

Changing culture: Stories not statistics of a movement not a mandate.

Gareth Sands joined HMPPS as a Prison Officer in 1997 and has governed / directed six prisons across two jurisdictions in the public and private sectors. He is currently the Governing Governor at HMP Full Sutton.

*'Culture is like the wind. It is invisible, yet its effect can be seen and felt. When it is blowing in your direction, it makes for smooth sailing. When it is blowing against you, everything is more difficult.'*¹

Cultures and prisons

I have had the enormous privilege of having governed or directed six prisons in two jurisdictions in the public sector and the private sectors. Each of these prisons had, and still has, unique cultures and subcultures and each presented quite different challenges around an approach to culture and change. You will quickly see that this isn't an academic paper but is instead a record of a recent Perrie Lecture and a practical overview and insight into what has worked and hasn't worked for me in trying to shape and change cultures in prisons. Culture change is difficult territory to navigate through. Regardless, I aim to explain what culture means to me and outline a few methods and practical steps for attempting to tackle the issue of multiple cultures, all existing and evolving concurrently in a single establishment, sometimes working towards a single goal but often not.

Ever-changing subcultures

Prisons are not simply one homogenous culture but are instead made up of a series of ever-changing subcultures which feed into, and draw out of, the overall culture. For example, there is a Senior Management Team culture, an A wing culture, a catering department culture, a dog section culture, and a psychology department culture, to name but a few. The complexities around culture and prisons are significant, and my quite simple approach has been to drive and motivate the team to work incredibly to sow seeds of positive change and deliver tangible progress to make a difference and create a norm around momentum and incremental improvement.

Culture change takes time

Whilst obvious to most, culture change in prisons takes time, often years, before an establishment fulfils its potential in terms of culture. However, continuously sowing the seeds of change remains essential, as does succession planning at a senior and middle management level in terms of passing on the baton, the baton being the ethos, the principles, the cultural norms, and the standards.

The baton passing sees successive leaders and leadership teams inheriting cultures, to take them to the next phase of their evolution and then passing them on. This paper includes multiple lists which deliberately aim to highlight the scale, pace, volume, and variety of changes, projects, approaches, and improvements required to tackle culture and create momentum. The 'lists' are followed with a question of 'so what?' in an attempt to communicate the reason and the value of action or approach.

History and inheritance

The context and condition of the prison that a Governor inherits in terms of history, performance (past and present), team, resource, and investment determines how one tackles the culture challenges faced. For example, I have personally found that a poor performing prison in, or bordering on, special measures requires an extraordinary amount of effort to prevent it from slipping backwards before tangible improvements can be achieved around culture and performance.² I have also found that a significant, yet different effort and energy is required to 'wake-up' and reignite a prison where performance and culture might be good but where complacency and stagnation might exist alongside a lack of energy, urgency, or desire to improve. A creative and more nuanced approach is necessary where there is no additional resource available as opposed to a 'blank cheque' rescue or

1. Walker, B., & Soule, S. A. (2017). Changing Company Culture Requires a Movement, Not a Mandate. Harvard Business Review.

2. 'Special measures' was an HMPPS process activated when a prison is assessed as needing additional specialist support to improve to an acceptable level. In 2019 this was replaced by the 'Prison Performance Support Programme'.

prison ‘downsize and reinvest’ situation. There is also careful handling needed in a prison, and sometimes a senior team, which has witnessed significant trauma, discord, or burnout. This is difficult as the need for improvement and change in performance and culture sits alongside a need for care, kindness, compassion, as well as a clear communication of intentions of a shared vision.

Predecessors and organisational memory

In taking up new roles, I have tried to understand and respect who and what has gone before me to appreciate the history and circumstances the best I could to inform the future challenges faced. Unpacking the past by stepping back to appreciate the historical context is important. I have found that connecting with predecessors wherever possible or appropriate to understand past decision-making and cultural issues is incredibly helpful and provides invaluable intelligence and insight into the role. I enjoy acknowledging and referencing predecessors to encourage an appreciation of the continuous nature of prison cultures and a collegiate, joined-up, and continuous improvement approach. This allows for the rich organisational memory to retain value where it might otherwise be distorted or lost.

A personal ‘rogue’ measure of improvement: 2 years = improvement of 1

In terms of my journey as a Prison Governor and Prison Director, I have listed the establishments and dates of tenure below (Table 1) and included my own personal score of the prison from a culture, performance, and potential perspective. I believe it takes a leader around two years to deliver and embed incremental improvements of ‘1’ on a ‘scale’ of 1-10. This is not intended to be a rogue rating system but is instead a personal score and rating which reflects my

opinion and experience of what I regard as marginal gains in culture change and performance improvement against overall potential. I have focused on the establishments listed for the simple fact that these are ones which were inspected by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) during my tenure, which in turn gives me a certain level of ‘ownership’ of the personal assessment.

I have listed some of the work undertaken to address performance, culture, and subculture issues, and have provided a particular focus on HMP/YOI New Hall from a 15-year longitudinal and improvement perspective, again from my perspective without wider consultation and with reference to HMIP reports. I will also share some stories from HMP Lowdham Grange during a period of significant expansion and at the half-way point of a 25-year contract where the importation of large numbers of long-term prisoners presented new risks. I will also touch on the resistance and forces at work at Mt Eden Corrections Facility (MECF) in Auckland, New Zealand, to highlight the value of looking backwards to draw learning and understanding around culture, whilst also stressing the importance of a strategic and future focused approach in shaping culture.

