



Ministry of JUSTICE

National Offender
Management Service

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Mr Crispin Oliver
Senior Assistant Coroner
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24 February 2015

Dear Mr Oliver

Thank you for your report dated 15 December 2015 addressed, amongst others, to Michael Spurr, Chief Executive Officer of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and [REDACTED] the Governing Governor of HMP Durham, concerning the recent inquest into the death of Derek Thomas at HMP Durham on 28 August 2014. I am responding on behalf of NOMS as Equality, Rights and Decency Group has responsibility for the policy on suicide prevention and self-harm management and for sharing learning from deaths in custody. I have consulted with the Governor at HMP Durham in formulating this response, which I am copying to the other recipients of your report.

Your report highlights a number of departures from correct procedure, and goes on to raise concerns that:

- ... These circumstances [of 21 July 2014] were clearly very demanding but they were not unforeseeable and may be repeated in future. When the procedures were 'stress-tested' in the way they were on 21 July 2014, they failed so that a SASH form went unnoticed.
- ... there is a lack of appreciation by GEOAmeY escort staff of the prisons reception procedures. There is a lack of awareness by prison staff of GEOAmeY staff's ignorance of them. Alternatively the prison reception staff develop the procedures without keeping GEOAmeY staff informed...
- ... There is an overreliance on the fidelity of the system, even when it has failed. No questions were asked at any stage ... as to how a SASH form had arrived in the prison without being previously noticed
- That the above concerns are not addressed by, and go beyond, the Governors Notice to Staff of 8 December 2015
- That the above concerns go to the inter-operability of GEOAmeY and prison and healthcare procedures, which is not yet addressed by any of the agencies ... I am concerned that this case provides a paradigm example of not just failure in communication between agencies but a deeper failure in properly appreciating each other procedures and potential weaknesses where they are supposed to inter-connect...

A number of steps have been taken to strengthen procedures, training, and relationships between the agencies to address these issues.

Reception – The Head of Operations at HMP Durham has instructed all staff working in reception that, prior to the escort contractor leaving the reception area, all documentation must be physically checked and read. The PER and all documentation must be cross referenced. It will be signed for by both staff. A daily detail is published which clearly identifies the members of staff who are working in reception on any given day and these are retained. The escort contractor has been informed of the process and is aware that the warrant and the SASH need to be handed to the supervising officer and the PER and property to the officer. All staff working in reception are expected to be competent in all areas of the process. Both are situated side by side. A custodial manager and the Head of Operations will routinely observe this process.

As well as the above procedures, reception staff must verbally hand over any self-harm warnings to the officer from the First Night Centre. Should a prisoner be returning from a court appearance the reception staff must verbally hand over this information directly to the health care staff. The verbal hand over is in addition to the Health Care staff receiving all of the documentation received on each prisoner.

Training - All staff working in reception must complete a level of training prior to working at the point in reception where prisoners are initially received. The level of training available to reception staff is an on-line course and a classroom based course. The Head of Operations at HMP Durham has deemed that as a minimum the on-line course must be completed. This will be managed by the individual member of staff's line manager. It will be added to their individual learning path and monitored through the staff appraisal system

Communications between agencies - The Head of Operations at HMP Durham meets with the escort contractor on a monthly basis. Any changes in procedures are communicated at this meeting. The entire contract is managed by a NOMS monitor. Escort contractor managers make on-site visits to observe the process. There are seven individual providers that make up the healthcare function. A monthly prison operational and clinical governance meeting is held and any issues between the prison and healthcare can be discussed at this meeting.

I note that your concerns are wider than the issues covered in the Governors Notice to Staff of 8 December 2015, however you may be interested to know that the NTS has been re-issued to primarily target reception staff. It outlines the importance of checking all documentation and advises that a failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. The Notice to Staff is published on the local prison intranet for a period of time. It is also available on the shared drive. The Head of Operations will also be positioning this on the front desk of reception for all staff working there to be constantly aware of. This will be followed up during staff's individual performance reviews.

Yours Sincerely

