

Evaluation report following survey of prisoners on use of emailprisoner.com

Introduction

Safer Custody and Offender Policy have been in regular contact with Derek Jones, the Managing Director of Emailprisoner, since March 2008. This follows introduction of his system for emailing letters direct to prisons which staff print off and pass on to prisoners. Following a number of queries from operational and policy colleague about whether the system was safe to use, we decided to survey the prisons operating the service to check it is compliant with security and correspondence policy; and also to understand the impact of the service on operational efficiencies.

Annexes to this report

Annex A – copy of questionnaire sent out on 29 September 2008

Annex B – list of prisons using emailprisoner.com

A full set of results is available – please email me at
Patrick.hunter2@justice.gsi.gov.uk

This report has been circulated to the following people:

- Pat Baskerville – Head of Safer Custody & Offender Policy
- Laura McCaughan – Safer Custody & Offender Policy
- Derek Jones – Managing Director of Emailprisoner.com
- Andy Moss – NOMS ICT Security
- George Houghton – Security Policy Unit
- Garry Wilson – Directorate of High Security
- Tony Watson – Operational Policy Unit
- Steve McGarvie – Procurement
- All prisons involved in the evaluation exercise

The overall response to the evaluation was very good. 19 out of 24 prisons approached completed and returned the form. Therefore the data contained in this report reflects 80% of the views of prisons using Emailprisoner.com.

ABOUT THE PRISONS

Of the total number approached, 3 were from the private sector (unfortunately only 1 completed the form) and 21 from the public sector (of which 18 responded). A further breakdown indicated that 2 prisons were in the High Security Estate, 2 the Female Estate, 7 held Young Offenders and 1 was an establishment for foreign national prisoners.

Geographically, the respondents were: 68% from the South East & West regions, 5% from Eastern region and 27% from the North.

FEEDBACK FROM PRISONS

1. It would appear that most of the prisons became aware of the services offered by Emailprisoner.com by either direct contact from Derek Jones or via recommendations from other prisons which had been approached by him.
2. It also emerged from that the responsibility for managing the system fell to a number of different departments including Security, Resettlement, Regimes, Offender Management, Operations, and of course Correspondence/Mailroom but the day to day operation fell, as expected, to the Mailroom OSGs.
3. There was a rough split between the prisons in relation to the amount of time the system had been in place at their particular establishment – 47% 12 months or more and 53% less than 12 months.

Usage

4. In terms of usage approximate figures were:
 - 63% of prisons received 50 emails or less per week
(Highest = 50 emails per week – Lowest = 2 emails per week)
 - 37% of prisons received in excess of 50 emails per week
(Highest = 314 emails per week – Lowest = 70 emails per week)

Something of interest is that one of the highest users was in fact a prison that had only been using the system for a short time (since April 2008)

Costs and impact on staff time

5. Only 22% of prisons indicated that no costs were incurred as a result of taking up the service, with 78% stating that they had had to provide things such as paper, toner, envelopes, electricity, telephone line rental for the fax machine and in some cases even the fax machine. This clearly did not reflect the free service advertised by Emailprisoner.com and this is something that should be made clearer in their advertising. However, it was subsequently established with Derek Jones that quite a few prisons had actually opted to provide these materials themselves even though he had offered to supply them.

6. In terms of noticeable savings on staff resources or increases in efficiencies, these were negligible with 58% of prisons saying that there were no differences and 42% saying these were only slight. However, indications were that the system did allow staff to spend less time on actually examining mail for illicit enclosures or contraband (obviously with normal post these have to be physically opened and examined) and this in turn meant that “incoming mail” was delivered more quickly. There was no discernible impact on the amounts of mail/letters coming in to the prison via normal post.

Support from emailprisoner.com

7. 84% of those who responded indicated that the support and advice offered by Emailprisoner.com and Derek Jones was very good and that there had not been any major problems with the general operation of the system with 16% stating that there had been no need to approach the company.

Security

8. There were no issues of concern raised about security and it would appear from the majority of replies that prisons had continually consulted with colleagues in both security and public protection departments (particularly on child safeguarding matters) about the use of the system. However, in one isolated case a prison received a threatening email and immediately referred this to Derek Jones who promptly dealt with the matter (sender was written to and their account discontinued).

