

31 July 2006

DC 19/2006

To: **ALL CHAIRS OF IMBs IN PRISONS**

c.c. Clerks to IMBs in Prisons
National Council Members
National Tutors
Chief Inspector of Prisons
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Dear Chair

PRISON POPULATION ISSUES

The prison population continues to rise. It reached a high of 78,495 on Friday, 21st July 2006; a weekly change of 52. Given a Certified Operational Capacity of 81,336, less an operating margin of 1,700 places, that left a Useable Operational Capacity of 79,636 or just over 1,100 available prison places. Worryingly, the first three weeks of July witnessed a population growth of 533.

As you will all be aware, aside from holding a significant number of Foreign National Prisoners, establishments are having to cope with the uncertainties brought about by an ever increasing and more complicated population.

A cursory examination of the population and accommodation figures paints a disturbing picture and one that we feel warrants further examination. The National Council has already raised concerns about overcrowding and about the numbers and treatment of Foreign National Prisoners with NOMS, with Charles Clarke and more recently with John Reid. We would now like to see what impact the increased population is having on "the humane and just treatment of those held in custody and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release."

Rather than ask you to undertake a lot of work we would like to hear of your experiences, however small, perhaps in the form of a list. This will enable us to gauge what impact, if any, population changes are having across the prison estate and which issues, if any, we need to focus on or to take further. In particular we would like to be able to judge whether or not population pressures are affecting access to programmes and the impact on regimes and, if you believe prisoners are being disadvantaged, in which way they are being disadvantaged.

You will no doubt be interested to learn that:

- recallees now make up 5% of the population (4,268) and represent almost 20% of self inflicted deaths so far this year;
- over 1,100 prisoners have received the new indeterminate sentence of Imprisonment (or Detention) for Public Protection (IPP);
- many establishments are now holding Foreign National Prisoners who would previously have moved on to Category D Open conditions but are prevented from doing so until a decision is made by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; and

- recent reports indicate that fewer prisoners are being released on Home Detention Curfew, thereby creating bottlenecks and additional pressure.

Finally you may wish to look at the most recent edition of *Lifer News*, especially the article entitled, '*Management of and Sentence Planning Issues for Short Tariff Indeterminate Sentence Prisoners*' by Tony Robson of the Lifer Review & Recall Section:
http://www.noms.homeoffice.gov.uk/downloads/lifer_news_summer_06.pdf.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Yours faithfully



Jo Jenkins
National Council



David Graham
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