

File Note – Visit to Gatwick 28th October 2014

This was a short notice visit to Gatwick, decided the previous day following discussions with Alison Ashcroft after we had received an email from Michelle Brown. I had alerted Ben Saunders on the 27th that I would be visiting.

On arrival Ben, Duncan Partridge, Juls Williams and Charlotte Bovill were in her office and the atmosphere seemed pretty calm. After the initial pleasantries Ben and I went into his office and I explained in more detail the reason for my visit i.e. the receipt of Michelle's email (which I shared with him) and the fact that I was becoming increasingly concerned about the stability of the management team at Gatwick. None of that really came as a surprise to Ben although as he read Michelle's email he obviously expressed some concerns about the content.

We then went through the management team at D2 and E1 levels so I was clear in my mind what the situation was and who undertook Duty Director duties. We also discussed who was taking out or had taken out a grievance or any other relevant matters. The appropriate list of Duty Directors etc. is:

- Duncan Partridge – Duty Director plus the grievance against Ben
- Michelle Brown – Duty Director and currently off sick
- Stacey Dean (temporarily promoted to D2) - Duty Director and the grievance against Ben currently being investigated by Lee Hanford.
- Chris Milliken – Duty Director and currently with an application for flexible working that Ben told me he was not going to grant.
- Juls Williams - Duty Director plus the ongoing investigation by Sarah Newland
- Sara Edwards – Duty Director

In addition to the above there is the ongoing vacancy for the Head of Safety/Security. I asked Ben about Duty Director cover, he confirmed that the normal pattern is a one weekend in 6 pattern and that the Duty Director is "live" in the establishment during the main shift and on call thereafter. I asked how Michelle Brown's duties are being covered (on the phone call yesterday I had suggested to him that he should step up to that mark). He told me that Duncan Partridge was covering the main shift Duty Director today and that he (Ben) would be covering the evening duty and overnight on call. He also told me that he had confirmed that he would be able to undertake the next weekend duty should Michelle not return to work. I asked if he had publicised that and was surprised when he told me he hadn't. I gained the impression that he was delaying in the hope that she would return or was concerned that if he said at this stage he was covering the duties that might encourage her to stay off slightly longer. I pointed out that he was missing an opportunity by being up front and telling the group that he was going to undertake the duties to indicate that he is very prepared to take his share of the increased workload.

That wasn't the only clumsy managerial issue I witnessed during my time with Ben. At one stage a FLM poked his head around the office door saying that he had just returned to duty from 3 weeks off to find that he had missed the close off date for the security manager's post and that it had not been advertised prior to him going off duty so he couldn't have applied. He asked Ben if he would still be able to apply. The easy answer is "yes" because of that background, however Ben prevaricated and said he would consider it and get back to the member of staff. Whether that was because I was present is one of those imponderables but after the member of staff had left I pointed out to Ben

that I thought the easy answer was yes and I encouraged him to tell the member of staff that as swiftly as possible because otherwise the member of staff might go to Duncan with the same request. If that happened the answer may be originating from Ben but in my view it would be Duncan who would get the credit. I later left without any great expectation that Ben would sensibly follow this up.

Ben and I had a discussion about the expectations I have for this period and the messages that I would be giving to both him and to Duncan. The major message was that I expected people to act professionally and if I felt that they weren't doing so then I would respond accordingly. I made clear that in my view, and contrary to some of the comments made by Duncan there is at this time no perpetrator and no victim. We do have a complaint which we are investigating and we will do so appropriately but any perpetrator/victim language is inappropriate. I made clear to Ben that I was not saying that he was using such language; but it was important that I stressed to him the types of things that I would be saying to Duncan.

I also talked about the thought of introducing an additional managerial resource and he welcomed that. I was absolutely straight with Ben that it would be a further "eyes and ears" that I would have in the establishment and he fully accepted that. I then asked how Duncan was responding and Ben said that in fairness to Duncan he was acting appropriately when other people were around and we agreed that I would feed that back to Duncan.

We talked about the Michelle Brown situation and Ben disclosed that he had received an email from Duncan stating Michelle had asked (via Duncan) for Ben not to contact her. I stressed my view that I felt he should make contact with her to see if she said that to him and not to rely on "reported speech". We talked about the investigation into the allegations of improper conduct by Juls Williams and I again stressed to Ben that I fully supported his decision to conduct a formal investigation and that decision would be supported publicly. We discussed this and I did suggest to Ben that one way forward given Michelle's unhappiness about the reopening of this issue that he should say to her that he would invite me to review the decision that he had made. Ben then disclosed that he had, appropriately, already told her that I had supported the reopening. I enquired about Michelle's domestic situation and whether that was causing further stress. Ben told me that the situation was much improved and that she seemed happier in her life having recently moved home. I then asked him about the number of direct reports and what stage the redistribution work is at. He shared with me that whilst some of this is tied up with the Tinsley House/Cedars issue they had had some discussions about reducing her number of direct reports and that Michelle was herself going to take forward the preparation of a report on this. I did point out that this has taken a very long period of time and that it needed urgent action. He also said that he and Duncan were considering a swap of Chris Milliken going to Tinsley House and Sara Edwards moving from Tinsley House to Brook House. I asked if Sarah Newland had been involved in any of those discussions given the plans for her to take over the management of Tinsley House and I was surprised when he said that they hadn't thought about including her in the discussions. I pointed out that if I was Sarah I would want to be and I saw this as further evidence of some clumsiness.

