

**Chair: Lord Toby Harris**

**Email: [HarrisReview@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HarrisReview@justice.gsi.gov.uk)**

<http://iapdeathsincustody.independent.gov.uk/harris-review/>

Jeremy Wright MP  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

10 June 2014

### **Review on Self-Inflicted Deaths in Custody of 18-24 year olds**

I thought it would be helpful to provide you with an update on the independent review into self-inflicted deaths in custody of 18-24 year olds, particularly as I am aware you are considering advice that is being put to you by officials following my request for further funding to enable the Review to proceed.

The Review has been running now for over two months. It has taken us much of this time to assimilate the size of the task we have undertaken and identify the information we need to complete it. I have been overwhelmed by the strength and diversity of the support I have received from a range of organisations and individuals. Already the panel has heard evidence from key stakeholders such as the Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. Their input has proved highly valuable, yielding further questions for us to pursue. This, and the other sources of evidence that we are in the process of gathering, promises to produce a robust and constructive report.

We are committed to providing the Ministry of Justice with recommendations that are both practicable and effective in reducing the risk of self-inflicted deaths among 18 to 24 year olds in custody. It is now apparent, however, that we are not sufficiently resourced to give due scrutiny to this grave and critical subject. I was concerned that this might be the case before I accepted your invitation to lead the Review. For this reason, I sought and was given clear assurances by your officials that the Review would have the opportunity to submit a case for further funding should I consider it necessary and that such a case would be considered favourably. I was also promised that the mainstream work of the Panel would not be adversely affected. It was on this basis I accepted your invitation.

I am mindful of the financial pressure on all government departments and I have supported the secretariat in their efforts to negotiate down projected costs, including the scale of research and events that panel members felt were important. While the enthusiasm of our panel members is to be admired, as chair, I accept the financial realities, and that we need to focus on elements that are considered essential rather than desirable. The extra funds that we are now requesting are put forward on that basis and are limited to three elements: a small but targeted research project on the current attitudes and understanding of those working in prisons; independent legal advice to the Review; and specialist help to prepare detailed summaries of the issues arising from the minimum of

84 deaths within the scope of the Review. We are also proposing to use the resources of the mainstream Independent Advisory Panel to commission a detailed literature review from the University of Greenwich (on the understanding that the rest of the mainstream Panel work will continue to be resourced).

The other resource that the Review was given was a dedicated secretariat. While the agreement was for two full time members of staff, NOMS agreed to fund an additional resource. This has not just proved valuable to the review, it has proved essential. The pace and scale of the work means our secretariat is working beyond full capacity – I understand all three have regularly worked extra hours to support the Review. I am now seeking your commitment that the secretariat support will not be reduced for the duration of the Review, and that as much as possible is done to ensure consistency of the current expertise and competency that the secretariat has provided so far.

The final issue I want to raise in this letter is the concern expressed by panel members, formally at our last Review meeting, about the lack of support the Ministry of Justice has shown properly to publicise the Review, including our Call for Submissions. We understand it is not unusual for such details to be published on the MoJ website, but nearly seven weeks after the Call for Submissions was published on the IAP website, and despite consistent effort from our Secretariat, this very significant Review has not received due publicity. Some of the panel members feel so strongly about this, and other perceived indications of a lack of commitment from the Ministry of Justice, that they intend to raise it at the Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody, to be chaired by Damian Green, on the 17<sup>th</sup> June.

I am committed to conducting the Review in an open, transparent manner. A record of all panel minutes, stakeholder hearings and significant correspondence is being published on the IAP website. I would like to be able to publish this letter alongside your response to it as soon as possible.

When you wrote to me in March, after I accepted your invitation to lead the review, you asked me to inform you if I needed your assistance. In summary, I am now asking you to provide assistance in three areas:

- Your agreement to provide the additional financial resources, which I have put to your officials via the Review's secretariat and your agreement that the mainstream work of the Panel will not be compromised (other than by the use of resources to carry out the literature review mentioned above);
- Your assurance that the Ministry of Justice will continue to provide a consistent and effective Secretariat and that every effort is made to ensure this is maintained for the duration of the Review;
- Your reassurance that the Ministry of Justice will demonstrate its commitment to the Review and give it at least the same due consideration given to other independent reviews in terms of publicising our details.

In return, I will give you my assurance that I am mindful of the financial pressures on the MoJ and I do not anticipate submitting any further requests for funding. I would also like to take this opportunity to restate my commitment to providing a robust report with well considered, judicious and achievable recommendations.

Yours sincerely

Lord Toby Harris  
Chair, Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) on Deaths in Custody