

NOT THE LIFE OF RILEY

A Deputy Prison Governor's whistle blowing
exposure of incompetence, corruption and
fraud in HM Prison Service and the wider
Criminal Justice System

Michael Riley

Not the Life of Riley

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A full review of sentencing guidelines for the Ministry of Justice.
2. Stop improper use of government D-Notices.
3. A separate investigatory body with a term of reference for the prison and probation service linked to the Independent Office for Police Conduct IOPC.
4. Relocate prison and probation service headquarters to the Midlands.
5. Explore A.I. technology to support prisons from headquarters.
6. Abolish area offices and all staff.
7. Invest in infrastructure to build 4 new 'Category B plus' prisons.
8. Reset the clock through diplomatic channels to return foreign national prisoners to their home countries.
9. Foreign nationals sign a contract on entry to the U.K which waives their rights to stay in the country if they break certain laws.
10. Standardise employer's human resource system specific to the recruitment of ex-prisoners in society.
11. Where complaints of corruption, fraud, incompetence, and bullying are raised proper use of policies must be used to investigate them.
12. A direct entry system from the armed forces into key work.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Monkmoor Public House, Shrewsbury.....	7
Recruitment & Retention.....	11
HMP Shrewsbury. The Dana	23
Prison Service Training College Newbold Revel.....	29
First Posting HMP Lewes 1990-1992 Category B Local.....	39
HMP Whitemoor: Top Security Category A Dispersal Prison. 1992-1998.....	81
Public document, partial Woodcock report of the enquiry into the escape of six prisoners from the Special Security Unit at Whitemoor Prison, Cambridgeshire.....	117
Article from the publication An Phoblacht 23 January 1997.....	120
Nicki Jameson follows the story of the Whitemoor escape 3 January 2017.	124
Further comment by me	129
Article from The Irish Times: Thu Mar 13 1997	129
Looking towards Blue 2s from the centre office.	138
HMP Littlehey 1998-2000.....	151
HMP Winchester 2000-2003 Westhill.....	167
My last staff report for HMP Winchester, given to me when I left.....	183
HMP Drake Hall 2003-2008.....	185
HMP Hewell 2008-2009.....	207

A Medication counter for IDTS.....	212
Targets for HMP Hewell 2008/2009	213
Staff Performance.....	217
Michael Riley staff performance and development record (SPDR) HMP Hewell.....	217
Appraisal sheet performance levels	218
Pay on Promotion and Progression through the incremental spine points scales of pay.....	221
Prison Service Orders: Conflict of Interest, Fraud and Investigations.	227
Extract from Conduct and Discipline Policy	232
Public Sector Controller’s Office HMP Dovegate 2009-2011.....	237
Source:.....	254
Details of my appeal case.	254
Public Document on Shrewsbury BBC Archive.....	271
Epilogue	281
Prison, Probation Service and Department of Work conclusions & Recommendations.....	284
Appendices:	291
Appendix A: 20th century hangings and the prisons they were carried out in	291
Appendix B: Information on prisoner security categories	294
What are the male security categories?.....	294
Security categories for male prisoners:.....	294
Category A.....	294
Category B.....	294
Category C.....	294

Category D.....	294
What is considered when deciding the initial security category?	295
Initial Category A.....	295
Initial Category B	296
Initial Category C	296
Initial Category D	297
Category reviews	297
Appealing a category decision.....	297
Prison Law: General.....	298
Security categories for female prisoners:	299
Category A	300
Restricted Status.....	300
Closed Conditions	300
Open conditions	300
Appendix C: Some types of homemade weapons you may find in prisons.....	301
Appendix D: Lord Nolan Seven Principles	304
Appendix E: The phonetic alphabet used on the prison radio net	305
Appendix F: THE HONOURABLE MR JUSTICE X* (PRESIDENT) Costs hearing.....	306
Glossary	321
Prison Slang in alphabetical order	321
Governors' adjudication.....	324
Governors' punishment or punishment another qualified person can award	327
References	330

INTRODUCTION

I came out of the military, in my opinion, as a caring person who did my best to treat people from all sides of a bitter civil war as equals. The bomb and the bullet do not form the basis for winning the hearts and minds of the people. I can see that historically, there has been so much sorrow on all sides, affecting and touching everyone in some way, shape, or form.

I am nothing special as a person. I am what you would deem a council house kid, living in an area where many council house kids came from in the sixties and seventies. You could say there is a single-track road that we all start down at whatever level you are raised in our society. We all walk along it, from birth to death and at certain points in our lives we eventually see a fork in the road and choose which one to take.

