



## PRISONS ORG UK LTD

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Mr. John Steele  
Chief Communications Officer  
Prisons Inspectorate  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor 10 South Colonnade  
London E14 4PU

21<sup>st</sup> March 2019

Dear John,

Thank you for your email, the content of which is shown below:

*On 21/03/2019 18:01, Steele, John wrote:*

*Mark,*

*Not only is the Chief Inspector "arrogant" and "rubbish" and doesn't care about evidence, but he is also now suspected of bowing to political pressure on Urgent Notifications, we learn from your Twitter feed.*

*I'm afraid to say we have given you yet another 'poor' assessment – our lowest – for factual accuracy.*

*You've escaped an Urgent Notification, however, because you do merit a 'good' assessment, the highest, for entertainment value.*

*And our recommendation is that you consider whether the sometimes valid points in your many campaigns would be taken more seriously if they weren't accompanied by so much vitriol and nonsense.*

*Keep up the good work.*

*Best wishes,*

*John*

I am sorry that, as a Civil Servant, you felt able to write to me today in such a way, I have clearly touched a raw nerve, but rather than descend to personal attacks let me provide you with the evidence instead.

You refer to 'arrogant' and 'rubbish'.

These were comments I made after it became clear from a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) response from the Prisons Inspectorate (B12-2018) that Peter Clarke, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, had changed without notice the previous policy of providing evidence for HMIP recommendations assessed as having been 'partially achieved' from one where evidence for such assessments was always provided in Inspection Reports, to one where currently no evidence is given to support such assessments at all (see Lancaster Farms 2019).

The FOIA response from the Chief Inspector also made it clear that there exist no criteria against which Inspectors are able to assess whether a previous recommendation had been 'partially achieved', there is nothing to guide them other than what the Chief Inspector calls their 'knowledge and experience' but the fact remains that the public who pay for the Prisons Inspectorate and for whom these reports are published have no way of assessing whether the content of the report itself is accurate.

No previous Chief Inspector of Prisons has done this and I suggest for very good reasons. It is indeed therefore 'arrogant', and produces a 'rubbish' result, if statements are made in official Prison Inspection reports, claiming that previous recommendations of the Prisons Inspectorate had been 'partially achieved' when no evidence is given to support it, and no criteria set out against which it can be judged.

In case you think that I am alone in my criticism of the Chief Inspector on this, let me set out what one person wrote in response to the criticisms I made on LinkedIn and Twitter about previous recommendations of HMIP being assessed as 'partially achieved' without evidence or criteria:

*You have made a very fair point and unlike Mr Clarke provided lots of solid evidence to back up your point. Not only does he not provide evidence on what partially achieved means he also provides no real analysis of why things have gone wrong at a prison. His performance as Chief Inspector is nowhere near as thorough and evidence based as previous post holders.*

I made the further point: 'Governors who work to implement HMIP recommendations shouldn't have their efforts assessed as 'partially achieved' or 'not achieved' at all, solely dependent on the toss of a coin as to which Inspector they get; that's the danger Peter Clarke cannot see.'

This brought the public response, from the same person:

*I agree Mark and nor will they get proper credit for the work they have done to implement recommendations that they often do not have the staff or other resources to fully implement. Another factual matter the Chief Inspector never properly addresses.*

Who was the person who wrote these comments?

That was Phil Wheatley, who spent 35 years in the Prison Service, rising through its ranks to become its Director General; perhaps you think he also doesn't know what he's talking about and deserves the same unwarranted personal attacks you have felt you should level at me?

Finally, on this I also made the point, and I stand by it, that the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Peter Clarke, spent over 30 years in the Metropolitan Police, rising to the rank of Assistant Commissioner. If anyone should realise the vital necessity of providing evidence for statements that are made, then it has to be Peter Clarke.

Now to the Report today on HMP Onley.

At Onley, we have a prison that is out of control.

Where prisoners are locking themselves away, where the prison is awash with drugs, where decency, safety, order and control have been lost; not just once either - this is the second time in a row the Chief Inspector has judged safety at this prison to be at the lowest possible rating - and done nothing about it.

Let me remind you what today's report states:

*"Levels of violence remained high and too many prisoners said that they felt unsafe. Causes of violence were not well understood and actions to make the prison safer were reactive and poorly coordinated. A restricted regime had been in place for over four years and continued to reduce the amount of time that prisoners were unlocked, particularly in the evenings and at weekends. Too many prisoners were locked up during the working day. A considerable number of prisoners were self-isolating or confined to the wings. Levels of use of force were high but managerial oversight was weak. Security arrangements were undermined by a huge backlog of intelligence reports. Drugs, particularly new psychoactive drugs, were easily available but supply reduction lacked coordination. Support for prisoners at risk of suicide and self-harm was weak. Outcomes for prisoners were poor against this healthy prison test. At the last inspection in August 2016, we found that outcomes for prisoners in HMP Onley were poor against this healthy prison test. We made 18 recommendations in the area of safety. At this inspection, we found that five of the recommendations had been achieved and 13 had not been achieved."*

Now then you tell me: with a restricted regime in place **for OVER FOUR YEARS**, with the majority of HMIP recommendations ignored, with the jail locked in a battle with drugs and violence - where assaults on prison staff have **DOUBLED** - if all that doesn't deserve an Urgent Notification to the Justice Secretary, that demands a public response and an Action Plan, what does?

I do not know whether political pressure has been placed on the Chief Inspector to rein in his Urgent Notifications or whether, if so, he succumbed to it – but I do know this: *it is what is being said* whether you like it or not – and it's understandable when prisons like Onley, that ticks all the Urgent Notification boxes, is not made subject to it so it can be put right.

So, John, next time you feel like tapping out vitriolic emails at public expense, remember to look at the facts first.

Educate yourself and remember you are no longer the hack crime correspondent for the Daily Telegraph but a Civil Servant subject to a Code of Discipline that today, with this email to me, you have shown you have as little understanding of what is appropriate as the Chief Inspector does of evidence to back up his 'partially achieved' recommendations.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Leech', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Mark Leech**  
**Editor: The Prisons Handbook for England and Wales**