

North Yorkshire County Council
Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee
18 June 2018
Visit to HMP Kirklevington Grange on 16 April 2018

Purpose of Report

To update the Committee on the visit to HMP Kirklevington Grange on 16 April 2018 that members of the committee undertook, as part of the committees ongoing scrutiny of re-offending rates in the county and what is being done to reduce them. It also suggests some lines of enquiry for the committee to pursue.

Background

Over the past 12 months, the committee has scrutinised the work of the local Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Company, with a particular focus on adult re-offending rates in the county and how these compare to similar and neighbouring areas in the region.

Committee members have raised concerns about the levels of adult re-offending in the county and also the lack of meaningful data to support a more in-depth understanding of what interventions work and where improvements in practice could be made.

The committee members felt that a way to better understand the situation would be to speak to adult offenders from North Yorkshire who are currently in custody but near to their release date. As such, a visit was arranged to HMP Kirklevington Grange on 16 April 2018.

HMP Kirklevington Grange is a Category D (Open) prison near Yarm, which is designed to prepare prisoners who have served longer sentences for release. As such, the focus is upon skills, training and work. Details are available via the following link - <http://www.justice.gov.uk/contacts/prison-finder/kirklevington-grange>

Members will be aware that the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a specific role as the County Crime and Disorder Committee, for the purposes of Part 3 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. It was in this capacity that the visit was undertaken.

Visit

Cllr Derek Bastiman, Cllr Andy Paraskos, Cllr Val Arnold, Cllr Bryn Griffiths, Cllr Caroline Goodrick and Daniel Harry, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager visited the prison. They were accompanied by Sue Barron and Lance Wilson from the prison.

A question and answer session was arranged with serving prisoners and 20 prisoners volunteered to take part. The session lasted for an hour and a half and was facilitated by Sue Barron and Lance Wilson. The prisoners engaged throughout and offered a variety of perspectives and experiences.

The large number of prisoners who volunteered to take part and their level of engagement throughout the session was taken as being indicative of a need to raise a number of issues that they felt had yet to be addressed within the Criminal Justice System.

Discussions and observations

The following is a bullet-pointed summary of the discussions:

HMP Kirklevington Grange

- The prisoners that we talked to were positive about the education and training that they had received at HMP Kirklevington Grange
- HMP Kirklevington Grange is focussed upon preparing prisoners for release. The prisoners have typically served long sentences and will have moved around the prison system (in the North East and North West). For many there is limited time at the prison to achieve some of the more in-depth qualifications that they need to secure employment upon release
- The focus is upon practical skills and training, typically construction (HGV, digger, forklift, carpentry, electrician), as for many this is most likely to be a sector in which they can secure employment upon release. There is a need to achieve industry recognised certification in many of these trades and occupations and there are times when these lapse before someone is due for release.

Prisoners serving life sentences

- There are a small number of prisoners serving life sentences, all of whom are subject to parole and so do not have a set release date. This can make it more difficult to access the training that they need as the qualifications can lapse before they are released
- Prisoners serving a life sentence often find it harder for them to assert themselves as their behaviour is regularly monitored as part of their ongoing assessment for parole and this can mean that they worry about how they are perceived and how they will be judged.

Closed conditions

- A number of concerns were raised about the difficulties experienced in doing education and training beyond Level 2 in the closed conditions (Category A to C). There are many more opportunities to undertake education and training beyond level 2 in open conditions but funding remains an issue. Also, for some of the longer courses, there is often not enough time to register for and then complete a course before release.

Suggestions for change

- Better use could be made of the skills that prisoners themselves have to help train and support other prisoners
- Mentor schemes work well and help increase the capacity of education and training within the prison
- Queries as to whether public and private sector companies could do more to actively employ ex-offenders, particularly people due to be released from prison.

Release

- There was a sense that there was very limited support upon release. Probation was seen to be often uninvolved and unsupportive, particularly when a prisoner is judged to be low risk
- In terms of reducing reoffending rates, there was a consensus that housing and work need to be in place upon release
- Older prisoners (60+) can find it difficult to get work upon release
- The release money of £47 was not seen as enough to enable people to re-establish themselves upon release, particularly if they have no relatives or friends in the area or have been banned from their home town or area (because of their original offence).

General

- There was a general sense that things take time to happen in the prison system due to the pressures upon resource, particularly in closed conditions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there was a sense that there was not enough money in the prison system to enable prisoners to engage with education and training and achieve the qualifications that they would need to secure a job upon release. This problem was seen as being particularly acute in closed conditions where the focus is more upon containment and the assessment and management of prisoners rather than preparation for release.

It was recognised that the staff at HMP Kirklevington Grange worked hard to make what money they had go further and also to secure additional funding from outside the Criminal Justice System. However, it was increasingly difficult to enable all prisoners to access the level of education and training and professional qualifications that would increase their chances of getting a job.

The view was that without a stable job and a safe place to live, the risk of reoffending increased dramatically.

Next steps

The committee may wish to pursue a number of lines of enquiry that have arisen from the discussions with serving prisoners at HMP Kirklevington Grange, as below:

1. What support services are in place for prisoners upon release from custody and who coordinates them?
2. What role do the County Council and District Councils have to play in the provision of education and training and housing to people released from prison?
3. What additional education and training funding could be identified and/or released to prisons that hold people from North Yorkshire?
4. What more can be done in North Yorkshire to support the employment of prisoners released from custody, particularly those who have served long sentences?

Recommendations

That the committee reviews the suggested lines of enquiry and identifies areas for further investigation at a future meeting of the committee.

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