

Stakeholder Hearing 18

The Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG)

Represented by Mark Blake, Project Development Officer

6 November 2014, 102 Petty France, London

Background

The Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) is a national organisation that aims to end racial inequality. In partnership with CLINKS, BTEG run the BAME CJS Network. The aim of this is to establish a national network of BAME organisations working in or around the CJS, as well as agencies with a specific interest in BAME communities in the CJS. BTEG also supported the Young Review, led by Baroness Youth, which was commissioned by the Justice Secretary to look at the specific experiences and needs of black and Muslim men aged 18-24 in the Criminal Justice System, and make recommendations to ensure that action takes place to address unequal outcomes.

Mark Blake (MB) leads on the BAME CJS Network working with MoJ policy and operational staff about relevant projects and developments.

CHARACTERISTICS OF 18-24 YEAR OLDS

There is a mind-set in the CJS that is punitive and retributive and that disproportionately affects young and BAME people. The police have a particular attitude to gangs, and children are not being treated as children. T2A identified issues around the safety of children at night time and the 'hard end' enforcement and disproportionality of stop and search powers.

Young adults should be treated as a special group rather than as adults. The justice system should look at the needs of this specific group; the CJS should look at alternative arrangements that are in place internationally. MB said that he was not clear what the right approach is but that it isn't Secure Colleges.

There should be specific selection and training of staff to work with young people.

There should be an assessment process to identify the maturity of the individual not just decisions based on age.

In prisons gangs are policing themselves, which leads to bullying; by allowing this prisons are condoning bullying.

Young BAME prisoners are more likely to be restrained and disciplined, which is due to stereotyping. This reflects a lack of staff training and a lack of BAME staff who can relate to the young adults.

Staff need to have a vocational element to work with young people. The dominant culture is 'these people deserve it'. The balance is more about control than care; the design of prisons and training of staff needs to address this. It should be addressed by thinking about what a good person looks like and that a prisoner should be better at the end of their sentence. The core of the problem is the weighting of control over compassion; culturally prisons can't give expression to compassion, it is very difficult to change this. At present, a member of staff may recognise that a young person has a problem and choose to do nothing about it. There should be consequences for staff who have been trained and don't do their job properly.

STAFF AND CULTURE IN THE CJS AND PRISONS

MB said that the CJS needs to listen more to the users and their families.

There needs to be an overall change to the system and its approach if it is to address BAME disproportionality.

More young people could be diverted from the CJS if there was more investment in them, particularly in schools and local communities. The good models of practice are not scaled-up due to an overarching punitive and retributive ethos, particularly to young people and BAME.

Black prisoners face a lot of the same issues as white prisoners, but the diversity of the staff does not reflect the diversity and cultural issues that BAME prisoners present with. There needs to be a broader diversity of staff and more training in cultural issues. MB told the panel that a focus group at Warren Hill (a prison in the Suffolk countryside) described an officer as holding up a prisoner at a gate, it was because he was a black prisoner from London. The black prisoner from London didn't reflect the staff mix, 'it's a cocktail for conflict'. The disproportionate number of BAME staff in establishments is a real issue, but is not a problem in HQ.

NOMS doesn't talk to communities and people who are now reformed to address cultural issues. There is a risk averse environment and mind-set that means the Prison Service won't embrace alternative approaches to dealing with BAME issues for prisoners. Mosaic mentoring programme founded by The Prince of Wales has highlighted how some ex-offenders are considered too high risk to bring into prisons to help resolve issues and provide advice on approaches to staff and prisoners. It is becoming more difficult generally for the voluntary sector, particularly for smaller voluntary organisations, to work in prisons. As well as the difficulties getting access to the prisoners, there may be no one available to escort the volunteers. It would be helpful for security cleared volunteers to have keys so that they can move around the prison.

Through the Gate (TtG) services provided through Transforming Rehabilitation may find it difficult for the organisations they work with to function in the existing prison system, which is not conducive for preparing people for release. BTEG companies are finding it difficult to keep going due to funding and having to find new sources of funding. They have been heavily weakened over the last 5 years and have a lot to offer, particularly when people who have been offenders are able to be involved.

There are lots of prisons locking down for 23 hours a day. MB reported, for example, a significant level of anger and animosity in Pentonville from people who were spending so much time locked up. There is no consistency in the regime; courses are cancelled at the last minute and mothers and babies who have come to visit are turned away at the gate.

There are not enough facilities to occupy young adults. Prisoners should have access to computers and Skype. Video conferencing facilities could be used to facilitate more family contact and 'visits' through Skype, but there is a resistance to using technology. NOMS should be moving faster on this.

Prisons are individual fiefdoms when it comes to what prisoners have access to and security outweighs everything else. Prisons are run on fear of failure rather than pride in success, which is partly brought about by fear of the media.

Many people from minority groups come into prison with a higher level of education than is generally found in the prison population. It is harder for them to get anything meaningful out of the education on offer, because they are unlikely to be able to access 'A' Levels or a degree which might be the next level for them.

ACCT

If there was another group of staff, not prison officers, looking after the well-being of prisoners and managing the ACCT process, then this may address some of the cultural issues. But these people would have to be empowered to challenge in the prison environment and issues of balance and influence would have to be taken into account.

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

A court order should be put in place to protect people who are ill; they shouldn't enter the CJS. There are many people whose illness could be treated far better outside prison.

The parliamentary select committee report regarding Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services published on 5 November 2014¹, highlights the problems for young people with mental health issues. Support services need

¹ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee/news/14-11-04-camhs-report-substantive/>

to be improved so that they do not go on to enter the CJS. Often people with mental health issues are not prone to violence, and in these cases they should not go to prison. The system should step away from the idea that punishment is the only way to deal with these people. There should be more powers at court to divert people and more places to divert them to. Health Services shouldn't exclude people who are violent, although the public does need to be protected.

There is a lack of funding to the Voluntary Organisations who run front line projects to offer interventions to deal with drug and alcohol issues which may be part of the problem.