

Initial Report to Monmouthshire County Council

Adult Select Committee

on

Usk Prison Older Persons Health & Wellbeing Forum,

Wednesday 16th November 2016

Report by:

Delia Hudson

Co-opted Member: Adult Select Committee

Usk Prison – Older Persons Health & Wellbeing Forum

Present at the meeting were:

- Julia Gamble - Prison Equality Officer
- Louise Dovey - Social Worker, Usk Prison
- Delia Hudson - Representing Monmouthshire County Council Adult Select Committee
- 20+ male prisoners

1.0 Introduction

Delia Hudson, Chairperson, Abergavenny Action 50+ Forum, was invited by Julie Gamble, Prison Equality Officer to attend the Usk Prison Health & Wellbeing Forum as a representative of the Adult Select Committee. The meeting took place in a room with no staff/officers in attendance from Usk Prison at the meeting.

There were twenty plus elderly males in attendance at the Older Persons Health & Wellbeing Forum, which was held in a congenial environment where the men all appeared to be relatively relaxed and able to mention or suggest any matters which they wanted to discuss.

Although I was introduced at the meeting, they were unaware of the role I represented. However, this did not appear to deter them from raising and discussing matters freely or from responding to my questions without any inhibitions.

I list, by heading, all the subjects the prisoners raised in Section 3.0 – Issues Raised (see below).

2.0 Terms of Reference

This report is to outline the issues raised by the older members of the Prison Health & Wellbeing Forum, during the session attended on 16th November 2016.

The role of Delia Hudson would be to listen to the prisoners and to report back to the Adult Select Committee on any health and wellbeing issues being raised by older persons residing at Usk Prison.

This report provides the feedback of the prisoners at the meeting. It does not provide any risk assessment of any of the issues raised. It does not address any potential risk, or the practicality, feasibility, validity and costs of implementing such requests.

This report has not been presented or discussed with any of the prison management or staff.

The report is written purely as an information gathering and reporting mechanism for the Adult Select Committee's consideration.

3.0 Issues Raised

3.1 Dental Services

It was pointed out that there is a waiting list of up to six months for an appointment with a dentist. I understand this issue has been raised several times before without success. Several men said they were regularly being given paracetamol for dental pain.

3.2 Chiropody Services

We were informed a similar situation to the Dental Services above appears to also exist for Chiropody requirements. The men raised the lack of appropriate chiropody care was affecting their mobility and activities.

3.3 Flu Vaccines

Flu vaccines are being given to all prisoners.

3.4 Hospital Visits

Elderly prisoners attending hospital and who are on walkers, are still being handcuffed to a prison officer.

The prisoners feel this is not necessary and causes unnecessary problems.

3.5 Prisoner with fractured spine and crumbling vertebrae

We were informed that one prisoner is said to require an orthopaedic mattress. He has been requesting this for some considerable time but each time nothing happens. He is being given regular medication to assist sleep but he claims this is being counteracted by having an inadequate mattress.

NB. Whether this may have something to do with the materials involved in the construction of an orthopaedic mattress (springs, wadding, etc), cost, perceived favouritism or another reason, I am not clear.

3.6 Specialist Clinics

The prisoners asked could specialists be asked to provide a clinic within the prison setting rather than prisoners needing to attend hospitals, particularly for those on walkers.

The prisoners said Dementia, Audiology and Psychiatric Services already provide clinics within the prison setting so could more of these types on in-house clinic be provided?

3.7 Clothing

3.7.1 Thermal Underwear

Older prisoners have been informed that they are to be issued with thermal underwear, particularly those that work outdoors.

Prisoners asked if the issue of thermal underwear could also be extended to disabled prisoners.

3.7.2 Donkey Jackets

Donkey Jackets are being provided to the older prisoners.

The prisoners asked could donkey jackets also be made available to disabled prisoners, for example those with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

3.7.3 Gloves and Hats

Hats are currently not provided except in relation to religious requirements.

The prisoners have asked if they could be provided with 'woolley' hats and 'hessian' gloves for working outdoors.

The prisoners feel that now that the Stores are managed by private contractors this does not help the situation regarding getting additional garments.

NB. It may be that their request for these items has been turned down due to the nature of the materials they have suggested, e.g. hessian (string) and wool (fibres) due to them having alternative uses e.g. for binding/hanging purposes, I was not made aware of the reason for them not being given these items.

3.8 Old Age Pensioner (OAP) Signage

Request was made for clarification of signage for OAP's with special conditions e.g. OAP signs should be displayed on cell door.

3.9 Upstairs Toilet on C Wing

This toilet is not flushing therefore resulting in men having to carry buckets of water upstairs in order to flush the toilet.

They have requested that this be rectified as soon as possible as it is extremely inconvenient.

3.10 Disability Wing

I was informed by the prisoners that the possible development of a specialised Disability Wing is presently under consideration. I was also informed at present there are no wheelchair users at Usk Prison.

3.11 Wet Cleaning and Prison Floors

The prisoners informed us that there is full-width wet cleaning of prison floors being carried out without any danger signs being displayed.

We were also informed that there was no bleach or disinfectant being used when cleaning prison floor surfaces.

NB. Whether there is a policy for this due to the potential risk of such chemical agents being used in a prison environment, I was not made aware of and perhaps an alternative antibacterial agent is being used for the cleaning of floors.

3.12 Evacuation of Premises

The evacuation of the premises is felt by prisoners to be a 'big issue'. This item was discussed including several risk factors being highlighted.

3.13 Visiting

For prisoners to be recommended for "enhanced visiting rights", we were informed that to qualify for such rights the prisoner is expected to contribute to prison life e.g. reading to another prisoner, teaching someone to play dominoes, etc. In other words being prepared to give of oneself, all of which build up your application for enhancement.

Some prisoners feel this system is not being used correctly as they felt there was favouritism at play.

3.14 Arts and Crafts

The prisoners informed us that the previous Arts & Crafts Store is now being used as a General Store by private contractors. This results in “colouring in” being the only type of Arts & Crafts available for the prisoners.

They asked whether Arts & Craft Classes be introduced and a room found for this purpose or whether a drop in centre might be more practical.

3.15 Other Topics

Other topics the prisoners said they want to raise, for further development are:

3.15.1 The opportunity for prisoners to get exercise on a regular basis

3.15.2 Mindfulness Courses to be started

3.15.3 The future admittance of stroke patients to the Prison (as there are no wheelchair users in the prison at present) and the potential for a specialised disability wing within the Prison, which they understand is currently under discussion.

4.0 Conclusion

It would appear that the older prisoners felt valued in that their opinions were being sought on the current services and conditions of Usk Prison in relation to health and wellbeing, and they welcomed the opportunity by freely raising many topics during the Forum Meeting.

This report highlights the topics, concerns and the desired requests raised by the prisoners.