Gangs are not a new thing; we had them around us as kids, neighbourhoods that stuck together, but we didn't know that's what they were at such a young age. Nothing seems to have changed much over time, has it? And I do wonder what's happened to people who I grew up with as a child.

I wouldn't say I was particularly gifted at school. Quite often most of us were left to our own devices during lessons, whilst the teacher concentrated on those they thought would do best to justify their teaching career and pay packet.

I suppose you could say we were quite poor, well, from a monetary point of view, but in terms of growing up, I was rich in terms of exploration and being allowed to live as a kid; playing football, exploring down the river, fishing, shooting air rifles, taking off into the countryside with our catapults and catching rabbits to supplement our family's diet.

As I grew up, I wouldn't say my mother was particularly maternal. My father left her when I was six months old, but my grandparents taught me a lot. I know that life started to change as kids just before our teen years. I wanted things like sweets, comics and a new football. We used to have a neighbourhood bobby who walked around our estate keeping an eye out on what was going on, maybe giving out the odd clip around the lughole if we were messing around too much. We started to make choices in life: people I knew as friends were in our gang, and no one outside of our area could join it. In my opinion, gangs have changed a lot over the years. When I was young, we used to run after the other ones who lived close to our patch, and they would do the same to us. It was more of a game back then. Nowadays, there is more malicious intent, where people are dying in different areas around the country, and the only clear driver that I can see for that is criminality in drugs, people trafficking, illegal economy and sweatshop manufacturing. Gangs will always protect their market share.

We always seem to have the same issues with the political parties discussing criminality and from what I can see first and foremost is that we have lost the whole infrastructure of families in place to deal with things effectively. Gangs are all around us, the most obvious being political parties, except they will use the law as their knife to take out other people or parties. Common sense when dealing with issues seems to go out of the window, and everything feels more dictatorial these days through messages that come down from Westminster under the guise of democracy through legislation. There are bloodsuckers on all sides trying to make money from the taxes the majority of people pay. Ultimately, it is those of us lower down the rich pecking order who suffer the worst, and the lower it goes, the worse it impacts people.

I started a paper round when I was nearly eleven years old, delivering newspapers to the local affluent estate near ours seven days a week. My God, it was character building - that's what they called it back then. Delivering the Sunday papers was hard work and the worst day of the week to do it, but I did it come all weathers – rain, sleet and snow.

Back then the cost-of-living prices were high:

A packet of twenty cigarettes cost 26 ½p which, when inflation is adjusted to 2022 prices, equates to approximately close to £2.50 in today's money (*Retrowow*, 2023). Memory lane prices below.

Prices adjusted with inflation from 1973 to 2022.

These are the prices of some items from 1973:

	1973 price	Inflation adjusted
Gallon of petrol	39p	£3.60
Bottle of whisky (Haig) (Co-op)	£2.45	£23
Bottle of sherry (Harvey's Bristol Cream) (Co-op)	£1.45	£14
Watneys Party 4 (Co-op)	45p	£4.20
Watneys Party 7 (Mac Markets)	78p	£7.30
Pint of beer	18½p	£1.70
20 cigarettes	26½p	£2.50
Pint of milk	5½p	51p
Large loaf of bread	11½p	£1.10
22" Pye colour TV (Currys)	£208.90	£1,900
24" Ferguson black & white TV (Currys)	£61.75	£580
The Daily Mirror newspaper	3p	28p
Average house price	£9,000.00	£84,000

½lb Lurpack Danish butter (Tesco)	10½p	98p
Nescafé 8oz coffee (Tesco)	54p	£5
Can of Coke (Mac Markets)	5½p	51p
Ford Cortina car	£1,075.00	£10,000
Polaris refrigerator (Currys)	£30.95	£290
Hotpoint Supermatic twin tub washing machine (Currys)	£73.36	£680
Bendix Autowasher Deluxe automatic washing machine (Currys)	£106.95	£1,000
Golden Wonder crisps	2½p	23p
One dozen large white eggs	32p	£3
1lb Stork Soft margarine (Tesco)	12½p	£1.20

Yes, I know we are generally all paying more these days, what does that tell you about companies today. Do we have greed inflation now? Prices paid in shops today suggest we do. Perhaps it's all the extra taxes we pay that make costs so high, with successive governments ripping us all off for years.

I used to push a lollypop stick up the out chute of the telephone boxes, first for tanners and thrupenny bits. Then when decimalisation changed our currency in 1971, I used to get ten pence pieces. They were returned coins from people who could not get through on their calls, but they always got stuck in the return chute. I just found a way of freeing them to enhance my pocket money. Back then, charity started at home (and probably still does today with the cost-of-living crisis we are all in).

