works and applying it more broadly. The Prison Service's current accreditation system for offending behaviour programmes has allowed us to intervene with a small minority of higher risk offenders in a way that evaluation is now starting to show can be radically more successful in

reducing re-offending than many of us ever dreamed. We will double the number of programme completions over the next three years.

Accredited programmes are important, but are only one element of what we need. The Basic Skills Agency tell us that about two-thirds of our prisoners, about 44,000 of them, have basic skills so poor that they are ineligible for ninety-six percent of jobs. By increasing our investment in education by about thirty percent this year we can transform the employability of many thousands of prisoners. The discipline and skill to make this happen exists and we have set ourselves a target to improve the literacy and numeracy of our least able prisoners by 15% by 2002. We are doing this imaginatively, complementing traditional teaching methods by using prisoners to teach others and - recognising the aversion to the classroom held by many prisoners training PE staff and Instructional staff in workshops as support tutors.

Drug related offending is another essential target. We have made strides in reducing drug misuse in prison (though there is much more to be done) and we now have a comprehensive, funded plan to help reduce drug related crime. This includes a commitment to offer support for prisoners, where necessary, for eight weeks following release. It is often suggested that prisons encourage drug mis-use, that they are awash with drugs. It might once have been so, but levels of misuse as measured by random testing have fallen sharply and are now down to about 17% compared with levels of drug misuse in those arrested of more than 60%.

The second key element of a robust, long term strategy is that we must enmesh our operations with the work of others. We need to become so interdependent with the work of probation services, for example, that it will become unthinkable to portray our objectives as in any way competitive or separate. We are already embarked on exercises to produce joint planning and joint training. Area drug coordinators will ensure our involvement in Drug Action Teams. We are working closely with Youth Offending Teams and are forging,

through Welfare to Work, a critical relationship with the employment service. Cementing our strategy means constantly looking out to the communities to which prisoners are returning.

My third heading is perhaps a little less obvious, but in many ways the most important. To give staff and prisoners confidence about our seriousness about making prisons work we must scrutinise the way we deal with prisoners every day. That means demonstrating fairness. We must remember all the lessons from Woolf about disciplinary procedures and about due process in the minutiae of institutional life. It is why we must review the way the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme operates, in the light of Alison Liebling's excellent research. Above all, it requires us to deliver a non-discriminatory service to ethnic minority prisoners, on which I know we still fall short. This heading also requires us to show respect for prisoners as individuals. That means decent living conditions. It means avoiding the abuse of authority through unnecessary rules or worse. Sadly, it still requires vigilance in weeding out a small minority, thankfully a very small minority, of staff who physically abuse prisoners; there is no place for such people in this service.

The under-eighteens

I want to conclude by offering you a suggestion for a litmus test for whether we are serious about pursuing a genuinely constructive penal policy. There are many who deeply regret that it should ever be necessary to incarcerate a young person who has not even reached their eighteenth birthday. The reality, of course, is that many adolescents do continue to defeat the best attempts to divert them from custody and the Prison Service has the task of caring for the majority of these young people. We have to recognise that very often their behaviour has been out of control, chaotic and sometimes dangerous. We have to deal with their rejection by other organisations and agencies, and the history of suspicion and failure they bring with them. The number of under 18s in our care, who number about 2,400 at present, has barely been recognised as a discrete group with particular

needs. We now urgently need to demonstrate that we can make meaningful differences for these young people. The Prison Service can look after under 18 year olds well. We have some way to go to convince everyone, but some very positive signs of what we can do are already being seen. Steadily, a real improvement in all establishments which care for this age group - including the now infamous Feltham - will become apparent.

But first, let us make no bones about it, we have to invest new resources. The local authority secure accommodation to which young offender institutions are so often unfavourably compared cost on average six times as much as the typical YOL. The achievements at Werrington and Huntercombe are, in part, due to extra funding which we managed to find last year. So it has been immensely encouraging that the Government has given the Service an additional £51 million over three years to replicate this achievement elsewhere. These funds will help develop two broad initiatives:

- the creation of a distinct estate in which almost all under 18 year olds will be held separately from other young people and adults; and
- the development of high quality regimes.

Unless we accommodate under 18s separately we cannot easily or effectively identify and meet their needs, abilities and aptitudes, which really are different from those of other young offenders.

As I have mentioned already, the under 18 year olds for whom we care have largely failed or been failed by schools, families and the interventions of other agencies. Most of the under eighteens at Wetherby had been excluded from school from about the age of thirteen. According to *Education, Exclusion and Citizenship* by Professor Carl Parsons from the University of Kent, exclusions have increased by a factor of more than four in seven years and now stand at more than thirteen thousand. Thankfully the Government are now tackling this determinedly. There is no doubt in my mind that the population of under eighteens in custody will fall as exclusions fall.

New regimes will quite rightly

place great emphasis upon education - remedial and vocational. These young people will learn responsibility in personal relationships and self-respect based upon recognised achievement. Critically, our approach will not simply be about doing things to and for them: we will seek to nurture their initiative so that, to borrow Sir Alexander Paterson's words 'they will regulate their conduct aright'. These changes are crucially dependent upon the role of staff, so we will recruit and train staff specifically for this work - and I expect to see those officers out of uniform. We know that adult role models matter to young people, which is why we are placing great emphasis upon staff performing the role of the 'significant adult', modelling attitudes and behaviours in the development of good relationships with young people. We know that young people *can change* and that we can influence that change for good.

We will publish standards for the delivery of regimes for the under eighteens, which will require us to deliver on the statutory task of preventing future offending by putting the young person's welfare at the centre of the regime.

I offered you our performance in caring for under 18s as a litmus test for our health as a service. Why? First, because it is a real test. We need to show the Youth Justice Board that we can be trusted to deliver to a high standard. The Board, not me, will judge our success. But secondly because the fundamental values we need to care properly for this population are those that must also inform our care of adults. A Service that cares properly for teenagers will know how to care for all prisoners. And experience shows me that many of the Service's most influential leaders and staff have had their commitment moulded by their role in looking after the youngest and most vulnerable of those sent to us by the courts.

I genuinely believe that there is now an unparalleled opportunity to make a balanced, moral and purposeful penal policy part of the permanent landscape in this country. I very much look forward to the challenge of helping to make that happen.

Martin Narey is Director General of HM Prison Service.