HMP/YOI New Hall, 2007-2009

In describing my experience of New Hall, I wanted to share my journey from 2/10 to 3/10 in terms of what 2/10 looks like, how the cultures and subcultures impact, what the financial and performance related issues were, how the services for women were, and what the overall conditions were like, before listing what action was taken. Therefore, this section looks across a 15-year period, presents edited HMIP headlines and suggests several golden threads of changes and improvements made and how a culture shifts over time.

Table 1. Establishments, dates of tenure, inspection dates and improvement gain

Establishment	Period of tenure	HMIP inspection	Improvement gain
HMP/YOI New Hall	2007-2009	2008	2/10 to 3/10
HMP/YOI Askham Grange	2008 (clustered)	NA	No change
HMP Lowdham Grange	2009-2013	2011	5/10 to 7/10
Mt Eden Corrections Facility	2013-2016	NA	5/10 to 7/10
HMP Hewell / HMP Hewell Grange	2017-2019	NA	2/10 to 3/10
HMP Full Sutton	2019-present	2020	5/10 to 7/10

My personal rating of New Hall in 2007 was 2/10. Firstly, it was important to prevent further decline and slippage to 1/10 before building back on some solid foundations. In terms of inheritance, I found New Hall to have an overall toxic culture alongside a reputation of protracted poor performance over several years, and with staff struggling with recent self-inflicted deaths of colleagues and prisoners. The prison was unsafe, we had a national high sick absence rate, a poor previous HMIP report, a £1.2 million forecasted overspend at the halfway point of the financial year, and an embedded a culture of acceptance around constant observations,³ dilapidated buildings, and poor living conditions. The regime was chaotic and unpredictable, and the staff appeared to be gripped by a feeling of learned helplessness, easily swayed by an influential trade union, and underpinned by a stark staff-management divide. Once again, this was my experience as Governor, a description which bears no resemblance to the high performing prison New Hall is today.

I had to urgently work through multiple outstanding grievances against one of the senior leaders, some genuine and others malicious, and was required to review multiple cases of inappropriate use of force concerning several colleagues. The children and family services and facilities were stark, several staff were suspended, and several pending disciplinary hearings needed urgently administering. Access routes to substance misuse support and counselling services were wholly inadequate, and we continued to receive extremely late out of area receptions throughout the week,⁴ and on Fridays in particular, as women's prisons locked out from south to north.⁵ I found a large section of the workforce to be anti-management and, along with the local trade unions, were vocal about their opinions and clear about 'how things are done around here'. There was a real confidence and swagger amongst sections of the workforce, reinforced by the influence they had inflicted on the performance and culture of the prison.

Personally, I needed to demonstrate some operating principles and communicate how we would introduce, deliver, and embed an agenda of legitimacy, procedural justice, truth, transparency, decency, optimism, challenge, conviction, and creativity. This

wasn't easy. I wanted us to create a prison which was safe, consultative, nimble, progressive, proactive, and innovative and one which was both staff- and prisoner-focused. There was no honeymoon period nor a first 100-day window to assess what was needed. We were bleeding resource and needed rapid action to prevent any further deaths. To achieve this, we needed to support and challenge sections of the workforce back to work, prevent a declining performance, address the significant overspend, and to manage the anti-management agenda which had gathered momentum.

Culture movements in any organisation often start with emotion. Despite my initial feelings of anger and frustration, I also experienced a strong sense of enthusiasm and optimism as I sensed that we needed

to provide a voice for the prison, for the staff, and for the women and the girls, and that we also needed communicate a positive vision and a path forward that was within our gift to deliver. New Hall was on the map for the wrong reasons, we had no additional resource and there was no established Women's Directorate as we know it today. I urgently needed to get the management team on board and create a small group of ambassadors who were prepared to work hard to secure several wins, which would in turn demonstrate some level of efficacy, hope, and momentum.

The early months were hard, desperate, and lonely at times. I did not have a blueprint and I was learning quickly. However, a small movement had started to gather momentum in the early months as several Senior Management Team (SMT) ambassadors stepped up, as did some wonderful Custodial Managers, all serving as culture carriers as we moved ahead.

The first year felt like a battle ground. The issues and challenges felt relentless but overall, we were committed to turning the tide. There were threats of a 'no confidence vote', some significant resistance and multiple unofficial staff meetings popping up throughout the months to discuss and debate the latest changes. Against this backdrop and context, we started to create a movement and shape a culture and we took many practical steps, both big and small, and hit the multiple issues hard. Some of the practical steps are outlined below in Table 2.

There was a real confidence and swagger amongst sections of the workforce, reinforced by the influence they had inflicted on the performance and culture of the prison.

3. Used when a prisoner is at high risk of imminently harming themselves.

4. People being received into the prison from geographical areas far away from the prison.

5. This means that the prisons were at capacity and unable to take anyone else.

Table 2. *HMP/YOI New Hall 2007-2009: Practical steps (to create a movement) and related stories*