I think my wage was around £1.20 a week for the paper round. I also tended my stepfather's vegetable patch in our

back garden, receiving the princely sum of 50p a week. When I was fourteen, I managed to earn £5 on a milk round that took me from a 5 o'clock morning start until midday on Saturdays. As the dairy was situated near my Nan's house, I was allowed to take some milk, orange juice and six eggs up to her after the round was finished. I would then help her and my grandad with their shopping from Kwik Save. They were frail, and I felt good doing that.

Some of those I grew up with did not look on working as a viable option to buy things. Maybe schools should have values lessons taught in them. They wanted to get things easily. I must admit, it was tempting, but as I was getting older, I thought about where things would head if I followed that path too.

I used to go rabbiting with a lad from the travelling community who had a Jack Russell and ferrets. We used to go along the railway lines, things you probably can't do these days, but back then we took it all in our stride. I used to take a couple of dispatched rabbits home so my mum could roast them. The rest, after I had butchered them, cleaned them out and wrapped them in newspaper, I used to take down to Monkmoor pub to sell for 50p each to the pissed-up dads, who were going home after spending their wages on booze.

MONKMOOR PUBLIC HOUSE, SHREWSBURY



There was nothing around our neighbourhood for someone like me. My older brother joined the military after leaving school and was badged to the Royal Artillery, so when I was sixteen, I trotted off to the local army recruitment centre to take some tests. I was told I had passed them and was well enough to join the Royal Armoured Corps (RAC) as a junior leader.

I'm sure there were lots of agencies around back in the 1970s, but we only ever saw the police, no one else, and they gave the place a sense of law and order! I hear all the time these days that people don't see enough policing taking place in their communities. Everything these days is about spinning select figures to tell the public what they want to hear. Where I live, we are told by the police and crime commissioner that there is less crime reported and that may be the case. What they fail to tell you is that the

101 number to report things on takes an hour to get through to when reporting non-urgent crime. I would guess that people get so pissed off waiting to get through to report a possible offence that they put the phone down, and even if they do manage to get through, by the time the police turn up to deal with it the perpetrator has long left the scene of the crime! We need a reset in society, not only in the police service but in all the other public sector areas too. People need to step out of their comfort zones and once again be proud of their civic duty to stop communities being taken over by those who want to commit crime and bring things down to their level, destroying many lives in the process.

Intervention is so important and vital for children at a young age and the communities in which we all live. If you don't intervene, you end up with children who don't know which way they are heading in life, and no one's around to make sure they don't progress into committing crimes, which costs us all more in the end.

When you see how much it costs to deal with law and order issues these days, if we primed services upfront when people are young, it could save a lot of money in the long run. Why can't different governments see that? They seem to tinker around the edges of everything except where it affects them or their friends directly, and only then they will throw our public money at it. Only people can vote for new changes, but lots don't, because they see the corruption up above and wonder what the point is. Maybe they just don't see how precious their voice is anymore, to change a two-party system that has bled us all dry over the years. I'm sure one day people will, and then it will make things better for everyone and not just the few.

Everyone I talk to say families have disintegrated; there is

no cohesion anymore, we all live in our own silos, making our homes like little fortresses to keep others out. When I was a child, we just walked into our friends' houses and that's the way it was. That doesn't seem to be as common now.

There appears to be something so fundamentally wrong these days in the way society operates, something so big that it's ripping everything and everyone apart at the seams. Families cannot seem to exist without everyone within them of working age having to get involved in the struggle to survive. I certainly feel like a slave to those who are very high up in government and the civil service, many appear to live off the backs of others rather than be there to do what we voted them in for; to protect the interests of our country and the people who live within it.

My advice to politicians and civil servants is:

**“If it is not right do not do it;
if it is not true do not say it.”**

Marcus Aurelius

I have included a glossary on page 321 of this memoir that I hope will give a better understanding of prison terminology. I think it is important for those who read this to be able to understand some of the information that may not be clear.

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION



As a serving soldier in Her Majesty's Queen Elizabeth II Army, I was badged to a cavalry regiment, 1st The Queens Dragoon Guards, a Welsh and border counties regiment. I had my first taste of Northern Ireland (NI) in 1980, aged eighteen years old, on a two-year tour of the province, stationed in Omagh, County Tyrone. That experience paved the way for me two and a half years later to train as an Arms Explosives Search (AES) dog handler.

