



# HM Prison & Probation Service

## Safer Custody and Public Protection Group

Her Majesty's Prison and  
Probation Service  
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Kevin McLoughlin  
Assistant Coroner  
Inner West London  
Westminster Coroner's Court  
65 Horseferry Road  
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6 July 2017

Dear Mr McLoughlin,

### **Inquest into the death of Jonathan David Palmer**

Thank you for your Regulation 28 Report dated 31 May 2017, addressed to [REDACTED], then Governor of HMP Wandsworth, at the conclusion of the inquest into the death of Jonathan David Palmer on 19 November 2015.

Your report has been passed to the Safer Custody and Public Protection Group in Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS – the agency that has replaced NOMS), which is responsible for sharing learning from deaths in prison custody.

HMPPS works hard to learn lessons from deaths in custody and in particular looks to recommendations from the investigations by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) and the findings of inquests to help us identify areas for improvement.

I would like to thank you for drawing our attention to the matters of concern that you raised in your report and I will seek to address each in turn.

Your first point is that there was no effective system by which the family of a prisoner can report their concerns about a prisoner's health needs and be assured that this information will be disseminated appropriately.

In October 2016 the NOMS Safer Custody Group issued a Safer Custody Learning Bulletin titled '**Receiving Emergency Calls: facilitating the sharing of risk information by families, Samaritans and others**' (Annex F). The bulletin is directed at all Safer Custody Teams, Custodial Managers, Reception/First Night Teams, Operations/Communication Room Teams and all staff whose duties may include receiving an emergency call from concerned families, the Samaritans or others. It states that 'All prisons should have processes in place enabling anyone with concerns about a prisoner's risk (to themselves or others) at any time to make contact quickly with an identified member of staff equipped to ensure that appropriate action is taken.'

It goes on to say that it is essential that contact can be made with establishments 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and that calls are answered promptly. It states that families should be provided with contact details which can be used in an emergency.

At HMP Wandsworth, a Governor's Order has been issued to all staff, stating that contact with prisoners' families must be recorded on the National Offender Management Information system (NOMIS). This is to ensure dissemination of information to all departments including healthcare. You also expressed concern at what appeared to be ineffective steps taken to control the inflow of contraband material into the prison.

HMP Wandsworth now has a robust multi-pronged approach in place to address this. Drug supply prevention is a continual challenge for all prisons and particularly a large inner city prison such as HMP Wandsworth. New psychoactive substances (NPS) present another aspect to this issue which the prison service was struggling with at the time of Mr Palmer's death. NPS remain a challenge as they can be easily disguised (e.g. sprayed on to writing paper) although dogs are now trained in their detection and the mandatory drug testing kits can now also detect NPS. In house training has promoted greater awareness and vigilance amongst staff but many of the supply routes remain the same.

In order to disrupt entry routes of illegal items and contraband, HMP Wandsworth now conduct searches of all visitors prior to the visit and search prisoners after visits. There are varying methods of prisoner searches, including rub-downs, full strip searches or using the prison's new body scanner. The BOSS chair (which identifies whether a prisoner has secreted items anally) and metal detection wands are also available tools in the search for contraband items.

Mail and property sent to prisoners is searched and dogs are used wherever possible. An x-ray machine is used for property and the policy on property was updated in 2016, clarifying what prisoners are allowed to have in their cell, thus reducing available hiding places and means of trafficking.

Drones are now a major threat to prison security with drone deliveries to Wandsworth extremely prevalent until September 2016, when a combination of police support, technological developments and more effective internal measures (intelligence gathering, disrupting particular prisoners, rapid response searches and fixing windows) led to a massive reduction. Since September 2016, there has been only one intelligence report relating to drones.

HMP Wandsworth has seen significant success identifying corrupt staff and volunteers in the last year. Several staff have been permanently excluded with one significant find of contraband leading to an ongoing police investigation.

Finally, in the next year the prison is due to change to a "smoke free" environment. This will be a massive challenge but once implemented will mean that any form of smoking is banned, making it much more conspicuous and easier for the prison to tackle NPS meaning more effective control and deterring those involved.

I hope this response provides you with reassurance that HMPPS recognises the importance of the concerns you have raised.

Thank you again for bringing these matters to our attention.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and flourishes, positioned above a black redaction box.