- ❑ A meeting with the POA to challenge and correct their view and statement that they were 'running the prison'.
- ❑ Mobile morning meetings introduced, visiting different areas of the prison each day of the week.
- ❑ Meetings became proactive and used as coaching opportunities.
- ❑ Funding for a brand-new reception building secured.
- ❑ All of the women and girls asked to list 10 suggestions to make life at New Hall better and then acting on most of these.
- ❑ Issuing 400 new quality duvets, pillows, and appropriate covers to replace blankets and poor bedding.
- ❑ Challenge reckless decision-making of the Psychiatrist in placing women on constant observations unnecessarily.
- ❑ Demanding recommissioning of Mental Health Services outside the commissioning cycle (and succeeding).
- ❑ Constant observations approvals sat only with the Governor for the first few months.
- ❑ Located in Dial Wood, naming all units after trees: Mother and Baby Unit changed to Maple House, Segregation to Sycamore House, Healthcare to Holly House and so on.
- ❑ Transformed Sycamore House (Segregation Unit) through team rotation, increased support services, introduction of library and therapeutic room, repainting and recarpeting, and reduction of the roll from full capacity to one.
- ❑ Carpeted and softened the Lifer wing, creating a quieter living space with modern furniture and fish tanks.
- ❑ Drove the punctuality of the regime and challenged a culture of complacency and slippage.
- ❑ Removed and replaced the Deputy Governor and recruited a new Head of Residence through open and fair competition.
- ❑ Dismissed several staff for inappropriate use of force, unprofessional conduct, and poor attendance.
- ❑ Introduced Telemedicine and promoted it as a default option, reducing the need for women to attend hospital handcuffed.
- ❑ Introduced regular Full Staff Meetings and Governor's address including sharing the vision, priorities, reward, and recognition.
- ❑ Grippped the budget, applied self-help principles, and sought creative sponsorship and investment solutions.
- ❑ Painted the visits hall, fitted new carpets, recovered the chairs, and improved facilities for children.
- ❑ Drove sick absence down through support and challenge, home visits, wellbeing support, and robust challenge.
- ❑ Modernised Maple House (Mother and Baby Unit).
- ❑ Drove the Staff Survey and achieved a 95 per cent completion (second highest in HMPPS).
- ❑ Addressed cases of significant land creep by residents living nearby who had expanded their properties onto Crown land.
- ❑ Held a 'colleagues and partners celebration event', 100 colleagues and partners attending but many boycotting the event.
- ❑ Held a second 'celebration event' months later which sold out within days and with 250 attending.
- ❑ Employed a driver to safely take the women to release addresses and protect them from exploitative males waiting nearby.
- ❑ Involved the local media in positive stories about the prison and promoted the work and recruitment of volunteers.
- ❑ Introduced movie and concert nights, inviting popular singers such as Kate Rusby and Foy Vance to perform.
- ❑ Clustered with Askham Grange and improved avenues for movement from closed to open conditions for the women.
- ❑ Engaged architects to scope out an open site in the grounds next door to support closeness to home and employment.
- ❑ Increased the use of ROTL including local employment at the National Mining Museum and to attend a Regional Dance School
- ❑ Other projects, initiatives. and changes.

Table 3. Extracts from the November 2008 Inspection report by Chief Inspector Anne Owers

- New Hall is a busy, complicated establishment holding a needy and challenging population.
- It is commendable that this full announced inspection found a reasonably safe and purposeful prison, beginning to focus on resettlement.
- Admission arrangements were satisfactory, with good support for those with substance abuse issues.
- Reception remained a poor facility.
- Relatively little use of force, segregation, or special accommodation.
- Chaplaincy was well integrated into the life of the prison.
- Healthcare was generally satisfactory.
- Mother and Baby Unit was bright and well resourced.
- Time out of cell was reasonable.
- Quality and quantity of education was satisfactory.
- Work and skills provision was sufficient and access to the library and gym was reasonable.
- Substance abuse services needed further development.
- Managers have to deal with a wide array of risks and needs among a diverse and complex population. Commendably, the prison had risen to some of these challenges.
- The prison provided a generally safe environment, with a reasonable amount of purposeful activity and an increased focus on resettlement.
- There remained much still to do.

So what? What difference did this make? What were the big hitters?

On their own, individual actions can make a small difference but combined, these multiple actions gave us tangible delivery, demonstrated raised standards, provided important messaging, and showed that change was possible. As I reflect back on this time, the 'big hitters' as such were; demanding and securing the recommissioning of Mental Health Services to offer adequate services and meet the significant need: building a new reception to replace the existing and woeful one; issuing duvets in order to improve sleep patterns and in turn engagement and wellbeing levels; increased visibility of managers across all parts of the prison so that standards could be discussed and addressed; staff celebrations which created a sense of community, pride and fun; the renaming of units as a cheap, soft, and impactful change; and breaking the cycle of constant observations to move away from a culture of dependency to one of multi-disciplinary, bespoke, and individualised care and support whilst addressing trauma and emotional and addiction issues.

Further big hitters including rebalancing the influence of the trade unions to give confidence back to managers, the launch of full staff meetings as symbolic opportunities for messaging around culture and standards, the improvement of access to services for betterment and repair of the physical environment, embedding regime punctuality to reflect procedural justice, and transforming the segregation unit into a safe and decent environment as a barometer for the prison. There was lots going on at once, but the tide

turned, the range of changes show a relentless approach and commitment, there was an acceptance that self-starting was necessary in that no external parties were going to rescue us, and we knew that we needed to pull together as a team. We were able to leverage the momentum, stop the decline and begin a movement which normalised change, energy, and pace, and create a living and working environment which was better for all. We were starting at a low point and, despite what we'd done, there was still much to do. However, the first test came in the form of HMIP in 2008.

So what did HMIP say a year on?

Extracts from the HMP/YOI New Hall HMIP executive summary are below in Table 3:

By 2009, and a year after HMIP, we had seen the toxic culture fade further still, we had stopped the rot, had seen the recommissioning of Mental Health Services, and had ensured that there were no self-inflicted deaths during the past two-year period. We had significantly reduced levels of self-harm, improved consultation and communication throughout the prison, begun to build the new reception building, and had improved living conditions and overall levels of cleanliness. We had brought the budget under control and instilled an air of positivity, fun and pride in New Hall. A movement towards something much better had begun and, in terms of my own personal rating, we had moved from 2/10 to a solid 3/10, a position and marking which, whilst still short of the potential for the prison, was an incredibly proud position.

