

***Confidential***

**Independent Investigation into Brook House**

**Monday, 27 November 2017**

**Interview with  
Steve Skitt  
Deputy Director**

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57. Q. I'm going back to 2015 and you arrive, there's been the issue between Duncan and Ben, there's a fairly dysfunctional SMT, you're responsible for security, and then you become the deputy?
58. A. Then the job was advertised. Sorry. Originally I did come down for security, then when Duncan went I was asked to be the Acting Deputy Director.
59. Q. And then the job was advertised.
60. A. The job was advertised, I think in about August 2015.
61. Q. In terms of day-to-day responsibilities, what does the deputy do? What do you do now?
62. A. At this moment in time lots of action plans!
63. Q. What's the day job?
64. A. There's a difference on what the day job should be and what the reality is.
65. Q. Tell us both.
66. A. Effectively it's Head of Brook House and Deputy Director of both sites, but I find my time is pulled around doing a lot of different elements of it.
67. Q. If you stuck with the job as it should be, so the job that you would want to do, what would you be doing day-by-day with respect to Tinsley and Brook House?
68. A. The problem I struggle against is it's clear – again, going back to when the centre opened, so I could put an analogy on this – you get a group of staff, and I'm not saying this is how it was but this is my view. You get a group of staff, x number of employees turn up, right, we've got no managers. I know this has happened in lots of new prisons when they've opened. We've got no managers, right, who have certain experience in certain areas. I know when Hewell (then Blakenhurst) opened, when that was private, they used to say 'Right, who's been in the Army?', 'I have.' 'Okay, so you can be a manager.' There weren't the processes in place that you would perhaps go through now. A number of people have noted over the years has there been development or was it the right people in the first place that could naturally develop to be managers. When I came here I found a lot of the first-line managers, from what I was used to, certainly in prisons, were managers. There'd be an expectation that I would expect a first-line manager to be able to manage the sickness, as an example, when somebody went sick, to make other contacts, do the paperwork. I just felt I had to micro-manage things like that: have you done this, have you done that. A lot of my time seemed to be spent – and still does, in some respects – having to talk to managers week in, week out, have you made contact with your sick, have you done this, have you done that, things that in a previous life I'd have expected the other way round. I would probably view it as managed from top down rather than bottom up.
69. Ms Lampard: Actually it's filling in the gaps because they're not up to doing what it is they really should be doing, so you're chasing them a lot, you're basically looking over their shoulder rather than being able to rely on them.
70. A. Some people I can rely on, but I'm just saying as a general.
71. Q. And you think that some of that comes from, frankly, not having trained people properly and not having identified people properly in the first place?
72. A. We've looked into this, and we look into this with the action plan. Sorry to keep on about prison experiences, but even in prisons there isn't that training

daily basis things would come up around there's not enough staff in visits. There's a morning briefing and if I'm on duty I'll always attend the morning brief.

105. Q. That's the 8am meeting?
106. A. The quarter to eight meeting. I'll always attend that. I say to staff if you feel you're not being listened to, come and talk to me.
107. Q. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but there's a sense that managers here weren't managing and your job was, in a way, supporting them to do their job properly, and that was unusual in the sense that you would expect people to be a bit more capable.
108. A. Be a bit more capable, effectively.
109. Q. If there wasn't enough staff in visits, you wouldn't expect as a deputy director to have to sort that out.
110. A. I'd have to look at the detail every morning and then pinpoint what about this, what about this. An example of something on Friday: I'd been doing a bit of work about a detainee coming in – I can't give too much detail for this because it was a document I had to sign for. I gave specific instructions on Friday morning where this person was to be located when they came in and where they were to go. I only found out by chance this morning that the person wasn't where I'd said.
111. Ms Lampard: So Ben takes over in this environment. Tell me about Ben's style. Was he concerned about the staff like you?
112. A. Ben had been here a couple of years by the time I came in. I like Ben, he's a very decent, good bloke. We have completely different backgrounds.
113. Q. I can't remember what Ben's background was.
114. A. He's a social worker and it would probably be fair to say operationally we wouldn't have the same views of doing things. I did call him Ben the politician once.
115. Mr Marsden: Facilitative.
116. A. Yes. He was more of a thinker than a doer, and there were some things that we probably didn't agree on, there were some things that I felt would have perhaps needed to be taken forward in a different way. I was quite talkative with him about the SMT and my views, and effectively that he should take more control and direction as to what the SMT does. I'd worked as part of the SMT – I counted it once – for 13 governing governors and they all come out of the same mould. I was used to working with operationally-focused governors, so there was a bit of a difference for me. As an example, it was clear we weren't all working together. It's very strange for me because I've worked with lots of SMTs, and I've worked with lots of SMTs with people that I wouldn't particularly like. Professionally you work together as an SMT, personally you may not like that person, that's part of life, but you all work together as a team, and he was different. There's a lot of individuals, strong individuals who could be quite vocal in the way they saw things, for various reasons, and need to be pulled together.
117. Q. Ben wasn't a builder of a team?
118. A. Not in my opinion.