Correspondent details

9. Following a conversation with Derek Jones, prior to the questionnaire's being despatched, Emailprisoner.com amended their online forms to include the relevant details of the sender (i.e. name & contact details). This made it easier for prisons to identify a correspondent if necessary and prevented prisoners from receiving "anonymous" letters which is prohibited under PSO 4411 Prisoners Correspondence at paragraph 4.13. The replies show that 84% had full contact details with 16% including at least a name/email address.

User views

10. Prisons were asked to seek the views of those using the system i.e. prisoners (including Foreign Nationals), families/friends and staff of what they thought of the service. We have treated the feedback with some caution because we do not know the extent to which it is directly received from users – which is partly a result of how we posed the question in the survey. However, on the whole feedback was positive as follows:

- **Prisoners** were in favour of the service and thought it improved communications with family and friends. The only negative comment was in respect of staff not delivering the emails straight away.
- Unfortunately **Foreign National Prisoners** were not well represented amongst the groups that staff canvassed for views. This was disappointing as this system clearly has benefits for this group of prisoners but it would appear that very few of the prisons approached actually held FNPs. However, those that did comment were enthusiastic.
- **Family/friends** similarly did not provide much feedback (and we could not tell if they had been asked direct). Those that did include family

feedback reported they were enthusiastic and also stated that the service should be rolled out across the estate.

- Finally, **Staff** feedback (other than those completing the survey) was sparse but when given was supportive of the service.

System developments

Two-way system

11. 68% of prisons indicated that they would not be interested in a two way service, citing reasons ranging from security concerns to staff time resources (i.e. it would be too time consuming) with 10% saying they might consider it at some later stage. However, 22% stated that they would be interested and it has now been confirmed that HMP The Wolds has agreed to trial such a system with Emailprisoner.com. They are currently in negotiations with Derek Jones. Since completing the survey report, HMP Parc has also indicated an interest in participating in the trial and we will be writing out to both prisons to offer policy support.

Downloading emails from website

12. Derek Jones had been interested in developing capability for two-way use of emailprisoner.com. We checked this idea with ICT Security colleagues who confirmed that it would not comply with data security requirements as prisons should not be accessing a non-secure website to download data that belongs to a prisoner. We have explained this to Derek Jones who has agreed not to pursue this development.

Conclusions and Next Steps

13. The service offered by Derek Jones via Emailprisoner.com has been well received – both by users and prison staff. There have been very few problems encountered so far but any concerns raised have been dealt with positively.

14. One of the benefits highlighted was that as this mail is delivered electronically there was no opportunity for an illicit enclosure being smuggled in to the prison, which in turn meant that mailroom staff would spend far less time physically checking envelopes for anything untoward.

15. The service is used by families/friends and while the number of “email letters” processed amounted to just over 47500 (which would equate to approximately 103 per month over 24 months at each of the 19 prisons that responded) it demonstrates that the system works well in the prison environment.

16. The system has also been adopted by two prisons in the High Security Estate (HSE) with no apparent problems. Two further HSE prisons are reported to be coming on line in the near future.

17. The service is not totally free to prisons, as had been stated on the publicity material circulated by Emailprisoner.com. Many prisons use their own paper, envelopes, ink-cartridges and in some cases fax machines. . Derek Jones has explained that a number of the prisons canvassed had opted to use their own supplies but agreed to make this clearer in any future publicity materials.

18. There has been interest in the possible introduction of a two way system, whereby prisoners would be able to reply to emailed letters by their handwritten response being sent off to the emailprisoner.com hub. HMP The Wolds and HMP Parc would also like to participate and we will be contacting them to offer policy support. Although I can see no obvious problems the trial needs to be supervised to check compliance with security and correspondence policy criteria. Even if it successfully implemented there we would like to be satisfied before committing to rollout the additional functionality to other prisons.

19. Derek Jones had suggested that prisons could in future download letters direct from the Emailprisoner.com website. He has accepted that this is not in-keeping with NOMS ICT data security requirements, and we will draw prison staff's attention this when we send out the summary report.

20. Finally, a suggestion was made by colleagues in Procurement Group that the system could be brought under control of a Zero Cost Contract arrangement. This would acknowledge that the provider does not charge NOMS for the service but would formalise our relationship Derek Jones and set a framework for review of the service provided. It would also enable us to stop the service if it is no longer required and to give Derek Jones some assurance about how that would be managed. SCOP will pursue this further with colleagues in Procurement Group in early 2009.

