



National Offender Management Service

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Frances Crook
Chief Executive
Howard League for Penal Reform

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Dear Frances

Newsnight

I am writing to express my deep disappointment with the inaccurate and, what I feel are irresponsible comments, you made with regard to the impact of detached duty on under 18 YOIs during your interview aired on Newsnight last night and which you have continued to make on social media today.

First, we have been completely open and transparent about our use of detached duty to support establishments pending permanent recruitment of staff. The leaked documents you obtained, which do not accurately reflect our final arrangements, merely proposed how we might deploy numbers that we have previously shared in response to Parliamentary Questions and the Justice Select Committee. Detached duty has always been used in the prison estate and it is a legitimate and appropriate way to manage short term staffing shortages.

Wetherby and Hindley are the only establishments in the under 18 estate which, at a time when the population was low enough to allow it provided a small number of officers for short periods on detached duty to assist other prisons with shortages. During this time Wetherby have had accommodation out of use and both establishments continued to operate a full regime and therefore there was no impact on the young people there. Wetherby have not sent any staff on detached duty since early December, and while Hindley will continue to support other establishments, this will only be when staff become free as the under 18 population decreases following the YJB's decision to decommission spaces there.

You stated that prison officers at YOIs have been cut by 40% and that young people would be locked up for about three weeks over the Christmas period 'in their cells all the time' as there will not be anybody on duty to open the cells to give them something to do, these statements are completely inaccurate. Since 2010, the population in the establishments constituting the Young People's Estate has reduced by 16% and in that period the number of officers (band 3-5) has reduced by 15% - this has maintained the prisoner staff ratio of 1.4

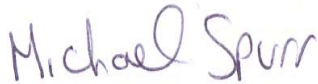
prisoners to each officer across those establishments. Therefore staffing levels have been maintained and the 40% cut you stated is complete nonsense.

In relation to the regime in the under 18 estate over the Christmas period, at Wetherby and Feltham there will be a full regime on non bank holidays (with the exception of 2 January) and on bank holidays, young people will have access to domestics (access to showers, open air and use of telephones) and/or recreational activities during both the morning and afternoon. At Cookham Wood, Werrington and Hindley, as services provided by external educational providers are not available between Christmas and New Year, a regime as set out above for bank holidays will be operated with the increased availability of access to visits and other recreational activities. Therefore again to say young people will be locked up in their cells 'all the time' over a three to four week period is also complete nonsense.

As I have said, I am extremely disappointed in your ill informed comments which will cause distress amongst young people and their families. Given your concerns about the pressures on the prison estate and your priority for the care of young people in the estate I would have expected a more responsible approach. My priority is keeping young people safe and secure and quite frankly your comments have made that job more difficult.

I hope in the future you will more carefully consider the impact your comments in the media can have and act more responsibly in checking the accuracy of the information you base your comments upon.

Yours sincerely



Michael Spurr