

Initial Thinking on the role of the Governor under Fresh Start

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I recollect as Deputy Governor at Wandsworth working through an exercise with the Governor, Bill Guinan, to determine the amount of his time over which he had control. The result was quite remarkable as almost 75% of his week was out of his control — it was controlled by routines, 'statutory duties', the number of managers and trade unions who expected direct access, demands from Region and Headquarters to attend management and training meetings, and attendance at institutional meetings. Bill's favourite phrase and actual practice was 'delegation with confidence'. Yet he had little control over the majority of his time to set objectives, monitor, plan and develop policy relating to that large, complex institution.

It was this experience, and similar recollections from other Governors in the past that led me to share the feelings of the de Frisching group that in the development of the management structure it was essential to 'free up' the role of the Governor. The de Frisching group summarised their recommendations on the role of the Governor in the following way:

'The Governor has the final responsibility for steering the direction of the establishment, creating a sense of purpose and commitment and enabling staff to give of their best. To achieve these goals, the Governor needs to be freed from detailed duties which tie him down and prevent him from managing his establishment in the round. To exercise his key leadership role, The Governor needs the space and capacity to keep in touch with the staff and with the inmate community. He must be able to judge the mood and temper of the establishment, and in that context, to chart the way forward.

He will do this most effectively through interaction and teamworking with his senior management team. A firm structure will enable him to delegate confidently, to define objectives for his managers, to allocate resources to them for their achievement, and to assess their performance against specified targets.'

I thought in this article it would be useful to share some of the thinking of the de Frisching group and respond to some of the arguments that have been presented to me about the new

management structure

'The Governor needs the space and capacity to keep in touch with staff and the inmate community.' Traditionally the Governor's rounds, it has been argued, has been the Governor's means of keeping in touch with the grass roots of the establishment. In many establishments the Governor's rounds have been a combination of routine, ritual and carrying out 'Statutory Requirements' that could be more effectively delegated. I can guarantee that many Governors used to have a set pattern every morning with adjudications, applications, visit to the centre, visit to the kitchen, cup of coffee in the hospital, and then back to his desk. This routine has been predictable to the extent that, if he visited at another time of the day, the greeting was still 'Good Morning'.

The Management Structure under Fresh Start and the delegation of tasks to senior management and intermediate managers should allow the Governor to be freed of those routines and rituals, and to choose where, who and when he wants to visit. This will

be a far more effective way of grass roots contact. Fears have been expressed that the delegation of responsibilities to senior managers and intermediate managers will isolate the Governor. The contrary in my opinion is true. For example, if the Governor can delegate the adjudication responsibility his appearance in the prison is not governed by the daily routine i.e. time of adjudications. Further the Governor can monitor and manage adjudications through doing them when he chooses, setting standards and by scrutinizing the white sheets each week. The greater control of his time should enable the Governor to personally and more effectively keep in touch with staff and the inmate community, and be seen to be more closely involved not more isolated.

The 'personal responsibility' of the Governor for 'Statutory functions' as laid down in Prison Rules, Standing Orders and Circular Instructions is an issue which has led to much debate. There seems to me to be two sides of the coin here. First, many of the requirements, we discovered on the de Frisching group, were more to do with tradition than what is actually said in Prison Rules and Standing Orders. For example, as far as we could see there is no requirement to taste the food but simply to examine and sign the menu book; a task which can be delegated. Visits to the hospital can be delegated to other Governor grades as can the majority of the other visits e.g. to rule 43s, and rule 48s. The other side of the coin is that Circular Instructions from Headquarters have often looked to **personal** involvement by the Governor in decision making within the prison. This may have been as a reaction to a serious failure in a system or, as a precaution to ensure the implementation of what is perceived by Headquarters as a sensitive policy decision. While clearly the final responsibility for that decision making lies with the Governor he cannot personally be involved in everything all the time. He must rely on delegation of decision making and then rely on his own monitoring procedures to ensure that those decisions are being made correctly. Each Headquarters division with their own policy responsibilities have to bear in mind that the Governor is responding to policy making from over ten Headquarters divisions and regional Office. Our recommendation was that 'A firm structure will enable the Governor to delegate confidently', and

Headquarters need to be confident of that structure operating under the management of the Governor rather than demanding the Governor personally to make individual decisions.

The management structure is designed to enable the Governor to have a manageable span of control i.e. 6 or 7 senior managers reporting directly to him. The clear definition of their responsibilities will enable him to delegate but also control what is happening within the establishment. It has been suggested that the disappearance of the Deputy Governor and the Chief Officer leaves the Governor without his right-hand men and again rather isolated. To counter that I would argue the reduction of the number of people directly accountable to the Governor will enable the Governor to steer the direction of the establishment more effectively with less overlapping of responsibilities and criss-crossing of communications. Specialists within the establishment particularly have felt they will be more remote from the Governor and their voices will not be heard. The aim is that the Head of Inmate Activities or another member of Senior Management to whom specialists are accountable will have more time to support those in the work they do and represent a balanced and accurate picture of the specialists' work to the Governor. The reduction of the span of control will reduce the need for a 'right-hand man' because he will have a smaller, manageable team to rely on for information and communication purposes.

The Governor needs to develop a sense of common purpose in that team and it is through that team work that the Governor will gain more effective support. In turn there is a need for all members of that team to have an overall understanding of the institution, rather like the old Chief Officer and Deputy Governor, rather than perhaps only seeing the institution from their own work stand point.

The Governor should exercise a personal role for all staff and inmates but not in the traditional sense of all having direct access on any issue. Delegating responsibility and decision making to senior management and group management levels does not mean that the Governor loses a personal role. We all know examples of how relatively trivial issues have taken up the Governor's time when they could have been dealt with much more effectively at a lower level. I

recollect sitting in the Governor's chair one weekend at a previous establishment when a dog handler plus a dog walked into my office to insist that I did something about a car that was blocking his car in the car park. Then there was the memo from an officer asking me if there were any size 17 collar shirts available. The Governor has inherited this from the old paternalistic role and this clutters up his time. What is important to maintain is personal contact between the Governor and staff and inmates on relevant issues where his personal intervention can make a difference, where problems have not been able to be resolved at a lower level. The caring role for both staff and inmates can be more effective where he has managers who can resolve problems for staff and inmates effectively and he can concentrate on those large problems which really do need his personal attention.

In a similar way the Governor's role in relation to industrial relations can be more effective if the union representatives can see ways of resolving issues without going to the Governor's office or without awaiting the formal meeting with the Governor. The Governor clearly needs to maintain good working contact with the various staff representatives in the establishment, but if he is constantly tied down to resolving issues that could be resolved by his other managers, the larger issues are not given sufficient priority.

The role of the Governor as the interface between the establishment and the Regional Office and Headquarters has to be of major importance. It is essential in the policy making of the Department, on national issues and local issues that the Governor provides significant inputs from the local level. We have all had experiences where one part of Headquarters has not linked in with another part of Headquarters and contradictions in policy have resulted. The Governor is in the unique position of receiving documents from all policy and operational divisions, and implementing them in a co-ordinated way within his establishment. What is often obvious to the Governor is not necessarily so for one particular policy division looking at one particular aspect of the establishment. It is essential that the Governor's knowledge and experience is drawn upon by those divisions in the formulation of policy, and essential that Governors readily and constructively contribute opinion

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