PATRICK HUNTER
January 2009

Questionnaire on using emailprisoner.com

Introduction

We are asking prisons for feed back on their use of the emailprisoner.com system to ensure it is operating effectively and securely. Our unit has responsibility for the policy on prisoner’s correspondence and we are working with emailprisoner.com to ensure their service adequately reflects the restrictions placed on prisoners. Your feedback will help us resolve any potential security problems and will also highlight other positive and negative views on the system.

Please complete this questionnaire and return to Pat Hunter, Safer Custody & Offender Policy – NOMS, 1st Floor Fry, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF by **31 October 2008**. Alternatively, if you would like an electronic copy of the form to complete please send your email details to Patrick.Hunter2@justice.gsi.gov.uk.

If you have a query about this questionnaire, please contact Pat on 020 7035 1538 or Laura McCaughan on 020 7035 1536.

Many thanks for your help.

About you

Prison name:

Your name and role:

Use of emailprisoner.com

1. How did you first become aware of emailprisoner.com?

2. How long has emailprisoner.com been operating at your prison?

3. Who is responsible for the administration of emailprisoner.com?

4. Which staff operate the system in your prison (e.g. correspondence clerks, OSG, public protection staff)?

Resources

5. We understand emailprisoner.com is offered as a free service but please tell us about any costs you have incurred (e.g. envelopes, electricity, extra staff time)?

6. What impact has emailprisoner.com had on a) staff b) other resources (e.g. have there been major savings of any kind?)

a) staff

b) other resources

7. What impact has emailprisoner.com had on volumes of correspondence?

8. How many emails do you receive via emailprisoner.com on a weekly basis (approximate figures only)?

Technical issues

9. What technical/client support does emailprisoner.com offer?

10. How have you found contact with emailprisoner.com?

Security & public protection issues

11. Have there been any security concerns about use of emailprisoner.com?

12. Do the emails received show the name and contact details of the sender and if not what actions are taken to verify this with emailprisoner.com?

13. If you are not based in public protection or security, have you liaised with colleagues responsible for public protection, safeguarding children or security? If so, please give brief details of the issues raised:

User feedback

14. Have you had any feedback from a) prisoners; b) foreign national prisoners and/or c) prisoners' friends & families d) prison staff on emailprisoner.com – if yes, please provide details:

a) feedback from prisoners

b) feedback from foreign national prisoners

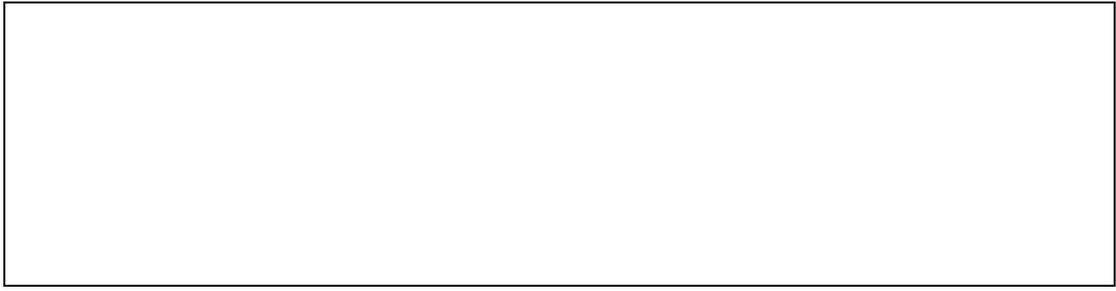
c) feedback from family & friends

d) feedback from prison staff

Future developments

15. Have you been made aware of any other similar service? If yes, please give details:

16. If a two way system was to be offered (so that prisoners could write letters for scanning and sent out via email) would you take this up?



ANNEX B

Latest information indicates that there are now 33 prisons on line with a further 17 in the pipeline. These are:

33 Currently On-line

Ashfield
Askham Grange
Blantyre House
Bronzefield
Canterbury
Channings Wood
Chelmsford
Dovegate
East Sutton Park
Eastwood Park
Edmunds Hill
Elmley
Erlestoke
Feltham
Full Sutton
Guys Marsh
Holloway
Kirkham
Leeds
Leyhill
Liverpool
Maidstone
New Hall
Parc
Portland
Reading
Rochester
Shepton Mallet
Verne
Wealstun
Winchester
The Wolds
Woodhill

17 due to come On-line

Acklington
Altcourse
Belmarsh
Bullwood Hall
Doncaster
Drake Hall
Exeter

Garth
Hull
Lancaster Farms
Littlehey
Morton Hall
Norwich
Rye Hill
Styal
Swaleside
Wandsworth