In stepping back for a moment, one can liken the journey of a prison to a tapestry where the tangles, threads and knots beneath the surface are representative of the detail and stories of the mess, successes, failures,

setbacks, and hard work undertaken which sit behind this but of which much is unknown, unseen or forgotten. The image below shows the tangled web of knots which sits behind the golden crown.

Figure 1. 15-years of New Hall (2007-2022): Change, Tapestry and Golden Threads of Continuous Improvement



As I touch on the 2012, 2015, 2019, and 2022 HMIP reports below (Table 4),⁶ I do so sensitively and respectfully, acknowledging that each report, as with every passing year, has its stories of outstanding leadership and hard work sitting behind them. As an overview, my attempt is to highlight the extraordinary efforts and skills of the leaders and colleagues at New Hall who have, according to HMIP, shifted and embedded an impressive and positive culture in

subsequent and recent years to my involvement, each year becoming better than the last. The following HMIP extracts show that change takes time, that incremental improvements matter, that there is always hope and potential in any prison and that 'Golden Threads' of care, compassion, conditions, mental health services, good leadership, and safety are evident throughout these reports, each one building on the last.

Table 4. Extracts from HMIP reports on HMPIYOI New Hall between 2012-2022

<p>January 2012 (Chief Inspector Nick Hardwick, Acting Governor Nigel Hirst)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> This inspection found that considerable improvement had taken place. <input type="checkbox"/> The women felt much safer and treated with respect. <input type="checkbox"/> Much better reception procedures and a more welcoming environment. <input type="checkbox"/> Now good mental health provision and better drug treatment. <input type="checkbox"/> Drug treatment systems responded effectively to need. <input type="checkbox"/> Improvements all contributed to a significant reduction in self-harm. <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced numbers of women on suicide and self-harm procedures since the last inspection. <input type="checkbox"/> Senior officers had led a major drive to improve staff-prisoner relationships. <input type="checkbox"/> External environment was generally clean and tidy. <input type="checkbox"/> Mother and baby unit was an excellent facility. <input type="checkbox"/> Effective help given to return to the community without reoffending. <input type="checkbox"/> Overall, New Hall has improved, and most women are held safely and respectfully. <p>June 2015 (Chief Inspector Nick Hardwick, Governor Diane Pellow)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Improved still further. <input type="checkbox"/> Ofsted unusually rated it 'outstanding'. <input type="checkbox"/> Support for women with complex needs was good. <input type="checkbox"/> Support for women with substance misuse issues had moved forward.
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⁶ Full HMIP inspection reports can be accessed via: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspections/>

- Relationships between staff and prisoners were a real strength.
- Clean, decent and had benefited from a great deal of effort to improve the overall presentation of many areas.
- Mother and baby unit provided excellent support.
- Health services were particularly strong.
- Excellent mental health provision.
- Provision for women who had been abused or victimised was very good.
- New Hall is a safe and very respectful prison.
- Excellent range of purposeful and vocationally based activities.
- Among the best of its type and we commend staff and management for the positive work they have done to achieve these outcomes.

April 2019 (Chief Inspector Peter Clarke, Governor Natalie McKee)

- Most prisoners felt safe.
- Three self-inflicted deaths since we last inspected.
- Those with complex needs received good oversight and case management.
- Segregation unit was a clean but austere facility with a basic regime.
- Environment in the prison was good.
- Quality of accommodation was variable but reasonable overall.
- The mother and baby unit was excellent.
- Health care was similarly good but mental health provision was undermined by staff shortages.
- Prisoners experienced good time out of their cells.
- Provision of learning, skills and work was improving.
- Coordination of resettlement work had improved greatly.
- Offender management was clearly focused on risk reduction.
- New Hall New Hall remains a good prison, delivering effective outcomes for those held there.

November 2022 (Chief Inspector Charlie Taylor, Governor Julia Spence)

- Overwhelmingly safe and respectful place.
- Very well led by a governor who knew her prison well.
- At the heart of the governor's leadership approach was a commitment to prioritising key work.
- This is a good report about a capable prison.
- Attendance was too low because other activities clashed.
- There was too little support to help women maintain or rebuild relationships with their children and families.
- Use of body-worn video cameras was too limited, hampering assurance processes for the use of force.
- Public protection arrangements had a number of weaknesses, and some risks were not managed well.

Year on year marginal gains and sowing the seeds of change

In summary, each year will see lists of what Governors and their teams have delivered and maintained in order to protect the prison from any slippage and to drive it further forwards. A positive culture and subcultures are critical in achieving this and, as previously mentioned, golden threads of continuous improvement, care, compassion, culture change, and consistency are evident in the findings above, all which serve the prison well in terms of safety and security and, importantly, have become normalised over time as leaders and their teams continue to sow the seeds of change for future years.

HMP Lowdham Grange, 2009-2013

The culture challenge at Lowdham Grange I found to be very different to that at New Hall. The prison was performing reasonably well and there was a decent level of confidence in the contract and its delivery. However, I found that the performance, assurance levels, and culture were dipping and stagnating in parts, that a culture of complacency had crept in, that there was untapped potential and missed opportunities, and that several contractual and commercial risks and issues were becoming apparent.⁷ At the time we were at the midway point of a 25-year contract and were also about to expand with the opening of a new houseblock and the preparing for the influx of a new and

⁷ HMP Lowdham Grange is a privately managed prison by Sodexo.

challenging population. My personal assessment of the prison was that we were operating at around 5 out of 10 in terms of culture and performance and I was encouraged that the team was energetic, responsive, and positive, and that there was little resistance to the work we did to challenge, shake, and shift the prison for its next phase and stage.

