

Monday 23 June 2008
JND to Governors by email

[Names of prisoners replaced by initials]

Dear Andy [copy to Wendy and Terry]

*[Andy Lattimore is the Prison Governor]
[Wendy Sykes is Head of Offender Management]
[Terry Lane is Chaplain and OPV Liaison Officer]*

I am responding to you as Wendy asks.

I am sorry my actions cause you so much anguish, and that the Woman's Hour incident wasted so much of your time. I am grateful to you and Wendy for taking the trouble to deal with the matter last Thursday.

My position here is as a servant: to you, your staff and most particularly to the people you hold in custody. If from time to time I have breached the letter of the rules it has not been thoughtlessly, but rather to further these Prison Service Objectives and Principles:

"... reducing the risk of prisoners re-offending, treating prisoners humanely, decently and lawfully, and working in close partnership with others in the Criminal Justice System to achieve common objectives, whilst promoting diversity, equality of opportunity and combat unlawful discrimination" [culled from the Prison Service Website].

I have agonised over whether I should respond to Wendy's email briefly, or to expound at length. Eventually I thought it right take this opportunity of describing my past and present actions so that you can decide whether you wish me to continue in your Prison. I apologise for the length of this explanation, offered with good intention for you all.

Our meeting

At our meeting on Thursday we agreed the following:

1. I should not have made any reference to the Prison in my remarks to Woman's Hour. Even though I had intended merely to use my prison experience as context, that was unacceptable to the Service. I apologised for that breach of etiquette and promised not to mention prison matters again in public whilst a prison visitor.
2. I should confine my activities to prison visiting, and not compromise security by continuing contact, without your permission, with people after they leave the establishment. In relation to two current situations:
 - a) I could gracefully transfer support for PWB to others, once arrangements were properly in place. In the interim I should inform you of any further contacts with PWB.
 - b) I could continue necessary support to PF whilst he is in Camp Hill Prison, as that could be seen as part of my prison visiting activity.

3. I should conform with Prison Service Vision and Values regarding diversity.

Wendy's email

In response to Wendy's email (for which I thank her):

4. I have re-read the Handbook for official prison visitors, particularly section 19(e) and reminded myself of the strictures there.
5. I recall our discussion on Prison Service Vision and Values; there is a potential misunderstanding between us there, so I address that issue below.
6. I do well understand your concern about compromise, conditioning and manipulation that could arise were prison visitors (a fortiori prison staff) to meet outside the Prison people they have got to know inside. I have on occasion dealt with the concerns of former prisoners and their families, so I think I should be quite explicit with you now about all those instances so that you can judge whether any or all of them were indiscreet or compromising. If unfortunately you decide my behaviour is unacceptable I shall have to accept that my prison visiting days are over. I set out the details below, as well as I can from memory.
7. Wendy asks whether I want to continue as a prison visitor. I am happy to continue if it helps. I have to leave it to you to decide whether you want me to do that.
8. Regarding the specific case of PWB, as promised [see 2(a) above] I set out below details of my contact with him, how that arose, the reasons for that, and my concerns for his treatment after leaving prison.

Vision and Values

As I understand it, a key concern for the Prison Service is expressed in the objective I mention above: promoting diversity and equality of opportunity, and combating unlawful discrimination. Beyond that, Wendy emphasises the need to recognise sexual equality. It seems to me that in your Prison that means especially recognising the risk of harm, perhaps bullying, of gay men. Wendy's underlying concern may be that, having expressed thoughts about traditional families, I might harbour attitudes and behaviour tending to disadvantage gay men in the Prison. So I must answer that point. I offer you three examples as evidence that I do try to conform with your Vision and Values in this respect: one concerns PC and another concerns PWB, each of which cases I address fully below. The third concerns another man who approached me in 2003. He told me he was gay and had a problem; would I help him? I asked him to explain. He told me he had applied for hepatitis inoculation or condoms to protect him from risk of infection following sexual activity. Apparently he had been told that condoms were not available and that inoculation would only be given were he to claim he was an injecting drug user. He told me he was not a drug user and was unwilling to lie about that. Why were gays discriminated against in that way, he wanted to know? I promised to raise the matter with my boss, the Chaplain, and did so.

