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# THE HARRIS REVIEW

Independent review into self-inflicted  
deaths in custody of 18-24 year olds

## Themes Emerging from Prison Visits

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# Objective

- Prison visits were seen as an integral part of the Review, and necessary to fully understand the environment in which these young adults are held, as well as the operational factors that staff need to deal with.
- The visits enabled Review panel members to familiarise themselves with the custodial environment and see how a prison operates on a day to day basis.
- There was also an opportunity to see at first hand the concepts, procedures, processes and policies that the Panel had read about from the early documentation and to engage with staff, prisoners as well as Listeners.
- During visits, panel members were able to speak to a range of staff, from governors, to specialist staff, the chaplaincy, out-reach staff etc. and wing officers.
- Importantly, the visits also gave the panel opportunities to speak directly to young adults, including informally and a number of pre-arranged meetings.
- Review panel members were also able to see different parts of a prison, to observe different activities at different times of the day.

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# List of Prisons Visited

- As part of the exercise, the Review visited the following custodial establishments:
  - HMP Holloway on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2014
  - HMYOI Brinsford on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2014
  - HMYOI Parc on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2014
  - HMP&YOI Chelmsford on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2014
  - HM YOI Aylesbury on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2014
  - HMP&YOI Swinfen Hall on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2014
  - HMYOI Glen Parva on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2014
  - HMP&YOI Isis on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014
  - HMP Leeds on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014

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# Issues Identified

## Managing Vulnerability and ACCT

- There is a difference in the level of knowledge, training and experience in those staff opening and managing prisoners on ACCT
- The ACCT process is time consuming and difficult to navigate, which can lead to inconsistent application
- In many cases there are examples of poorly produced care plans, poor follow up, together with a lack of accountability
- There was a concern that ACCT focuses too much on those who self-harm or who verbalise their wish to self-harm and not those that are quietly distressed
- ACCT should be a multi-disciplinary process, but in many instances it was not. There was a feeling that there should be more effort to ensure it is multi-disciplinary and open up to input from others with contact with the young adult, including family, Listeners and Chaplaincy
- The information available, within prisons and what is provided to prisoners about and the use of the Listeners scheme is not consistent
- Many prison staff lack a basic knowledge of mental health issues
- Because mental health training is left to local provision, there is an inconsistent and inadequate approach to the training provided that would equip prison staff with the knowledge and skills they need to provide a professional response to the issues they encounter

# Issues Identified

## Operational Challenges

- The reduction in staff numbers following benchmarking, coupled with the loss of experienced staff through the early departure scheme, has led to a deterioration in prisoner/staff relationships
- The reduction in staff numbers has led to an impact on the regime. For example, the time a prisoner spends out of their cell has been reduced, there is less association, gym and other purposeful activities
- Some establishments rely upon staff on detached duty, which has a detrimental impact upon the relationship between officers and prisoners
- Another impact arising from the pressures on resources relates to prisoners movements, in that often prisoners are not able to get to health appointments or work/education as they can not be escorted in time
- Procedural issues relating to the way that the PIN phones work often mean that prisoners are unable to make contact with their family in the early days in a new establishment
- There have been tensions between staff and prisoners over the operation of the revised Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme
- Many prisoners were of the view that there was a disconnect between what the Governor expected and believed was happening and what was actually happening in reality
- Both staff and prisoners were concerned that the full impact upon an individual's mental health through usage of New Psychotic Substances (e.g. Synthetic cannabinoids) is not known and will be a challenge

# Issues Identified

## Organisational Culture

- A key point raised as essential was the need for strong and consistent leadership within each establishment in order to support a safe and decent regime; this was seen as critical to the well being of prisoners
- Time getting to know prisoners was seen as an important tool in supporting vulnerable prisoners. This includes chatting to them, building up trust and an understanding
- There was some concern over the operation of the Listener scheme and a perception that amongst some staff there a reluctance by some Officers to support the scheme or respond to calls. The review also heard some suggestions that the scheme should be extended, however no consensus was expressed over how a future scheme should operate
- There was a feeling that current education and employment programmes were used more to keep prisoners busy and not to support rehabilitation. The relevance of these schemes to offender management plans was questioned, as were the availability of spaces
- The management of young adults requires a specific skill set and many felt that some current staff, some of whom who have been redeployed from other types of establishments, were not equipped for the role
- There was no consensus amongst prisoners and staff spoken to as to whether mixing young adults with older adult prisoners was a positive or negative things. Some young adults questioned mixing with younger 18 and 19 year old prisoners with other young adults

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# Issues Identified

## Health and Mental Health

- Prison and Healthcare staff highlighted a problem with the transfer of information into the prison from primary health care services and mental health services, and also from other prisons. This included problems associated with the different IT systems in use
- There was a concern expressed by some that many vulnerable young adults should not have found themselves in prison in the first place
- Both Prisoners and Healthcare staff raised concerns that some Prison officers might be resentful of health facilities available to prisoners, which were perceived to be 'better' than in the community, and that this might lead to a reluctance to collect them from cells, which could contribute to the numbers of 'did not attends'
- The availability of mental health care services available to support prisoners in establishments are not consistent and can be disjointed
- If staff took more time to talk to prisoners and get to know them, then those more discrete mental health problems and all-round prisoner well-being could be picked
- There was a recognition that too much time kept inside cells has a detrimental impact upon the mental health and overall well-being of prisoners

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# Issues Identified

## Family Contact and Liaison

- Young adults were particularly concerned about prison visits by family and friends, especially the length of time for the visits, the time it takes to escort prisoners to the visiting area. All of them acknowledged how important regular family contact, including visits, was for their mental health and overall well-being
- Some of the contributors questioned the arrangements in place within establishments for families to be able to phone in their concerns about a particular prisoner
- There was also concerns raised over how any such information received from families or friends was utilised in a timely and appropriate manner to manage and support vulnerable young adults
- Many prisoners felt that some officers did not see a prisoners engagement or interaction with their friends and family as being important
- Some prisoners also relayed complaints on behalf of their families over the way that they had been treated, some felt that officials treated the families like criminals

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# Conclusions on Engagement with Young Adults During Prison Visits

Listening to young adults in custody and what they were going through at that time was enormously valuable for the Panel members.

A number of consistent messages were heard including:

- A sense of frustration at the more limited regime that most of them now endured;
- Spending long periods in a cell in particular was described as frustrating, together with limited access to relevant work experience or training;
- Contact with family was another issue that clearly meant a lot to those the panel spoke to, especially contact during early days in prison when they felt particularly vulnerable, and
- The sense of frustration when highly valued time with loved ones during official visit times was shortened due to process or delays when the young adults were brought to the visit centre.