

EXTENDED EXTRACTS FROM DETAIL INTERVIEW WITH PRISONER OMBUDSMAN PAULINE MCCABE

Tell us what you have found in this report into Samuel Carson's death.

Pauline McCabe: "The report has identified a number of concerns. One of the most serious ones is that throughout the time that Samuel was in Hydebank Wood he was very seriously bullied. On two occasions he was assaulted and the report does raise concerns in connection with the way in which the bullying was managed and Samuel was protected."

The report talks that Samuel was in constant danger of attack by other inmates, a prison officer says he rarely came out of his room because of the verbal threats made by other inmates, he was constantly under threat. Is this one of the biggest failures you have ever seen?

Pauline McCabe: "This is undoubtedly one of the worst cases of bullying I've seen but I have seen many over the last five years. This is undoubtedly one of the worst."

Could Samuel's life have been saved if the prison system acted properly?

Pauline McCabe: "We can never say that somebody's life could have been saved. But it is important to note that in the report we have identified a number of factors which may have contributed to what finally happened. We have talked about the bullying; we have mentioned some of the healthcare related issues. It was also the case there were a couple of very important external factors which we knew Samuel was very troubled by. The first was that Samuel could not get bail and he made constant efforts to get a bail address throughout his time in prison and there were times where he was in prison where he didn't need to be in prison because he and his girlfriend, who made desperate efforts to find somewhere to live together were unable to do so. Part of the reason for that is because when they found addresses they believed might be suitable there were paramilitary threats against them."

Was Samuel caught in a vicious circle where nobody seemed to be helping?

Pauline McCabe: "There were instances undoubtedly where some officers tried to help Samuel and we have made that clear in the report but the policy that currently exists makes it clear that every single instance of bullying, every threat of bullying should be reported, should be discussed and should be addressed. It was clearly the case that was not happening."

You'll understand that there's been the Ower report, there's been death after death in Hydebank, there's been complaint after complaint in Hydebank but nothing seems to ever change. How many more young people are going to have to die in Hydebank before something is done?

Pauline McCabe: "We are in the middle of a prison reform programme which my own office has played a significant role in the last five years into trying to influence the commitment to that programme and to the shape of that programme. It has in my opinion taken too long. We have not made the progress we would have wished to have made to date for a variety of reasons but it would be wrong of me not to say that I do believe there are some very positive things happening at the moment which it will take some time to realise the benefits of."

Samuel took his own life because he was bullied. Do you believe this was an isolated incident or is there still bullying going on at Hydebank?

Pauline McCabe: "I am not satisfied that the bullying problem in prison has been properly addressed. I have raised it not too long ago in connection with the drugs issue in prison. I am not satisfied that the response at the moment to dealing with bullying throughout the prison estate and at Hydebank Wood in particular is adequate."

Are you saying to us that this bullying is still not being addressed properly?

Pauline McCabe: "If you're asking me am I satisfied that today nobody would be bullied at Hydebank Wood that is absolutely not the case. I believe that efforts are now being made and there is a commitment to dealing with it but I do believe we have a lot of work still to do."

Do you believe that the police investigation into the bullying of Samuel was properly investigated?

"Well obviously it's not my job to investigate the police, but it's very evident from the report that there appeared to be shortfalls in terms of the investigation that took place. It will be for others to investigate and decide whether there was any justification for those shortfalls."

We understand the police ombudsman is now investigating the allegation of the failure to investigate the bullying of Samuel. Is that your understanding?

Pauline McCabe: "That is my understanding and I welcome the fact that it is the case."

Was Samuel failed by the justice system at every turn?

Pauline McCabe: "The report raises questions for the justice system at every turn. There was evidence by the end that there was the potential to, we don't know, but there was the suggestion to rehabilitate Samuel and the fact is that a whole number of factors came together that resulted in the tragic outcome. I do think there are a lot of questions for a lot of people arising out of the Samuel Carson report and certainly they don't stop with the prison service."

Do you believe bullying was being tolerated in cases like Samuel Carson. There were some good prison officers but there were others who seen Samuel was being bullied and nothing was done?

Pauline McCabe: "I think the attitude of different staff members, we saw significant differences in the way different staff members approached it. But what was quite clear is the prison service has a policy, they have that policy because they say bullying won't be tolerated and what we consistently found was the way in which the policy was being applied simply wasn't sufficient to make sure that it delivered as it was intended to."

So the policy wasn't being adhered to?

Pauline McCabe: "The policy absolutely wasn't being adhered to, there's no doubt about that."

In some cases the regime was turning a blind eye?

Pauline McCabe: "Maybe rather than saying turning a blind eye maybe a more appropriate way of describing it would have been that the level of concern and efforts made to address it properly fell well below what we should reasonably expect."

