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NICK HARDWICK CBE

Date : 14 January, 2016

Bob Neill MP
Chairman
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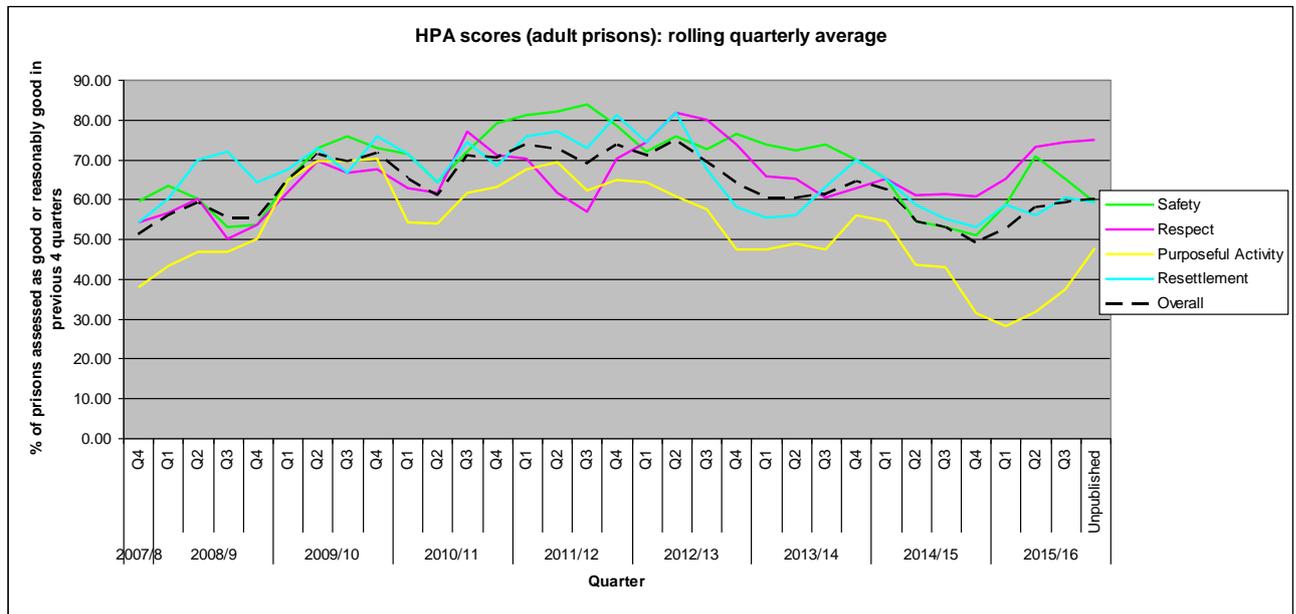
Dear Mr Neill,

Thank you for your letter dated 8 December asking for my observations about the evidence the Justice Committee was provided with by NOMS earlier that month. In particular, you ask my view of whether the prison system has ‘turned a corner’, with establishments more stable and operating better.

Inspections provide ‘healthy prison assessments’ that evaluate outcomes for prisoners in the areas of safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement. As I am sure you are aware, my last annual report demonstrated that there had been a sharp decline in all outcome areas, to a ten year low. Prisons have become much more dangerous.

Comparing HMI Prisons’ evidence for one year with another must be done with care, as the same establishments are not inspected each year and, as HMI Prisons’ risk assessment processes become more sophisticated, those establishments of more concern are inspected more frequently. However, recent inspections demonstrate a marginally improved picture over the last year that now looks to have leveled out. The following table includes the healthy prison assessment scores of my most recent adult prison inspection findings:

Rolling HPA scores 11/01/2016 (includes published scores to end December 2015 [Q3] and unpublished scores up to and including HMP Lewes [inspected January 2016]).



Improvement can be noted in the respect and purposeful activity outcome areas, but there is little change in resettlement and erratic change in safety outcomes. You will note from these figures that since Q3 2013/14 scores relating to safety, while fluctuating, have remained consistently lower than they had been since Q3 2010/11, so they remain of great concern. NOMS data demonstrates that prisons have become a lot more dangerous, with higher levels of homicides, self-inflicted deaths, self-harm incidents and individuals, assaults and serious assaults (on staff and other prisoners) than they have been since these records began.

Regarding self-inflicted deaths, the figures are still of concern, in particular the number of these among prisoners already identified as vulnerable and on ACCTs, and the recent increase in numbers of transgender and female prisoners. My calculations suggest that the number of self-inflicted deaths per year has stabilised in the last few months at around 90. This figure is unacceptably high, especially given it was around 60 two years ago.

The HMI Prisons HPA scores set out above include our most recent inspections, whereas the most recent available Ministry of Justice Safety in Custody Statistics (published on 29 October 2015) includes statistics up to June 2015 (assaults and self-harm) and September 2015 (deaths in custody). I hope and expect to see some improvement in the next set of statistics.

One of the reasons for the decline in safety in prisons is the availability of new psychoactive substances, but as you know I have also expressed concern about staff shortages, overcrowding and wider policy changes having an impact. The recent stabilisation in staffing has had a positive impact and supports some of the improvements I have noted through inspections.

I hope this information is useful to you. I would be happy to answer any further questions in person on 20 January.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Hardwick', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

NICK HARDWICK