We then talked about the possibility of Steve Skitt coming on detached duty. As noted above Ben didn't put any objections about that proposal and I asked where the issue of clearance had got to.

Ben became flustered and eventually said that it had been with Sarah Grady for the past two weeks. I was uncertain about the veracity of that claim but have asked Alison to follow up on it.

Ben and I then had a long general discussion on a range of management issues. This was free ranging and valuable. During the discussion I spoke to him about the previous claims that there had been a "hit list". I said that my sense was that he had had such a list. He considered that for a short period and then said that he hadn't had such a list but after further discussion he did agree that he could have made some unwise comments to people who then have turned those comments back on him. Following that we talked about the Stacey Dean grievance and he said that he had been surprised by it, not least because they had in his view had a very sensible discussion that had come to a reasonable conclusion on the issue. I asked if he had written to her after the discussion reflecting the tone of it and limiting her opportunity to turn the discussion back onto Ben. He said that he hadn't done so and I advised him that this was a very useful management technique so that there is a fairly instantaneous record of any meeting and it means that the other person present has to take definitive action to refute the record that he has produced. He said that he would start using that technique but again I wonder if he will. I asked why in his view the team had become alienated. The only response he gave was that he accepted he can be a fairly chaotic worker and that can frustrate people such as Duncan who are very ordered. We agreed that Ben needed to reflect on that and to introduce other structure into his work.

We then talked about how he was feeling and he understandably is feeling fairly down and at risk at the moment. We had a long discussion about how I had felt during similar situations and I felt that was a useful and supportive discussion for him.

Following that I went into Duncan's office and had a discussion with him. This was of shorter duration, in some ways deliberately so, in other ways it happened that way because of the time that I gave to Ben in terms of discussing the wider issues.

Again, I said to Duncan that I was there because of the email I had received from Michelle Brown. It seemed to me that he was aware of the contents of that email or at the very least the tone of it. I said that I was also there because of some feedback from Lee and that I had been surprised that Duncan would not be ready to meet Lee until November 6th. I said that concerned me because of the ongoing period of uncertainty both for him and for Ben. I asked Duncan if he was feeling safe at Gatwick and he disclosed that he had been feeling safe since his earlier meeting with me and the assurances I had given and the confidence he had derived from that; but he went on to say that currently he didn't "particularly feel safe" and referred to an issue the day before. I invited him to expand and he said that Ben had challenged him about the day that he had taken off to care for his son and that Ben had asked how that should be treated. In my meeting with Ben he had referred to the meeting so I was already aware and I made clear to Duncan that in my view that was a perfectly legitimate question by a line manager and one that I would ask of my team and that I saw no issues with it. I told him that I understood that the matter had been resolved and Duncan confirmed that. This led me into stating that I expected absolutely professional behaviour at this time and that I would have no patience with any inappropriate behaviour and that I expected Duncan to give the support professionally to Ben that a 2 IC should give to the IC. I then made clear to Duncan that Ben had told me that Duncan was being professional in that way and I reinforced that comment.

Duncan then said that he felt that Ben was treating him differently and I asked for detail. Duncan said that Ben seemed to be more cautious in approach. I said that I was completely unsurprised by that given the situation and the current timing.

I asked Duncan whether he felt he should still be working at Gatwick given the situation and he began to go into his view that he felt it was right for him to be present because he was loyal and professional and began to talk about victims not being moved. At that point I halted the conversation and said that I needed to make clear that in my view at the current time we have neither a perpetrator nor a victim but we do have a complaint which is being properly investigated. He accepted that but I felt he was unhappy at me making the point.

I then shared with Duncan my intention to identify some additional managerial resource and I got the distinct impression that he was unhappy about that. I can put a number of constructions on that but won't at this stage.

I said that I was going to ask Andrew Seddon to visit to conduct a risk assessment and that I was nominating Andrew as Duncan's point of contact/support. He accepted both those facts. He confirmed that he is still awaiting the occupational health appointment and I said I would chase that.

We then returned to the issue of whether he should be in post and he said that Lee Hanford had said to him the previous day that Lee wanted to ask an "off the record" question and said that Lee had then said that in his opinion he "didn't understand why you are still there".

I do ask myself why Duncan made the point that Lee had allegedly said that he wanted to ask an "off the record" question because in my view if Duncan had agreed with that he shouldn't have disclosed it to me. He then said that Sarah Grady had asked or made a similar statement to him at the outset.

We then returned to Michelle's absence and the impact on Duty Director. Duncan made a point of telling me that he had taken on Michelle's duty directorship for the day but did not mention the fact that Ben was actually covering the evening/overnight period so I thanked Duncan for covering the main shift and I made the point that I understood that Ben was covering the evening and overnight shift. I also told Duncan that Ben had shared with me that he would be covering any weekend duties. Duncan said that he was unaware of that and again the unfortunate element is that Ben has lost the element of leadership in not disclosing that earlier in the day.

My conversation with Duncan then ended; again this was a conversation that was positive in atmosphere throughout even though I think that Duncan would have been disappointed with one or two aspects of it.

Later in the afternoon I spoke to Lee and said to him that Duncan had stated that Lee had asked an "off the record" question. Lee had no memory of that element of the conversation and I made clear to him that it was in my view an entirely appropriate question that he had asked Duncan if indeed the question had been posed.

Jerry Petherick