Summarising my own views: I believe that society would be better were families to stay together and nurture their children. This in no way conflicts with my care and concern for all men, whatever their sexual orientation.

Meeting former prisoners and families

Since December 2000 I have visited probably some 200 prisoners, and I have written with encouragement and advice to about fifty whilst they have been in prison. All my letters go from me as John, Prison Visitor c/o The Chaplain HMP Winchester by Royal Mail. I have had unusual contacts with thirteen out of the two hundred I have visited: DH, DA, GR, MH, NP, PC, PT, PF, PWB, RL, RJ, SD and TC. I recall those contacts here, in alphabetical order:

DH: I was asked to attend the family celebration of his ETA course [*Enhanced Thinking Skills, a prison course aimed at encouraging men to think before they hit people*], arranged in the Prison by the Probation Service; I met his fiancé and her mother there. DH expansively asked me to come to his wedding but I excused myself. He was released, married and then unfortunately re-offended. I visited him again in Prison but have not seen him outside and have no contact with him now.

DA: DA was a sexual offender. He moved from Winchester to Albany and then back here. On release on licence he was billeted in Dickson House Probation Hostel and started attending a training course in Portsmouth. I continued to see him to encourage him to continue with his course, and as he had no family contact I agreed with the Probation Service to act as his representative regarding his possessions at Dickson House. Sadly complaints were made about him on the training course and he returned to HMP Winchester. He was subsequently transferred to Dartmoor. Meanwhile I went to Dickson House to make sure that his possessions were suitably stored there till he could return for them. To my surprise I received a Christmas Card from him at my home address. I wrote back to him at Dartmoor saying I felt he would be best cared for there but that in extremis he might write to me care of the Chaplain at HMP Winchester. To date he has not done so and I have had no further contact with him. As far as I can determine, that is the only occasion my personal security was breached; I imagine my address leaked out from Dickson House.

GR: GR was in prison as a result of motoring offences. I thought his situation was a sad and possibly avoidable one: he had a small transport business. He had been disqualified from driving. He had been caught driving one of his lorries, disqualified for a further period and imprisoned. Whilst I knew him in prison he was up before the magistrates for some other driving offence. He suggested he would prefer to exchange his disqualification for a suitable number of hours of community service so that on release he might resume his business and support his family. I wrote to the Southampton magistrates and attended court, but to no avail. He was released but awarded a further period of disqualification. I have had no contact with him since.

MH: MH re-offends frequently. He is here again now with a four month sentence, and always he asks to see me when inside. My first encounter with him was in May 2001. He was here for a long time and had significant mental health issues. I was so concerned that, in conjunction with the chaplaincy, Mental Health and Social Services

I interceded with a residential home in Exeter for him to be housed there. On release I met him at the prison gate and drove him to Exeter. He had a good interview and was accepted for a place two weeks later. I drove him back to Portsmouth and worked with Social Services to attempt to find him suitable accommodation in the interim. This eventually became impossible. He took an overdose, was admitted to hospital and then discharged. Having nowhere to live he committed a minor offence and returned briefly to HMP Winchester, where of course I saw him again. On his release I took him to Exeter and saw him settled in. Sadly he got himself into trouble there, was for a spell in HMP Exeter, and eventually expelled from the residential home. He reappears at Winchester periodically and I visit him when he is here but I no longer see him outside.

NP was a VP [*VP: vulnerable prisoner, usually one who has committed a sexual offence or been a police informer; so, someone at risk of harm from other prisoners*] serving a fifteen year sentence, very withdrawn at first, whom I got to know gradually over a year or so. His home was near Romsey, but as it became known he was to be moved to HMP Wakefield his wife sold up and moved to Huddersfield. Whilst in prison here, NP found solace in the Chapel services and courses, and as a result he and his wife decided to renew their marriage vows. The Chaplain agreed to hold a service in the Prison Chapel and NP asked me to act in the role of best man. So there I was holding their two rings, in the Chapel on their wedding anniversary morning. After the service his wife EP planned to take advantage of her journey from up north and see NP in the visits room that afternoon. I took her out to lunch in the Wykeham Arms and walked with her beside the water meadows to try to give her some comfort. I did not meet her again, but continued to visit Noel till his transfer to Parkhurst, from where he did get to Wakefield. Noel died a year or two later before release from prison.

