

Date: Wednesday 28 June 2000

Venue: Committee Room [], National Assembly for Wales

Title: Prison Healthcare

Purpose

1. The Committee has asked for a report on progress towards improving prison healthcare.

Summary

2. Officials keep in close touch with the work of both the Policy Unit and Task Force which have been set up to help improve liaison between the Prison Healthcare Service and the NHS. The aim is to drive up standards in prison healthcare. Dr Felicity Harvey, the new head of the Policy Unit, visited Cathays Park on 12 May to meet with officials from Primary and Community Health and Health Professionals. She and her team are keen to meet with Jane Hutt AM and an appropriate date will be sought for this. This close co-operation will continue as we take forward the project in Wales.

Timing

3. This is a medium to long term project though some worthwhile improvements can be achieved relatively quickly.

Background

4. The joint Prison Service/NHS Executive Prison Health Policy Unit and the joint Prison Health Care Task Force were set up on 29 March 1999. This was awkward timing as the National Assembly was just coming into being but, after initial communication problems, the position in Wales was recognised in the Press Notice which was issued to announce the two bodies. The then Secretary of State for Wales endorsed the plan for close joint working. Co-operation since then at official level has been excellent.

5. The Policy Unit is responsible for meeting the needs of both Home Office and Department of Health

Ministers for briefing and policy advice. The Task Force works with prisons and local health organisations and supports them in leading and managing local improvements.

6. The National Assembly is responsible for the NHS aspects of this work in Wales whereas the Home Office has responsibility for prisons and prison healthcare services in both Wales and England. This arrangement is well understood by all the parties and is working well. However, it causes possible difficulties in funding arrangements in Wales which are discussed further in "Financial Implications" below.

7. Information on this Government initiative has been spread by a series of seminars with presentations from the Prison Service, the Task Force and Policy Unit and other interested parties. We held the Welsh seminar in the Millennium Stadium on 16 February this year. It was a very successful event with senior representation from the Prison Service, the NHS and the voluntary sector although all present recognised that it was only the first step in establishing contacts with others and in establishing the scale of the problem.

8. We are currently considering how to take this forward. The 4 prisons in Wales (Cardiff, Swansea, Usk/Prescoed and Parc, Bridgend) do not have uniform primary healthcare arrangements. Swansea and Usk/Prescoed have similar contractual arrangements with local GP practices, Cardiff has in-house clinical staff while services to Parc are supplied by Bro Morgannwg Trust. Our approach to achieving improvement will have to recognise these local differences, seek to underpin and disseminate good practice and achieve genuine close working between the NHS and the Prison Healthcare Service. All this will require careful consideration and close consultation with all interested parties. We aim to produce a draft scheme over the next 6 months.

9. We need also to consider the best way of involving the voluntary sector in this work. Apart from general health issues, mental illness and substance abuse play a major part in ill health amongst prisoners. We need to harness the expertise of the voluntary sector in these fields.

Financial Implications

10. In England, the Home Office and Department of Health will each contribute to funding any improvement scheme. The Department of Health will be finding their contribution from their existing resources so that there will be no consequential funding for Wales. In Wales, the Home Office funding should be available as in England but we shall have to find any National Assembly contribution from existing resources. We are looking at all available budgets which might have a relevance to prison healthcare. Progress on this will be reported when the draft improvement scheme is presented. NHSFM and FP Divisions have seen and approved this submission.

Compliance

11. The Assembly, under Section 33 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, may consider, and make

appropriate representations about, any matter affecting Wales. Power to consider such action has been delegated to the Assembly Secretary. There are no issues of regularity or propriety. The Assembly Compliance Office has seen this submission and is content with the compliance aspects.

Jane Hutt
Assembly Secretary