

Statement from South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to The Detail December 2016

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE NUMBER OF PRISONERS WHO HAVE DIED IN CUSTODY OVER THE PAST DECADE?

“The issue is complex and needs to be set in the context of societal, regional and national trends. Firstly, Northern Ireland has a higher rate of suicide than other areas of the UK. Secondly, the Strategy for Suicide Prevention in Northern Ireland ‘Protect Life’ recognises that self-harm and suicide is a societal issue requiring a response from all government departments.

“In the context of the prison, there are many variables impacting on a prisoner's mental health and wellbeing such as the prison environment and regime, bullying, trading of drugs and lockdown of prisoners leading to long periods spent in cells.

“Strategies for dealing with self-harming behaviours include having alternatives to boredom, a structured and meaningful day, and a planned day out of the cell. Therefore the prison regime is a significant factor. The building blocks for promoting and maintaining good mental health are positive relationships between prison officers and prisoners which are the first steps in generating onward referral to our healthcare services.”

WHAT IS THE TRUST DOING TO PREVENT AND REDUCE THE NUMBER OF DEATHS?

“As already stated the Northern Ireland ‘Protect Life Strategy’ highlights that preventing suicide and reducing self-harm requires a full system response. Prisoners may be vulnerable for a wide variety of reasons

“The Northern Ireland Prison Service has a Supporting Prisoner at Risk (SPAR) policy. Trust staff contribute to the SPAR process and work in partnership with the prison staff to support prisoners.

“Every prisoner receives a healthcare screening on committal and an in-depth health assessment within 72 hours of committal. The mental health team also screens all committals to identify any prisoner who is known to community mental health services or any prisoner requiring referral to mental health services.

“The trust has a multi-disciplinary mental health team who provide a range of services to respond to low, medium or intensive support needs. For individuals who require hospital inpatient treatment, clinicians will make the case for transfer to an outside mental health facility as necessary.

“As stated the trust is working with the Northern Ireland Prison Service to develop a joint suicide protection and self-harm strategy in recognition that a full system response is required.”

WHY HAS THERE BEEN A DELAY IN REDRAFTING THE SUICIDE AND SELF-HARM PREVENTION POLICY?

“The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and South Eastern Trust (SET) are currently drafting a joint Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention Strategy which should be completed in the near future. Experienced operational staff from both NIPS and SET have been involved in the development of the strategy. The delay in drafting it reflects that this is a complex agenda requiring time to ensure it is a joint document.”

WOULD YOU SUPPORT AN INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO THE NUMBER OF DEATHS, INCIDENTS OF SELF HARM AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

“The Justice and Health Ministers have already announced a review of the support available to vulnerable prisoners which will address any actions required by both departments.”

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO ADDRESS THE PERCEIVED DEFICIENCIES IN PRISONER HEALTHCARE?

“South Eastern Trust is commissioned to provide a primary care service which includes the full range of physical health screening and primary care services. Since 2012 when healthcare staff became employees of the trust, we have introduced a range of services enhancing healthcare provision.

“The trust provides an enhanced primary care model with nursing cover 24/7. The trust has extended treatment rooms to each house providing daily access to a healthcare professional. The trust provides radiology, podiatry, optician, dietician, dermatology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and dental surgeries in each prison. The trust has implemented the regional screening programmes for bowel, cervical, breast, abdominal, aortic aneurysm which are targeted at prisoners as per the regional criteria for each programme.

“The trust has developed services to address screening for tuberculosis, blood borne viruses and developed sexual health care services. The trust offers immunisations in line with regional guidelines. The trust has targeted chronic disease management to improve identification and management of diabetes.

“The trust has restructured prison healthcare mental health services to support early intervention.

“The Criminal Justice Inspectorate/RQIA inspections of Maghaberry in September 2016 reported significant improvement in mental health services.”