PC is an intelligent young man with severe difficulties as a result of a serious assault. His ability to make himself understood in speech is much impaired. In February 2006 your Diversity Manager Josh Durham asked me to assist PC outside the Prison. I was introduced to PC in the Prison and shortly afterwards met PC and his mother at Southampton Crown Court, from where PC was released. I drove them both to Basingstoke, and subsequently took PC to meet his probation officer. The following week I was in touch with Josh Durham again to see what help he could give PC in connection with his benefits and housing needs. I then wrote to PC at his mother's home telling him of several housing associations (especially Stonham) that might be able to help. I did not see PC after that till he turned up in Prison a year or so later for a brief spell, and have had no contact with him since then.

PT is serving a life sentence with a tariff of 20 years. I found him subdued and at a loss when I first met him in late 2004. Amongst a host of concerns and outpourings to me he expressed frustration and anger with the Prison Service about the difficulty of communicating with his girl friend held in HMP Holloway. I helped him with a letter to the local MP, for which I was severely criticised by your predecessor Cathy Allison – and for which I apologised. PT was transferred to Parkhurst and then to HMP Kingston. With the approval of the Chaplain there I send him occasional holiday postcards and Christmas cards, which I am told he appreciates. That is the limit of my contact with him and he does not write to me.

PF: PF is the prisoner with whom I have had the most intense and lengthy contact. I first met him on C Wing in 2002. He gradually shared with me a host of personal problems, and in relation to many of those I had discussions with the Chaplaincy. At one point we jointly considered some sort of post-release accommodation and mentoring by a church volunteer. PF, Linda Rowe, Peter (the volunteer) and I met in the Prison Chapel to try to progress that. PF was difficult to please however, and rejected the offer. He did progress gradually whilst here, thanks to considerable effort by officers and others. He took all his courses, and was a listener for a spell. [*a listener is a prisoner trained by The Samaritans to operate qua samaritan on request*] After re-categorisation he was transferred to HMP Erlestoke. I expect I wrote to him there once, to say goodbye. He was then moved (He says against his will) to HMP Leyhill, from where he absconded. Six weeks later he was recaptured and taken to HMP Dorchester. It was considered best for his chances of continued progress toward rehabilitation that he return to HMP Winchester, and he duly arrived here. Meanwhile he had acquired a new girl friend. Once back here he asked to see me again, so our contacts resumed. He was now battling for parole, and I supported his application, to the extent of offering him support on release. I passed a copy of my letter to Terry [*Terry Lane, the Chaplain*], and he forwarded it to Wendy [*Sykes*], who regarded this proposal as 'beyond my remit'. I felt that, whilst no doubt absolutely correct according to the rules, my offer might be further considered. Terry explained that was a matter for the Governor, so I asked for a meeting with you. As that did not happen I took it that 'beyond my remit' could be interpreted as 'out of our domain', and did not withdraw my offer to PF and the Parole Board. PF's first parole request was declined. He applied again the following year and was granted parole on 27 November last. In the meantime I had been asked by Havant Probation to attend two MAPPA [*multi-agency public protection arrangements*] meetings held to consider his case; in particular to address the question of his residence upon release. In agreement with his probation officer I collected PF from prison, delivered him to Dickson House, attended his first probation meeting and agreed to act as his personal representative as far as the hostel was concerned. During the following three weeks I managed to meet him several times, expose him to crowds (he was somewhat agoraphobic) introduce him to outside library services, and take him for walks, all to encourage him to change his way of life in a positive direction. Unfortunately for a complex set of reasons matters did not develop well and PF was returned to custody on 17 December. He was held at HMP Bullingdon first, and then at HMP Camp Hill, where he remains six months later. Leaving aside whether his activities may or may not have constituted breach of parole conditions, he has been angered by his detention without charge. I visited him at Bullingdon and later at Camp Hill alongside his girl friend, and subsequently twice, alone, by courtesy of the Camp Hill Chaplain. That was in the context of a threat he made to take his own life on 2 May, considered sufficiently realistic by the Residency Governor for her to convene two suicide prevention meetings, to the first of which I was asked to contribute. PF is now calmer but continues to pursue his case. He occasionally writes to me and I respond. Meanwhile I have collected his belongings from Dickson House, held those for him, and at his request have sent him various of his papers. I regard all these actions as positive support for him whilst he makes up his mind whether or not to avoid offending any more - as obviously I hope he will.