119. Q. Was he the kind of person who would walk around the place? Would he go out and walk down the visits and find out what's going on here?
120. A. Not on a regular basis.
121. Q. Did you do that?
122. A. I'll go round every day if I can, if time prevails. It's a good combination sometimes to have two different people, but ultimately there needs to be somebody to grasp things and pull things together. From his point of view, in fairness, as I said he was a very nice bloke, and I think the Duncan business probably affected him to a great extent. I know that the Stacey Dean business did because we were talking about it once. We would talk quite often and, I wouldn't say frightened, that's probably not the right word, but it was always in the back of his mind that all this business had gone on. Everybody went through a horrid time during that process, to be honest, and I don't think some people would have recovered so robustly as perhaps other people.
123. Ms Lampard: This leaves you: you're the deputy and you have a very nice and thoughtful and decent bloke but he's not, however, doing quite enough. You have a lot of frontline managers who are not quite up to being frontline managers and perhaps quite inexperienced, a lot of staff have been here too long so they're not getting quite enough of an exposure to what good looks like. And you're wandering around, you're the first person who's going to get it in the ear for a bit because you're out there listening to some of that. That's quite a pressurised environment, and also quite a heavy workload. How did you respond to that? Did that make you quite stressed out?
124. A. I don't do stress. I'm very clear. People say this to me and I've always had the ability. The last few months have been quite difficult but I always say to people you have to take time out. People say you seem quite resilient or you seem quite whatever, and I say you tell your managers. I say I've spent a long time working in different environments, and when you walk out of the gate you have to walk out of the gate, and you have to leave whatever's in your head at the gate. Some people might say in the position you're in you're walking out, and I say we have to, it's self-preservation. I've watched too many people over the years, I've been to too many funerals of people over the years who've died before their time. Sometimes you focus on certain things and it's how you do things, and I've always done it. I've always walked out and, in a lot of respects, just think I've left work now.
125. Mr Marsden: You've done what you can.
126. A. Yes, let me do my other bit. You get frustrated. Somebody summed me up once, many years ago, and said 'Steve's the type of person who'll kind of lose it, he'll have a rant for about five minutes, dust himself down and just carry on', but you have to. You have to have certain mechanisms in place because these environments can be all-consuming.
127. Ms Lampard: On top of all this comes the Neil incident. Tell us about that.
128. A. I found that one quite difficult, to be quite honest because he was a guy who could talk a good story, clearly he was blowing smoke in places and, as I say, I started seeing through some of the cracks. I became more challenging on certain areas, more demanding on what I wanted, because there were lots of things coming up, like policies that needed reviewing and things like that. The policies at the ?Dehatch Centre I need to go through them, I need to do some re-work on them, etc. We started to build that up through the performance

Commented [NS1]: SS: not sure what the word is supposed to mean .

PS, because what happens in prisons, eventually it changes the culture in somewhere like this.