What was striking was the lack of voice of the workforce and the absence of a trade union presence, one of the many issues we needed to work through. There were also some individual HR issues which needed urgently addressing, including reviewing staff suspensions, and looking at some individual performance management matters. Finally, I had an inclination that the contract itself required some attention and, in partnership with our Commercial

Assistant Director, commenced a 'page turning exercise' which gave a line-by-line analysis of the contract, looking for signs of commercial inaccuracies and 'contract creep' where we could review if we were under- or over-delivering. There was also the opportunity to draw from a Prisoner Amenities Fund which had grown over recent years due to a small percentage of the in-cell telephony spends being put back into the fund to be used for the greater good. This presented an opportunity to both improve the prison and fulfil the commercial requirements from the centre. In summary, we worked through a range of issues and actions over a 36-month period. The first of the actions listed are below (Table 5) which were taken forwards in the first few months to help shape expectations, create momentum, and reshape the culture.

Table 5. *HMP Lowdham Grange: 2009-2013: Stories of Early Actions around a Movement and Culture Change*

- Lifted inappropriate suspensions on key (including senior) staff.
- Encouraged increased trade union membership, presence, voice, engagement, and 'teeth'.
- Held multiple 'listen to improve' sessions (staff, prisoners, and visitors).
- Utilised a significant and untapped 'Prisoner Amenities Fund' to invest in facilities for prisoners and activities for staff and prisoners.
- Ceased weekly mid-afternoon SMT local pub catch-up sessions.
- Created stunning staff memorial garden and fountain.
- Moved to 'non-smoking' site for staff prior to legislation and removed the staff and SMT smoking culture.
- Addressed daily systemic reporting and acceptance of 'incorrect roll-checks'.
- Completed contract page turning exercise to address invoice inaccuracy and under-charging.
- Created prisoner-run Call Centre for frequently asked questions, support, and advice.
- Improved staff retention levels including improved terms and conditions for staff linked to increased invoicing through contract review.
- Commenced radical accommodation review of staff and prisoner areas and facilities.
- Improved signage throughout the prison and made reception more welcoming.
- Created futureproof OMU, Psychology and Business Unit open plan hub working areas.
- Introduced two additional segregation unit exercise yards linked to decency, wellbeing and progressive behaviour.
- Introduced regular full staff briefings and shared priorities and successes.
- Drove a reward and recognition agenda and awarded 'Lowdie Lion' soft toys to staff for good work.
- Refurbished the visits hall and replaced chairs and carpets.
- Designed and opened an outside children's playground with a slide, swings, roundabout and rabbits and guinea pigs.
- Launched a 'You Said, We Did' campaign which HMPPS later replicated as good practice.
- Achieved 92 per cent staff survey completion.
- Held concerts for staff and prisoners by artists such as Michael Kiwanuka and Foy Vance.
- Commissioned the 'Beyond This' 20x12 Cultural Olympiad music and recording with acclaimed composer Mark-Anthony Turnage.
- Heavily subsidised staff diner meals.
- Launched a prisoner led call centre and maximised in-cell telephony.
- Held half-day staff and prisoner 'cooking together' relationship building events in the main kitchen.
- Held staff and partner / family celebration events.
- Held healthy relationship-building courses for men and their life-partners including learning, listening, and eating together.

So what? Why was any of this important? What were the 'big hitters'?

My reflections of this are that the prison was in a good position and that it was doing everything required of it. However, I felt that there was much more we were capable of doing and delivering, and that without a culture shift, we were at risk of regressing. This early approach allowed us to inject a sense of urgency, to move quickly, to raise the bar, to set some new standards and expectations, and create a movement and momentum around staff voice and requesting more in terms of engagement and decency, all with a view to making HMP Lowdham Grange the best it could be and creating a workplace of choice for the staff. In terms of the 'big hitters' as such, the staff and prisoner accommodation reconfigurations, changes, and investments were significant. The introduction of a children's playground sent a message around decency and normalised visits sessions, adding

significant quality to the visits experience. Running relationship courses for the men and their life partners was powerful, as was holding high impact and energetic full staff meetings for recognition and communication. Furthermore, holding concerts with high quality musicians was also good, and provided an opportunity for creativity, escapism, and normalisation. Another 'big hitter' included the contract 'page turning exercise' which saw the correction of the charging system and the generating of increased revenue for investment, including improved terms and conditions for staff. Finally, the building of a memorial garden and the launch of a prisoner-led call centre combined with the rest to create a culture of change, momentum, 'voice', investment, pride, energy, control, and confidence.

Aside from the contract performance reviews, the first significant test was HMIP in 2011, two years after some of the changes had taken place. So what did HMIP say (see Table 6)?

Table 6. Extracts from the 2011 Inspection report by Chief Inspector Nick Hardwick

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Previously commended the prison and it is pleasing to do so again. <input type="checkbox"/> All the more creditable because although the prison had expanded significantly and taken a large number of potentially challenging prisoners. <input type="checkbox"/> Impressively safe and decent place, with plenty of activity and a sound focus on resettlement. <input type="checkbox"/> Despite a growing population of serious offenders, prisoners reported feeling safe at Lowdham Grange. <input type="checkbox"/> Security was effective and proportionate use of force had declined and drugs were less of a problem than at many similar jails. <input type="checkbox"/> Staff prisoner relationships were good, supported by an improving personal officer scheme. <input type="checkbox"/> Staff appeared more confident and settled, and the level of turnover had fallen significantly. <input type="checkbox"/> Accommodation was generally excellent, particularly the newest wings. <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners spent plenty of time out of cell. <input type="checkbox"/> There was enough work and education, but there was scope to improve quality and some waiting lists were too long. <input type="checkbox"/> Overall, there was too little vocational activity for a training prison, although what there was offered impressive and marketable skills. <input type="checkbox"/> PE provision was very good. <input type="checkbox"/> Resettlement had improved. <input type="checkbox"/> It is commendable that Lowdham Grange continues to improve, develop and innovate. It has done so despite a significant growth in population and an increase in the numbers of potentially very challenging prisoners. <input type="checkbox"/> Overall, this inspection found Lowdham Grange to be not only a safe and decent place, but also among the most impressive category B training prisons in the system.
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This was a deeply satisfying time in terms of expanding the prison, improving the performance, establishing Lowdham Grange as a workplace of choice, and being recorded as 'not only a safe and decent place, but also among the most impressive category B training prisons in the system'.

