



Kilmarnock prison – a day in the life of the Director

My day begins at 6 when the alarm goes off and I set it to snooze for a further precious 10 minutes. I then get up, throw some clothes on and walk the dog for 30 minutes – he and I have a well travelled route and rarely deviate. To my delight there are plenty of rabbits around at present but he just steps over them – so much for instinct.

Home, I feed the dog and cat's breakfast and jump into the shower, get dressed and as soon as possible set off for work. I love my job and always look forward to arriving and hearing the busy hum of a successful prison around me.

For some reason I am incapable of getting to work earlier than 8am despite best intentions. 8 o'clock is when prisoners start the process of 'going down the route' and heading to work. I enjoy being there and greeting colleagues and prisoners as the day begins but I always seem to arrive at the end and have to visit each of the departments to meet and greet people.

I have one or two areas of the prison that I like to visit every working day; the inpatient unit of our Healthcare and our Segregation Unit. Often holding some of the most challenging people in our care, I am always astonished by the constant professional compassion shown by my staff despite, at times, extraordinarily difficult circumstances. I make a point of meeting with every prisoner in these areas at least once a week. I like to do this in the morning as the most convenient time for me, but often meet only sleepy prisoners unwilling to talk to me this early in the morning.

I then like to visit one or both Houseblocks and check with the staff that there are no unusual rumblings or difficulties and that all staff are present and content.

If I have the time I like to meet with my Security Team to discuss the previous day's events and concerns. Like any job, pressures can occur suddenly and in my job we have to be very proactive to try and prevent moving into a crisis. A crisis in a prison often leads to casualties and with one of the lowest violence records in Scotland; we are all determined to keep our excellent record. There are times when tragedies occur unexpectedly but with an emphasis on robust risk assessments we manage to keep incidents to a minimum.

Depending on time I will then pop into another area of the prison before the morning meeting. I enjoy seeing our Adult Learning Centre busy with prisoners improving their education and also seeing our seven workshops humming with activity. I firmly believe that going to work is one of the best experiences we provide – welding, woodwork, textiles – if you want it made we can make it.

I hold an operational meeting at 09.30 for all heads of department to meet and share information as well as plan the day ahead. It provides the opportunity to analyse information and trends as well as ensuring that all departments are involved in making this prison work.

The meeting also provides a forum for individual concerns to be raised and solutions sought. There are regular items on the agenda and although an essential and formal part of the management of the prison, it also usually involves a great deal of laughter. It is surprising how even the most difficult and worrying problem can be tackled more easily through laughter.

In any day I seem to have a great many meetings either with staff, or informal meetings such as health and safety. So between 10am and lunchtime I am usually trapped in my office in meetings, or tackling the blizzard of paperwork and emails that descend on me. I do enjoy the letters from families – it is easy to forget that most people in prison are going to be coming out soon, and families that stay together are often the reason for a prisoner not re-offending. My letters vary from concerned, through angry to thank you. I treat them all with respect – I am conscious of how I would like to be treated if my son or partner were in prison.

I like to have a clear desk policy at work but as fast as I clear the previous days work, the next lot appears on my desk.

Lunchtime is supposed to be spent in the gym, but most of my lunch hours are spent catching up on phone calls and resolving niggling worries that occur. For example how on earth did we spend so much money on jumpers last month? We have 650 prisoners yet we used 2,000 jumpers. Or why can we not use one of the exit doors? Answer, because we have a nesting set of birds who will be disturbed and this means devising alternative routes!

The rest of my day is spent in making decisions, and trying desperately to clear my desk before 5pm so that I can tour some of the prison again and leave by 6! Not always an easy task, I like to stay on one night a week and experience the prison after the main work day is over. I am always touched by the amount of volunteers we have working with us who do their best to help prisoners and their families turn their lives around and prevent the next victim. Their unpaid work is incredible and deserves mention – thank you to you all.

One of the joys of my job is the diversity and variety, I can plan to spend a day doing paperwork and find myself talking to 30 Russian Prison Governors followed by spending time with a tearful prisoner who has been finding it difficult to cope then talking to one of my staff who has achieved a lifelong ambition. I may even be called to chair a Risk Management Group with all the departments represented while we try and find the best management solution for a difficult and dangerous prisoner.

No day is the same and every day brings new challenges to keep me on my toes. It has to be the best and most enjoyable job in the world and having been a teacher, spent time in healthcare management and brought up two children, there can be no other career that is so rewarding.

Wendy Sinclair

DIRECTOR

HM PRISON KILMARNOCK