138. Q. PS being psychoactive substances.
139. A. Yes. We've had some glitch, but some of the elements within the detention estate have changed. There are more problematic people, and you only need a couple to make things more difficult.
140. Q. Also a more demanding Home Office, as in the policy has shifted, more aggressive? That's a question, not a statement.
141. A. I don't think the policy has changed. There's certainly more issues raised by residents around casework. I struggle to get my head around the Home Office, the way they operate. Sorry to keep going on about prisons, but if you go to a prison it's different. It's very difficult operating centres where all you're doing is, for want of a better word, locking people up and looking after their needs. You have no input whatsoever into their cases, you have no access to any information about their cases. In a prison you would. The offender management supervises all the work around a prisoner, it's all there, all accessed, and we deal with it.
142. Ms Lampard: And you're working towards something: get them out.
143. A. You are. There is an endgame.
144. Q. And you know everything about them, you know what the triggers are for their behaviour, and have sanctions.
145. A. Yes. I can get Joe Bloggs, it's a five-year sentence, and we know for the next five years, or two-and-a-half years, there's going to be a plan for this individual, where he's going to go, what he's going to do, what he needs to achieve; are there any offending behaviour targets or any courses or anything that we need to do, any interventions for that individual? And we know at the end of that period of time, if there are no particular problems, he'll go out on licence. Here you get somebody come in, the majority of people we know will be short stayers, we know people are coming in for charters, etc., but there's no endgame as such. And you won't know a lot about that person other than what you glean from any previous intelligence or information that comes through. None of the systems works together. The system we operate here will be a different system to the one operated in another centre.
146. Q. Tell me about the business of maintaining discipline and controlling people within this environment. What are the keys to that? Are there any keys to that? Have you any levers at all?
147. A. This is what I try and instil in the staff. It's about what you do with this, it's about talking to people, about engaging with people and about forming relationships to help somebody through how they are. It's fair to say that everybody that comes in here doesn't want to be here. Everybody that comes in here we know at some stage it's planned that they're going to go on a flight and they're going to be removed either back to their own country they came from or to a country, in some cases, where they've probably never even lived, so there are difficulties within that. It's probably fair to say that if you did a poll of detainees not one of them would say they want to be here, because they all don't. That's a fact of life. Some bits that staff can do, one is form relationships, and I talk about this. There are very few consequences for poor behaviour, in my opinion, in an IRC, and detainees know that. They know we have Rule 40, they know they can probably display poor behaviour, do

172. Q. Detainees, and the time set for foreign national offenders and how many of them you have. You talked about very few levers you have to manage them. I wanted to ask your view on whether or not you think they've become more difficult to manage, whether the population as a whole is more complicated over the time that you've been here.
173. A. There are two things. One is it's a complicated population. If you look at people that come through the door, as I said, not one person that comes through this door wants to be here, and people will have their own journeys and what they've been through in life they will bring with lots of complications. Sometimes when I sit down and do any case reviews and ACDTs, you listen to some of the things people tell you, and I have to say for a family or anybody to make their way from somewhere like Syria or Iraq or wherever overland to end up here, it's some tenacity in having to get that far anyway. I wouldn't imagine it's an easy journey for people. There are lots of people with different needs, everybody will have their own story, they're individuals, and that can change. With the churn that you have in place, there's lots of churn going through, and the estate has changed. Some of the things that happen: one person displays poor behaviour and doesn't end up with any consequences, and you bring in the mix of different types of substances coming in, you bring in the mix of age groups. We can probably track our different populations, so we know exactly what the Albanians are like. They come from Albania and if you get 50 or 60 Albanians in the centre the dynamics will change. We got ready for a Jamaican charter.
174. Mr Marsden: In what way with the Albanians?
175. A. They have no respect, the way culturally they are. In their own country they work in clans, depending on which family you're from, etc. If you take one Albanian on you take them all on, very similar to my experiences from Vietnamese in prisons, a population like that. Then you get the Nigerian Ghanaians who, in my opinion, are historically quite litigate. They've probably been here in the country quite a number of years, will fight every avenue not to go, will be difficult on charters, etc. The Jamaican population is another difficult population. If you look at the Jamaican population, if they've come in here for charter removes, you find a lot of Jamaicans haven't lived in Jamaica perhaps since they were a child or, in some cases, have never lived in Jamaica. It's just that the parents didn't get a British passport when they were younger, etc. There are those dynamics. Eastern Europeans will throw in a different mix to that.
176. Ms Lampard: On top of this we also have now the business of corralling all of the people of one nationality, because you're going to have a no-notice –
177. A. Limited notice charter.
178. Q. Tell us about that and what that does for the dynamics of the place.
179. A. Besides asking our staff to lie, effectively, or being disingenuous, should I say? I think this all stemmed from a protest at Stansted Airport last year where a number of protestors got into the airport and stopped the plane from taking off through various routes. This is my understanding of it. The Home Office are very limited in what airports they can fly from anyway, or find it difficult to find an airport which will do charters, because my understanding is they don't really need the business.
180. Mr Marsden: Why would you want it?