Mt Eden Corrections Facility (MECF), Auckland, New Zealand, 2013-2016

The culture challenges I experienced whilst at MECF in Auckland, New Zealand were extraordinary

and complex. The time included working with an outstanding SMT, topping the New Zealand prison performance table for over two years, driving an agenda of innovation, and operating under intense political and media scrutiny as the only private prison in the country, under a demanding and highly punitive contract. There was a concerted effort from multiple angles to disrupt, frustrate, and discredit the contract and to ultimately return it to public sector hands. Handling this meant working with a multitude of

cultures and subcultures against the backdrop of significant pace, prisoner churn, and volume of issues. We were proactive, had operational grip, committed to partnership working, innovated, delivered to a high level, and managed a diverse and largely resistant former public sector staff group. We responded to an ongoing national prison population crisis as the country's biggest remand centre, handled approximately 800 reception movements each week, worked through multiple staff corruption cases, and handled issues around competence, collusion, and corruption amongst key stakeholders in an aggressive anti-private sector campaign.

Political context

One lasting memory is of a day I spent with former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, then a List MP,⁸ as we toured the prison together. Despite her relatively positive experience of the prison, and her reluctance to agree that she had felt safe throughout her visit, we debated private sector involvement in New Zealand prisons and the fact that her Labour ideologies would not allow her to shift her opinion that the prison should be back in public sector hands. After several hours together, Jacinda left the prison to meet a waiting media and reported on unsafe staffing levels, repeating a line which the trade unions had used for months. A year later, significant media coverage reported on leaked mobile phone footage of several cases of in-cell fighting, an incident which went on to become the second biggest national media story in the country of 2015. The prison dominated the media for days and it seemed as though everyone wanted to have their say on private prisons, sharing their apparent shock concerning fighting in prisons. As context, New Zealand has one of the highest incarceration rates per capita in the western world, second only to the USA, and as a private prison MECF provided an easy distraction from a wider and much more difficult topic. There were no safe spaces for me as Prison Director, there were no clear staff ambassadors outside of the SMT, the wave of resistance to the prison sustaining its success was palatable, and the leaked footage was shared with the media whilst I was overseas and unable to respond in person. The commissioning and

governance around the investigation into the incident was questionable with often-used phrases such as 'fix it' in response to isolated incidents against a backdrop of longstanding systemic failings which were never addressed. This time was operationally and culturally rich and demanding, and the leadership team were truly remarkable in terms of their integrity, energy, commitment, cohesion, and work ethic.

So what? What's the relevance to culture and change? When can culture change be impossible to achieve?

The cultural and performance challenges of this time were complex, wide, deep and, despite MECF leading the prison performance table for two consecutive years, culture change was arguably impossible given the scale of resistance from so many parties to make the necessary changes. We had moved a quarter of our workforce to the, soon to open, nearby private prison in line with their contractual requirement for an experienced workforce. Given the enormous potential of the new prison in terms of build, innovation, and contract, its imminent opening would have seen 25 per cent of the New Zealand prison population held in two private prisons with both having the potential to be high performing. From an ideological perspective, the opposition party (then Labour), trade unions, customer (Department of Corrections), and media would have found this position and private sector presence difficult to accept. Therefore, within days of the new prison opening, MECF was taken back into public sector hands through a 'step-in' process because of in-cell fighting, incidents of which were known and prevalent at numerous other prisons across the country. The complexities and issues relating to this extraordinary time are not for this paper but suffice to say that culture change within this prison and within this jurisdiction was impossible to achieve.

Prisons: looking backwards and moving forwards

Despite the extraordinary challenges, and in assessing prison and culture change, I am reminded of Māori proverb Ka mua, ka muri which expresses a simple image of a person walking backwards into the

Handling this meant working with a multitude of cultures and subcultures against the backdrop of significant pace, prisoner churn, and volume of issues.

8. A list MP is someone who has been elected from a political party's 'party list'.

future with the past clearly visible, whereas the future is not. This proverb talks of us as having imperfect information for the road ahead, but that this is a natural situation. This proverb speaks to Māori perspectives of time, where the past, the present, and the future are intertwined, with life viewed as a continuous cosmic process. Within this process, time has no restrictions in that it is both past and present. From a Western perspective, the past tends to be behind, and our goals and aspirations relate to the future, which is ahead. However, from a Māori perspective, the opposite is true in that the past and the present are knowable and so sit at the forefront of human consciousness. The proverb suggests that the future cannot be seen and is therefore conceived of as behind, and that the individual is conceptualised as travelling backwards in time to the future, with the present unfolding in front as a continuum into the past.

In terms of prisons, this conceptualisation of time does not leave the past history behind, but rather holds it at the forefront of future thinking, drawing strength from carrying its past into the future. The proverb talks of ancestors, therefore predecessors of all grades, as being ever present, existing within the spiritual realm and in the physical, alongside the living as well as within the living. This proverb resonated with me in viewing the continuity of the journey of prisons, their individual stories never ending, with future potential needing to draw from the past to better inform and fulfil future potential.