PWB: PWB is the prisoner with whom we have the most immediate concern. On 3 April this year your Diversity Manager Josh Durham met me and asked if I personally would visit him, as PWB needed very sensitive treatment. [The OPV requests folder held on the Centre records: "PWB has agoraphobia so finds it hard to mix on the wing. Nevertheless he wants to learn to talk to new people".] I duly met PWB and got to know him. A little later he self-harmed seriously and had to be taken to Odstock Hospital in order (I was told) to have microsurgery to reconnect severed nerves in his left arm. After his return to prison I resumed visits. Then I heard he was to be released on 3 June. It seemed to me that his mental health issues were so serious it would be foolish to release him onto the street without help. I discussed this with Joanne Bird [*Prison Housing Officer*] and Josh Durham. I understood that the proposed next steps were that he should attend the Street Homeless Prevention Team in Southampton as a priority case for housing. It was agreed that I would collect him at the Gate and take him to Southampton. I asked what would be done if, despite the priority, he could not be found immediate accommodation, and was told there was a possibility he would be left homeless. I was concerned that I might have a man in my car I would have to ask to get out in the Asda car park and spend the night there. I was worried enough to wonder whether I could ask a friend to put him up for a few days. At that point I spoke to Wendy [*Wendy Sykes, Head of Offender Management*] on the phone, who advised me very wisely as it turned out that that would be foolish. So I came to terms with the possibility that I might have to leave PWB in the street: my trying to help him find a home would be better than doing nothing. The following morning I duly met PWB and we went together to the Two Saints Day Centre where PWB was interviewed and found a room at Patrick House [*a hostel in Southampton*], with the promise of an interview with Stonham Housing to follow. I took PWB to Patrick House, saw him settled in, and left him there. Last Wednesday I took PWB to his interview with Stonham. His interview seemed to go well. Meanwhile during the past two weeks there have been various alarms and excursions, culminating in his admission to Southampton General Hospital with serious arterial damage having lost a considerable amount of blood. Patrick House then determined he was unsafe to return. His room had been locked and would have to be professionally cleaned, having been sprayed with his blood. He could not return to Patrick House. [That brings us up to date with Wendy's note in her email to me of last Friday.] I visited PWB in hospital, meeting the psychiatrist handling his case, and heard that he was soon ready to be discharged. I asked what provision was being made for his accommodation and care and understood that was not a concern of the hospital. That seemed to me to say the least an unattractive state of affairs: by now Patrick House had decided to destroy his clothing and effects; he had nothing in the world; not even a pair of shoes. Then the CPN [*Community Psychiatric Nurse*] arrived and I left him in her care. The same day, after I had heard of his self harm at Patrick House, I took a phone call from Stonham: they were offering him a place in a shared flat. I arranged to call on the area office and collect a letter for PWB explaining this. I collected the letter, spoke to the manager there, established what the relationship would be with his link worker, and took the letter to PWB in the Department of Psychiatry, Royal South Hants Hospital, Southampton, where he was staying. I encouraged him to phone his new link worker on the following Monday (today). I also explained to him that the Prison was concerned at my continuing contact with him: it would be best for him to establish a good relationship with his new link worker, and (once he was settled) for me to withdraw. As he had no shoes I gave his ward sister ten pounds so she could go out

