

Positive influences on the wellbeing of prison staff

The Butler Trust held three large-scale, residential consultation events with frontline staff in 2016, 2017 and 2019. And in 2018-2019, Simon Shepherd held meetings with staff from every closed prison in England & Wales, as part of the Trust's *Good Book of Prisons* project. Much of the focus of both was on factors which have a positive impact on staff morale and wellbeing. Some of the key positives identified by staff are summarised below.

Working environment

A clean working environment had a positive impact on mental health – while a dirty prison felt depressing and less safe (giving the impression of a jail out of control). Some prisons, such as Highpoint, Wakefield, Elmley and the Isle of Wight, were notably quieter than others, and this was another positive, and for similar reasons. Access to green space, and views of greenery from inside, were also highly valued and had a significant impact on wellbeing too.

Management and leadership

Some of the qualities staff valued in their Governors were: being visible; 'mucking in'; listening to staff; giving praise where it's due; supporting staff (including following up anyone who's been assaulted and visiting them if they've been hospitalised, and sending flowers after a bereavement); knowing staff members' names; and sending out personalised Xmas and birthday cards. They valued similar qualities in other managers too, and highly rated 'back to the floor' days (such as at Aylesbury and High Down).

Consultation and communication

The importance of effective communications and consultation with staff was stressed by many – with Northumberland, Hindley, Forest Bank, Risley and Send among those receiving positive reports from staff in this regard, and Brinsford having a dedicated communications manager.

Monthly full staff meetings, fronted by the Governor, were widely appreciated. Regular newsletters were valued too, especially where they were in hardcopy (rather than digital) and when they included 'thank-you's and lighter stories, alongside news and briefings – with those at Leicester, Northumberland, Bristol and Humber among examples rated by staff.

Morning briefings for operational staff were also highly valued, and the Governor-led, prison-wide 'breakfast briefings' at Swansea, Birmingham, Bristol and Winchester, with coffee and snacks provided, were particularly popular – weekly team meetings (e.g. at Altcourse, Forest Bank and Peterborough) were valued too.

A number of prisons held regular staff surveys and forums (e.g. Bronzefield, Lincoln and Moorland). Some had formal consultative committees for staff – including a 'people committee' at Belmarsh, 'people first' committee at Forest Bank, and staff engagement committee at Wakefield – while staff 'ideas' schemes were noted at Forest Bank and (open to prisoners too) at Onley.

Staff also valued the less formal communication and consultation opportunities provided by 'visible' managers who regularly tour the jail, while a number of prisons (including Hindley, Lindholme, Dovegate, Usk and Onley) held a monthly 'breakfast (or lunch) with the Governor'.

Staff recognition and “thank-you”s

Staff stressed the importance of feeling their efforts were valued by their managers.

Most prisons had some form of staff award scheme – in some cases, such as Erlestoke, Warren Hill and Portland, including nominations from prisoners, and the ‘Amends People Awards’ at Highpoint covering both prisoners and staff – and these were generally appreciated.

Schemes involving more instant recognition from managers for a job well done, including ‘on the spot’ awards at Lancaster Farms, Woodhill, Northumberland and Forest Bank, and the similar ‘caught doing good’ initiative at Berwyn, were generally well received too, especially those where recipients were then entered into a prize draw. A ‘shoutouts’ board at Bullingdon, and ‘thank you’ pads and postcards at Durham and Low Newton, respectively, used by colleagues, managers and prisoners to thank a member of staff for something, were highlighted among many initiatives – and staff valued Governors and line managers who regularly gave thanks and praise, including in staff meetings and newsletters, as well as on a less formal, more *ad hoc* basis.

Staff support

In a number of jails staff noted, and appreciated, the Governor contacting any staff member who’d been assaulted, and visiting them in hospital where applicable, as well as ensuring that any assaults on staff were followed up by the police. Ready access to shower packs and clean clothes following ‘potting’ incidents were highlighted at Manchester and Woodhill.

The support provided by care teams was frequently highlighted, with those at Woodhill, Eastwood Park and Brixton among many singled out by staff. Staff counselling was a positive in a number of jails, including (among others) at The Mount, Ashfield and High Down, while the full-time staff welfare officers at Wayland were highlighted by staff there. Personal touches, like a Governor who sends flowers to staff after a bereavement, were much valued too.

Detailing

Many staff noted the importance of effective detailing in helping maximise continuity of staffing, and ensuring (where possible) an appropriate balance of experienced staff with newer recruits – and the benefits of operational experience in the detailing office were highlighted at Bedford, Long Lartin and Manchester. Self-rostering arrangements at Bure, Dartmoor, Stoke Heath and Eastwood Park were seen as positives too.

Staff facilities

Many jails had staff messes, some of them (re-)introduced in recent years, and these were often highlighted as positives by staff. Breakfasts at Long Lartin and New Hall, and 7-day opening at Moorland, were especially popular. Staff rest rooms at Moorland and Onley, and the catering facilities at the latter, were also highlighted.

Staff families

A number of jails held regular ‘family open days’ which were widely appreciated by staff, including at Dartmoor, Foston Hall, Lindholme and Ranby, and seen as helpful in reassuring potentially anxious family members about their loved ones’ safety. Family fun days and other events to which families were invited, like annual Xmas parties, were valued too.

Other positives

Wellbeing days for staff were common across the estate and widely valued by staff. Access to the gym (including at lunchtime) was another widely rated positive, while yoga, meditation and mindfulness sessions for staff were noted at Isle of Wight, Styal and Parc.