So what? Why was this important? What difference did it make?

This was an interesting chapter in the story and life of MECF as it showed what was possible against the odds. The standout achievements were the sustained high performance despite significant strains and imperfections, the delivery of a more open regime than was expected, the holding of full staff meetings which celebrated through song and stories, and the opening of the Puna Wānanga, a spiritual centre and chaplaincy space in a 1,000-bed prison where there previously wasn't one. Facilitating 600 men to vote whilst in custody was another highlight, as was engaging with

Auckland Bird Rescue and seeing the men on the Case, Support, and Integration (CSI) unit care for the birds and nurse them in readiness for release to the wild. I was proud of our ability to exit long-serving corrupt staff who had operated in this environment undetected and unchallenged for years. A further highlight was navigating through the complex aftermath of a high-profile step-in and presenting a more accurate version of events to senior public servants and shining a light on the impact of systemic failings. This chapter also reminds me that resistant cultures are powerful and can remain or return at any time, that some parties prefer the cultures and subcultures they know, and that there is sometimes political resistance to change due to more strategic and wider ramifications around raised expectations and efficiencies in other establishments. Overall, this chapter briefly touches on a deeper side to public services in New Zealand in terms of truth, transparency, and integrity, but also shows that success and setbacks can often operate side by side.

HMP Full Sutton, 2019-present

My journey through culture and change in prisons brings me to HMP Full Sutton and some of the culture challenges which were different again. Full Sutton is a solid operation which performs well overall, and which has a culture which is generally harmonious and good. However, I am reminded about the risk of complacency, of the need for change, of both the strengths and vulnerabilities of a good,

solid, and largely static SMT, and of the risk and opportunities a significant influx of new staff poses. In working hard to create and drive a culture of continuous improvement, the approach is that of 'good to great' and a desire to be the 'best in class', and where appropriate change is instilled, and innovation is normalised. There has been much done to further shape the culture and to future-proof the prison considering significant changes in the workforce. However, there is still much to do in terms of culture and subcultures, the size and variety of the staff group presenting wider challenges and opportunities. In terms of some of the changes, messaging and challenges, table 7 below provides a few examples as a flavour.

In terms of prisons, this conceptualisation of time does not leave the past history behind, but rather holds it at the forefront of future thinking, drawing strength from carrying its past into the future.

Table 7. *HMP Full Sutton: Culture, changes, and ‘good to great’.*

- ❑ Launched improved core days (2020 and 2023) with a 2025 version planned.
- ❑ Created improved Segregation Unit conditions, regime, colour scheme, communication, signage, and facilities (including a new healthcare suite).
- ❑ Refurbished Central Detail building to create a new Staff Centre (through sponsorship).
- ❑ Designed a staff memorial garden.
- ❑ Created Business Change agenda and lead.
- ❑ Created new People Hub accommodation (more central and open plan working).
- ❑ Fitted quality signage throughout.
- ❑ Realigned SMT accommodation (to meet business needs).
- ❑ Provided year-round access to daylight hours exercise.
- ❑ Refurbished Education Department and rebranded it The College.
- ❑ Closed library and moved to The College complex.
- ❑ Converted old library to create a Community Centre.
- ❑ Introduced mobile morning meetings then moved to blended Visits Hall and Teams morning meetings (all minuted).
- ❑ Embedded diverse promotion board membership (message of fairness).
- ❑ Focused on the top 10 most vulnerable prisoners.
- ❑ Opened Café Portal (coffee cards sold to staff and prisoners and gifted as a ‘thank you’).
- ❑ Designed new ‘Full Sutton: Safe for All’ logo.
- ❑ Displayed prisoner artwork in the corridors (inspired by HMP Holme House).
- ❑ Refurbished staff mess and renamed it The Halifax (site of a former Halifax Bomber airfield).
- ❑ Delivered improvements to staff areas throughout the prison.
- ❑ Introduced ‘meet and greet’ events to communicate key messages to staff.
- ❑ Published annual events calendar.
- ❑ Refurbished and modernised gymnasium.
- ❑ Secured sponsorship for staff sports (football) kits.
- ❑ Fitted 16 electric vehicle charge points, launched a Greening Agenda, and secured solar panels for future fitting.
- ❑ Held Staff Family Visits evenings during the year (Friday evenings and always sold out).
- ❑ Painted and modernised the (1980s) boardroom (paint, IT, telephony, trophies, heating, blinds, and furnishings)
- ❑ Fitted car park barriers and ‘values’ signage on the car park fencing.
- ❑ Relaunched Full Staff Briefings (drink and food with key messages and awards and a sponsored July BBQ).
- ❑ Embedded reward and recognition culture (Colleague of the Month and Team of the Quarter).
- ❑ Introduced weekly Safety Meeting held in the Community Centre.
- ❑ Launched Full Sutton Focus for staff (regular newsletter).
- ❑ Launched Newshub (quarterly magazine) and a quality weekly Prisoner Newsletter.
- ❑ Repaired and recovered 100+ chairs (initially sent to HMP Wakefield and now repaired in-house)
- ❑ Published The Guide (prospectus for prisoners).
- ❑ Secured funding for a wood mill (after trying for 7 years and which opens in the autumn).
- ❑ Refurbished Visits Hall (through self-help inspired by a visit to HMP Lindholme with furniture made at HMP Hull).
- ❑ Introduced user-friendly directional signage.
- ❑ Refurbished or replaced faded corridor windows.
- ❑ Improved exercise spaces / yards (new equipment, outside scenes, bright paint and plant pots).
- ❑ And more.....





