



PRISONS ORG UK LTD

Opening up the Closed World of Prisons

PO Box 823

HIGH PEAK SK22 9AL

Tel 0845 474 0013. Fax 0844 8246411

e: customer.services@prisons.org.uk

Co Reg Number: 05949117. VAT Reg: 895-907166

Reg Office: *Calcutt Matthews, 19 North St, Ashford, Kent. TN24 8LF*

Andrea Albutt
President: Prison Governors Association.
70 Petty France
London SW1H 9EX

2nd August 2017.

Dear Andrea,

PGA BULLETIN 724.

I am just writing to say that having read your Bulletin to Members 724, to me it makes complete sense. Both as The Editor of The Prisons Handbook for the last 20 years and, lamentably, before that as someone who spent a long time on the wrong side of the cell door, I know only too well how vital it is to have staff who are experienced – and never more so than now.

The absurd decision to create a frontline service in HMPPS, leaving policy largely in the hands of those who have no operational experience of prisons, makes no sense at all – and taking experienced SMT staff from establishments to plug the knowledge gap in the MOJ, has left our prisons now in a truly critical state.

The loss of 7000 front line staff since 2012, especially those who left as a result of VERS, has seen a hemorrhaging of vital custodial skills from our prisons that will take many years to replace. As a prisoner it was immediately obvious to me who were the inexperienced staff, their lack of knowledge and grasp of the prison environment not only enabled experienced sophisticated prisoners to run rings around them, but staff with little experience can create chaos, and it is often the innocent officer who next opens the cell door that gets the brunt of it.

Our prisons are in crisis like never before. Last week (as you will see on www.politics.co.uk today) I discovered every single prison inspected in the year to June 2017 by the CFIG (Fire Regulator) failed all fire-safety tests. This is not a case of Governors treating health and safety with contempt, its evidence of a system flipping into self-destruct as Governors try to make the small number of staff pegs fit the large number of operational holes and survive one day at a time.

Budget cuts have devastated our jails. It's not rocket science: you just cannot run a modern, safe, prison system on tuppence ha'penny.

Staff recruitment ought to be solely in the hands of HMPPS; they have to train them, they should be the ones to choose them – why is that basic concept so hard to grasp?

Your Bulletin makes a wealth of sense and at a time when people with your experience need to speak out most loudly of all.

Thank you for it.

Yours,

Mark Leech FRSA
Editor: The Prisons Handbook.