

IAP panel member meeting notes – 24/03/2020

Apologies: Kish H; Nick P; Jenny T

Introduction

Juliet talked through the suggested agenda, panel members who were present agreed with agenda. Deborah highlighted that Robert B is giving evidence at the justice committee at 15:00 which might be of interest to IAP members.

Immediate advice

Juliet received note from Peter Dawson which highlighted the fact that there shouldn't be prisoners on basic IEP at this time. There was a suggestion that national guidance should be developed to ensure that prisoners are deprived of contact with their families and loved ones, to the agreement of other panel members. Deborah made the point that this is something that the IAP has advocated for before.

It was also highlighted that the POA has said that there isn't enough protective clothing within the prison estate, there are suggestions for it to be rationed. Jenny S made the point that we should only comment on situations where our advice has not already been given. We want to avoid giving individuals a 'shopping list' of things to do during this time.

There was concern raised about prisoner's health within prison. Prisoners are currently only allowed out of their cell to shower and make phone calls. Deborah raised concerns about how this would be monitored and how the prison phone would be kept sanitised etc. Juliet pointed out that 900 sets have been given to prisons that don't have in cell phone. These sets would be intended to be shared but should be cleaned after every use. However, this was further questioned, especially given to pressures that the prison service was faced before COVID-19. Juliet suggested that in times like these, perhaps prisoners themselves could be used to help ensure everything is kept clean. Furthermore, the use of Samaritans and listeners within the prison estate is important. But they would need to follow guidance i.e sit the recommended distance away from each other etc.

Seena highlighted the older prison population and questioned whether extra resources have been used to target that specific part of the prison population. We understand that COVID-19 is more detrimental to older individuals so it is important that extra resources are diverted towards them. Especially in light of the fact that the prison estate might be running on up to 40% less staff than usual. (30% estimated being sick from the virus on top of the normal sick rate which is approx. 11%).

Jenny S is worried about the knock-on effect of spending too much time inside for prisoners, worrying about family members and loved ones on the outside. In light of the fact that visitors have been cancelled, Jenny questioned if there is any other way in which we could provide help? Via phone perhaps?

Juliet suggested that we make use of prison radio and/or inside times. We could link the IAP website with Inside Times so that family members could have support and information. Deborah asked what is being done regarding in cell activities and questions whether the type of things that are being

carried out within the community can be replicated in prison. She also inquired about what effect this might have of suicide and self-harm rates within prisons.

Seena highlighted that suicide rates tend to decrease in situations such as this but was unsure about self-harm rates. Jenny S highlighted that self-harm rates also tend to decrease because of community strengthening, however this situation might be different as individuals are having to self-isolate and therefore might feel like less of a community. She then offered the possibility of giving counselling services and/or therapeutic services via the telephone for those within prison.

Human rights letter

John highlighted that there is 2 parts to this discussion, firstly do we think that this is a good idea in general and secondly to get other panel members to look at the letter and give John feedback. Deborah does think it is a good idea, it is important. She noted that she has a call with the PPO tomorrow to see what they are going to do in relation to restrictions of investigations. The IAP should write a letter, and it should have a section that voices the opinions of families. She noted that she thought the letter was a bit too legalistic.

John W highlighted that there were two reasons why the letter was so detailed, firstly, because the individual he wrote the letter to is a QC and secondly, so it would be legal enough for them to be passed onto their lawyers. Both Jenny S and Juliet agreed, citing that it was a good letter.

The question of whether individuals can be released due to the lockdown was then brought up by Juliet, as this was an action that the IAP had previously be advocating for. It was questioned whether the IAP should still advocate for this position as releasing individuals might put them in a vulnerable position, especially if they are homeless.

This point was furthered by Deborah who highlighted that it would be difficult to keep women safe if they were released if there was no structure on the ground. She doesn't think that it should stop the IAP from saying that people should be released, but we should be realistic about the problems that it would pose and how we could tackle them.

Jenny S also voiced her concern, especially with the closing down of charities within the community, coming out of prison could be worse than staying in prison and therefore the IAP need to be careful of what position it takes.

Seena F highlighted that one of the main reasons people die after release is due to drug overdose, which would need to be monitored. Individuals who are released might also end up back in the same situation that caused them to be in prison in the first place.

Network

Juliet highlighted as a result of the Keeping Safe conference, the stakeholder list has increased. Anne Owers has offered her services. Juliet suggested that if all panel members share any upcoming phone calls with each other, any interested panel member could dial if they feel that they need to.

Deborah C suggested that given the website is being updated regularly, perhaps we can email stakeholders to let them know that there are resources on the website.

Adrian B highlighted that he is happy to update the website with anything the panel members want to be on the website, if they highlight and send it to him, he will update the website. Juliet highlighted that any articles that we want stakeholders to be aware of can also be uploaded to the website.

John W stated that even though we usually wouldn't put correspondence with ministers up on the website until it is completed, perhaps in this situation it would be a good idea to upload the letters that the IAP have written.

Deborah also suggested that we should send a short note to stakeholders to say that the IAP are committed to the safety of prisoners, especially during this difficult time etc.

Deborah also explained about the work she is doing to ensure that there is due consideration for investigations even though in person investigations are unable to take place at the moment. As inquests are due to be suspended until after autumn, it will create even more of a backlog to a process that is already prone to delay. She is currently trying to find out who is responsible for what to ensure that individuals on her team who are contact with families have accurate information to pass on. Once she has further information, she shall write a note for panel members.

John W suggested that perhaps this could be a separate letter for the secretary of state that we could send to him next week. He further suggested that it could be angled as 'learning lessons'

Juliet highlighted that when departments receive letters from the IAP, they do take it seriously and this should be something that we should be cautious of as any operational staff has been taken out of the HQ. This isn't to deter us from writing to departments but just something to be aware of.

Closing remarks

John W asked if panel members could have comments to him within the next 24 hours.

Juliet thanked everyone for their time and the panel shall reconvene at the same time next week.