

Background Note on Pentonville

Establishment:	HMP Pentonville	Area: London
Governing Governor:	Nick Leader	Date in post: 09/04/07
Deputy Governor:	Jeanne Bryant	Date in post: 17/12/07
Name of Area Manager:	Nick Pascoe	

History (Where we are coming from):

Pentonville was the prototype for radial prisons, designed by Major Jebb after whom the avenue in which Brixton prison stands is named. Pentonville opened in 1852 and has remained in use as a local prison with four of the original cell blocks still largely as they were at the time, in spite of much refurbishment over the years. A damaging HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons Report in 2005 said that the prison was 'failing to provide the fundamentals of prisoner care'. An unannounced follow up inspection in 2006 found that although some improvements were in place, it was clear that there were still real concerns, particularly with regard to poor prisoner/staff relationships. This was confirmed by a survey of prisoners in 2006 in which prisoners said they felt staff did not respect them, ignored cell bells, sometimes provoked them and also accused some prison officers of trafficking. Pentonville suffered an escape in 2006, with a prisoner escaping from a hospital escort.

Present Situation (Where we are now):

There have been some significant management changes at Pentonville in recent years. The previous Governor implemented new profiles to rationalise staffing and also introduce self-rostering which enabled a more flexible workforce.

Some recent developments indicate positive work has been delivered in the last twelve months including:

- Commendable Prison Service Standard and Security Audit results
- Effective Offending Behaviour Programmes
- Positive Drug Services work (including imaginative partnership working)
- Positive responses to increasing population pressures – in the prison with the busiest reception in the country.

That said, it is fair to say that, in May 2007 Pentonville was judged to be a poor performing prison including some systemic failings that need urgent attention.

Issues included:

- Failure to respond to many of HMCIP concerns
- Poor morale of staff (as highlighted by the Prison Service Survey)
- The poorest Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) results recently reported – indicating prisoner dissatisfaction in standards of care within the prison
- Lack of strategic direction and poor management systems / structures
- Poor building and physical infrastructure

- Difficult industrial relations
- Overspent healthcare budget and poor relations with the local Primary Care Trust (although service delivery to prisoners has significantly improved).

In April 2007, Nick Leader became the new Governor of Pentonville. Mr Leader is managing the establishment through a performance improvement planning (PIP) process, a performance management tool designed to highlight areas of improvement and drive higher levels of performance. He has successfully tackled similar complex challenges in previous postings where he has governed prisons through performance test and PIP procedures. His appointment is designed to galvanise staff and managers to respond to the justified criticisms made of it. Since this time evidence of 'shoots of recovery' have been provided including:

- Improved cleanliness and pest control arrangements.
- Positive engagement with unions and staff creating a climate that is accepting and enabling required changes to be introduced.
- Improved reception, first night and in-cell facilities.
- Enhanced meal arrangements.
- Development of a resettlement area.
- The introduction of new policies that deal with prisoner care issues (Violence Reduction, and Induction being examples of this).
- Involvement of prisoners and peer support to give a voice to prisoners – this has also included the development of a prisoner magazine ('Voice of the Ville').
- The development of a strategic development plan that, if funded, should transform the living and work environment addressing some of the design limitations the prison has in trying to meet the needs of prisoners in the present age.

The prison still has much to do but it was pleasing that in December 2007 the efforts of staff, managers and unions was recognised when the Prison Service performance rating system was lifted to that of level 2. The prison is still not performing to the level required but improvements are beginning to take effect.

Future (Where we want to be)

Short Term priorities include:

- Improving cleanliness
- Developing a prison site development plan (including required investment and maintenance needs)
- Addressing immediate and significant health funding and partnership weaknesses with the PCT
- Drug supply reduction
- Introducing new offender management arrangements
- Engaging with unions to enable a realistic and purposeful change development plan to take shape and be implemented during 2007.

Governor's Comments:

I recognise the scale of the task to be done to improve areas of regime delivery and management organisation so that we provide a decent living and work environment at Pentonville. I am confident recent improvements are sustainable and will continue to be built upon. Pentonville's change process actively encourages ideas from prisoners, staff, managers, union representatives and external stakeholders. The prison understands the need to focus on the support 'front end' service in reception, first night and induction for prisoners. Pentonville also needs to develop a 'needs' driven service to address the requirements of those prisoners within Pentonville's care. Strategically, the prison hopes to agree a site development plan that will help provide the foundations required for a busy complex prison operating in 2007/08.

Area Manager's comments:

Pentonville is a prison that has been performing significantly poorly against a range of measures for some time. The prison has been disorganised and dirty, with staff, prisoners, and various inspections expressing deep dissatisfaction at the conditions. The previous governor made some inroads into the systemic failings that were apparent with the introduction of a new staff profile, self-rostering and core day, and by tackling drug trafficking and staff corruption issues in a robust manner.

Nick Leader, the new governor, arrived with a clear brief and is leading the prison through a PIP, something he has done very successfully at previous establishments. In recent months it has become evident that significant positive change is underway at Pentonville, which it is anticipated will shortly be recognised by the announcement of a rise to level '2' on the Prison Service performance ratings.