The test of the longstanding stability of HMP Full Sutton combined with a refreshed approach came in the form of HMIP in 2020, the last inspection before COVID-19 restrictions were introduced. HMIP found the following:

Table 8. Extracts from HMP Full Sutton's HMIP 2020 report by Chief Inspector Peter Clarke

- ❑ The prisoner population is complex, including prisoners convicted of a wide range of very serious offences.
- ❑ Safety improved to our highest grade of good and the prison had the lowest levels of violence in the high security estate.
- ❑ Segregation unit had improved considerably since the time of the last inspection.
- ❑ IEP was used in a way that did genuinely encourage good behaviour.
- ❑ Challenge, Support, and Intervention Plans (CSIPs) were being well used.
- ❑ Not enough work or activity places for the population, and allocation was too slow in some cases.
- ❑ Ofsted recognised that plans were in place to bring about improvements, but those had yet to materialise.
- ❑ Public protection work was generally robust.
- ❑ Psychology staff were well integrated across the prison (identified as good practice).
- ❑ Fundamentally a safe and decent establishment.
- ❑ Energetic leadership and a staff group who interact well with the prisoners in their charge.
- ❑ No reason why Full Sutton could not aspire to be one of the best performing prisons in the country.

So what? What were the big hitters?

In terms of Full Sutton, I see this as moving from 5/10 to 7/10 over four years. Some of the 'big hitters' in terms of incremental changes and improvements include appointing a Head of Business Change to oversee multiple change projects, improving the core day through two successive changes (and a third is planned), shaping the regime to allow year-round access to daylight exercise, driving high standards around written and spoken communication, embedding a tone of energy, learning, coaching, and continuous improvement on a daily basis through the morning meetings, launching a meaningful greening agenda, introducing a progressive and impactful self-help team for improvements to living and working conditions, cleaning the faded walkway windows through the 'See The Light' project, the launch of a rebranded and refurbished College and related prospectus, refurbishing what is now a wonderful visits hall, and embedding a rhythm of Colleague of the Month and Team of the Quarter. This pace, volume, and commitment to change and improvement becomes normalised, opportunities to sow the seeds of change become widespread and owned by many, and a sense of pride is evident for staff and prisoners alike.

Keep sowing seeds of change

This paper is a simple and practical overview of changes made and a record of their perceived impact. As explained, prisons are not a single homogeneous culture but instead comprise multiple cultures and

subcultures which are multi-layered, each stacked with history and complexity, and are ever changing. Working in prisons, in whatever capacity, offers many opportunities to make a difference and to sow seeds of change, the fruits of which we might never personally see. Drawing from the past to inform the present and future is rich and valuable, as is referencing and connecting with predecessors where possible and appropriate. The length of stay for leaders to progress establishments has long been debated, and I have found myself altering my view on this matter. When questioned, and assuming the appropriate team-related succession planning and support, I now suggest a seven-year tenure to be optimum.

Long-term assessments

In terms of HMP/YOI New Hall's history, this is simply my story and interpretation across 15 years of reports, and I encourage similar assessments to be done at other establishments. The projects and priorities selected at this time are listed and intend only to highlight the agility, innovation, decency, safety, and care required.

Communication of the vision and ambitions was important then and remains just as important now. The vehicle of communication is also important with purpose, plans, and progress being presented in written form, via verbal briefings and meetings, and simply through 'word of mouth', allowing colleagues to be reminded about their purpose and be invited to be part of the change. Culture change requires tenacity and a relentless drive and a sense of responsibility.

Celebrating wins

With culture change, it is important to recognise the power of celebrating small wins and to bring in people who are sympathetic to the cause. I have found it helpful to highlight examples of actions I hope to see more of within the culture. Being nimble and innovative is also important in being able to deliver the desired outcomes, and examples of projects and methods can be used to help communicate ambition.

I have also discovered the significance of building strong coalitions to create a shared common purpose and spread key messages, ideas, and latest developments. I also highlight the importance of creating safe spaces to discuss ideas, hopes for the future, and what good 'looks like'. In wanting individuals to act and behave differently, it helps to change the surroundings and conditions, and create forums to share ideas. Furthermore, there is value in both public and private idea sharing of ideas, of dynamic meetings, and also the creation of roles which point to business change and innovation.

Symbols are powerful

Symbols are also important and might be as simple as language, branded signage, logos, or the rhythm and style of certain meetings. As examples, the longstanding HMP Full Sutton 'Safe for All' logo is a symbol which gives clarity and a sense of purpose, the 'Lowdie Lion' is an award and a symbol of gratitude for a job well done, and the MECF staff family day at Auckland zoo and the staff family evenings at Full

Sutton and sponsored BBQs serve as symbols of gratitude.

A particular style of language, and certain words and phrases, are often helpful in shaping culture. Examples I have used in verbal and written form include a desire to be 'best in class', the need to 'maximise the footprint' in tapping into potential, encouraging 'push back' in actively inviting colleagues to challenge, 'workplace of choice' in wanting to improve working conditions, regularly 'painting a picture' so we know who we are and how we are doing, and 'looking up and out' in encouraging colleagues to visit other prisons and organisations, exploring and researching best practice.

Closing comments

And finally, leadership is stretching, exhausting, lonely, and frustrating, so find people who can support you. Understanding the context of a prison is critical within prison leadership and to the culture journey. It is important to focus your energy and invest your time upfront to understand the root cause(s) of your cultural issues and challenges. Be laser-focussed on a small number of issues but attempt to address a much larger number. Invest time, energy, and resources wisely and actively encourage, discourage, and set new standards for behaviours at every opportunity in order to create a faster change. Be a role model, work on yourself, accept your limitations, and share your failings, fears, and frustrations. Find role models and champions and leverage their energy and give them a voice, and remember people are watching what you do, what you say, and how long you stay.