My brilliant and absolutely trusted black Labrador was called Jason, or JC as I affectionately called him, and he was the closest I ever got to a true animal friend. He no doubt saved countless lives in his Army career and protected me from harm; he was an extension of my mind and body. You're such a close-knit team that you end up second guessing what the other may do. When we were on a shout, but specifically route clearances, looking for improvised explosive devices (IEDs), he knew instinctively when I would give him the signal for crossing the road,

and he would do it without me giving him any sort of command. Jason joined the Army in Melton Mowbray with the Royal Army Veterinary Corps (RAVC). He came from one of the estates where he was rejected as a retrieving gun dog. I was told Jason came from Sandringham of all places and was one of the Queen Mother's trainee gun dogs.

I was told he was moved on from Sandringham because he hated to enter the water to pick up game, not a good trait for a gun dog! All throughout his training in the Army, he was terrified of it, so I had to carry him over water obstacles as best as I could! He kept me and others alive with his super sensitive nose; our partnership was to last over four years and he was a true close friend.

After spending over six years serving in NI, I felt it was time for me to leave. Sometimes you can invite fate a little too close for comfort in your life. It was 1988, and I was nearing the end of my nine-year contractual service date in the military; it was due to end just before my twenty-seventh birthday in 1989. It was either leave the armed forces or sign up for the full twenty-two years and continue life as a professional soldier. A lot of handlers move on, and back then quite a lot rebadged over to the RAVC. I didn't fancy my chances of survival much in NI given the amount of time left to serve if I signed up for the full twenty-two and stayed in the province.

I have profound memories of Northern Ireland, a lot of good ones, but bad ones too, which included some friends that were killed as part of their duties. Dog handlers are a unique bunch of people, and though the job could be very routine, it was for the most part, very dangerous. I remember a saying that I believe came from a terrorist; "The Irish Republican Army (IRA) only has to get it right once, the British army have to get it right all the time."

In our down time we played hard. 8 Brigade, where I worked, along with other colleagues meet up every year in Melton Mowbray, when some of us swing the lamp shade about our past trials and tribulations in the province, remembering our colleagues who were murdered. Leicestershire is where all our training took place. We were certainly a band of brothers in the real sense of the word, and I will never ever forget those times with those whom I have served alongside. God bless you all who are still alive, and to the colleagues we lost, rest in peace and party on in heaven. A small group of us paid for a memorial stone to be placed in the National Arboretum in Staffordshire for those killed in the line of duty, those who had paid the ultimate sacrifice for what essentially was a bloody civil war.

I eventually decided the best thing for me to do was sit the entrance exams for the English Prison Service. I travelled down to Belfast along with a friend of mine who was serving in 6 Ulster Defence Regiment (6 UDR) and also a serving dog handler. I passed the relevant parts of the papers they had set for candidates, and I was interviewed the same day by a panel of three, two men and one woman. I can only remember one of the scenario questions they asked me, which was about dealing with inmates who were watching a football match in a television room and who were predominantly black prisoners, and it was getting near to lock up time. Basically, they wanted to watch the end of the game and would not leave the television room until it finished. The question, I assumed was to test the way I approached and dealt with the situation, and because they had mentioned there were more black prisoners in the room than any other type, I thought maybe they had an issue with racism in the English and Welsh prison systems.

I asked them how long the match would overrun after the lock up was called, and I think that highlighting that mostly black prisoners were in the room was in fact a red herring question. They informed me there were ten minutes left until the end of the game. So I said, "Well, I would just report back to the officer in charge of the wing what was happening, but rather than cause a real problem that could arise if I tried to get them out there and then, I would let the match run its course. When it had finished, we could get them back into their cells for lock up and presumably there's some sort of action that could be taken after that." They basically said, "Yes, you can place them on report." I thought to myself, "I'm glad they didn't ask what happens if extra time is announced?" Common sense is something you need a lot of in the prison service, something which is sadly lacking with some of the senior managers.

I returned to my military base, which was at the time, in Derry or Londonderry depending on your own persuasion. The city's name is usually linked to the type of religion supported. Most soldiers I knew called it Derry, and even though I'm not the religious type, it just tripped off the tongue easily. Using the shorter version of the name wasn't an issue for me, but I guess it could be for some of my ex-colleagues.

Any jobs we used to do over the Catholic side, we referred to as going into the city, or city side. A lot of us at the time didn't have those deep-rooted thoughts about the location, which the people of Northern Ireland had - a place for them that has had so much conflict and destruction in it over the years! We were there to do a job: to protect both sides of some deeply divisive communities from terrorism, whose views are absolute lines drawn in the sand. I hope things don't return to those times of the