and buy him a cheap pair of plimsolls so that he could view the intended flat. Today I took another call from the manager at Stonham. No-one had told her the real nature of PWB's problem. She was sorry but had she understood PWB's condition properly she would not have offered him the accommodation; the offer would be withdrawn. I asked what the alternatives were and she said the Mental Health Accommodation Team would address the problem tomorrow (Tuesday). PWB clearly needed a residential care arrangement with 24 hour support. [It is clear to me that there had been a gap somewhere in communication between the Prison, the SHPT, and Stonham. I seemed to be the only person in possession of the relevant facts.] Later today I had a call from PWB, who had by then been told the news and was naturally disappointed. I arranged to visit him, which I did at 5:00pm today. I told him I regretted the change at Stonham but understood their reasons and realised it arose for lack of information from elsewhere. It would be best for him to have the 24 hour support he was now likely to be offered. He should stay calm and stay in the hospital till that was arranged. As he had no other support I would still be available for him to call until new arrangements were properly in place. Then I should relinquish my role and hand over to a key worker. He understood that and was grateful for my temporary support. [It seems to me that relegation of a homeless self-harmer to the vagaries of SHPT on release from prison is quite inadequate. We should as a society be able to do better than this. By the way, his welfare payments (DLA etc.) have not yet arrived.]

RL has severe learning difficulties. He was held here for some months in 2001. I tried to help him with reading. He had an interest in birds so I thought a children's bird identification book might spark an interest. I sent him a book by Royal Mail but it was rejected by the censor, so I had another copy dispatched by a bookshop and that was allowed in. I think he appreciated that. RL was discharged to accommodation in Portsmouth with two support workers who'd take him on trips out. I met him by chance on The Hard in Portsmouth on 11 September, the day of the twin towers attacks, whilst trying to find accommodation for MH. I have had no further contact with RL.

RJ is a Filipino mentioned to me by Andrew Hockett, Chaplain to the Mission to Seafarers in Southampton. His offence was aboard an ocean liner, and he has a life sentence with a long tariff. Andrew visited RJ monthly by arrangement with the Prison Chaplaincy. I visited RJ and helped him understand what had happened to his property impounded by the Police as evidence. He was still concerned about that after his transfer to HMP Garth, and so I helped him understand the situation and sort it out, hopefully to his satisfaction. I have heard nothing from him since January.

SD as you will know is serving a life sentence and has been in prison for something like 35 years. He was Reception Orderly here at HMP Winchester for some months last year, and I got to know him there. He has now been transferred to HMP Ford; I have sent him a letter and he has replied, but I have not heard from him apart from that.

TC was originally held for breach of ASBO. I visited him in prison for three months in 2004. TC had had multiple problems outside to do with cars that he owned, and the flat he lived in. He was also concerned about the terms of his ASBO, which amongst other things prevented him from entering the premises of WightLink. As he lived on the Island he was unclear whether he was allowed to use the WightLink ferry to get

home, so I contacted his arresting officer on his behalf, ascertained that he must not travel by WightLink and helped him arrange alternative means of getting to the Island on release. TC returned to HMP Winchester later, and in January this year he asked to see me. I saw him at least once in his cell and was so concerned at his state of mind that I asked the Chaplaincy to help. At some point he was on ACCT [*the suicide watch scheme*] and I may well have made entries in the file. Then he was relocated to HCU [*Health Care Unit*] where I saw him again and was appalled at his state. On my next visit I found he had been sent to Woodhaven Psychiatric Hospital. However, he had left for me, c/o the Chaplaincy, a huge number of scribbled notes asking for various forms of help, together with some official letters. His notes were incoherent and I was worried so I contacted Woodhaven and spoke to his ward sister on two occasions. On the second occasion I found he had been sent to St Mary's Hospital on the Island, and thence to HMP Parkhurst. I spoke to the Chaplain there intending to return some of the papers he had left with me including letters from his Solicitors and from the Criminal Cases Review Commission. I wrote to TC at Parkhurst. Shortly afterwards I took a phone call from Isle of Wight Police telling me TC had taken his own life whilst in Prison.

In conclusion

I think all these activities, whilst some of them perhaps lie outside a narrow interpretation of the OPV rules, have all been positive, well intentioned, helpful to the prisoners, and in line with the objectives of the Prison Service. This is what I am and how I feel it is right to behave. However, it is of course for you as Governor to choose whether you want someone like me to continue as a prison visitor. If you decide I can continue, then I shall be pleased. If on the other hand you decide I ought to move on, I shall leave you with a good grace, with thanks for the opportunity of past service, and best wishes for the future.

I await your decision.

Sincerely

John Dexter

[The governor did not reply]