

# BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH

England & Wales · Charity number 1177625

## Details

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**Status** Registered

**Legal form** CIO

**Registered** 2018-03-20

**Register** [View on the Charity Commission register](#)

## Contact

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## Activities

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**Objects:** THE OBJECTS OF THE CIO ARE FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT:(1) THE RELIEF, REHABILITATION AND RESETTLEMENT OF FOREIGN NATIONALS AND IMMIGRANTS IN DETENTION IN HMP WANDSWORTH BY VISITING THEM IN PRISON TO DISCUSS THEIR NEEDS AND CONCERNS AND BY WORKING WITH THE PRISON AUTHORITIES AND OTHER SUITABLY QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS TO ACHIEVE THESE OBJECTS, INCLUDING THE PROBATION SERVICE, LAWYERS SPECIALISING IN CRIMINAL AND IMMIGRATION LAW, AND OTHER CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS WORKING WITH PRISONERS AND EX-OFFENDERS, THEREBY ALSO HELPING THE INTENDED BENEFICIARIES TO SECURE THE SUPPORT THEY REQUIRE BOTH IN PRISON AND AFTER THEIR RELEASE FROM PRISON; AND(2) TO PREVENT AND REDUCE CRIME BY ASSISTING THE INTENDED BENEFICIARIES' REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY AFTER RELEASE FROM PRISON, INCLUDING HELP IN FINDING EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, AND CONNECTING THEM WITH OTHER CHARITIES AND ORGANISATION THAT SUPPORT EX-OFFENDERS AND HELP THEM TO REINTEGRATE INTO SOCIETY AS VALUED MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.

**Activities:** Our activities are to befriend and support foreign nationals in HMP Wandsworth by conducting regular visits to those who request BEST visits and supporting them as needed, including by helping them to get in touch with suitably qualified experts specialising in areas such as healthcare, legal advice, housing etc.

## Classification

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- **How:** Provides Services, Provides Advocacy/advice/information, Sponsors Or Undertakes Research, Acts As An Umbrella Or Resource Body
- **What:** General Charitable Purposes, The Advancement Of Health Or Saving Of Lives, Disability, Other Charitable Purposes
- **Who:** Other Defined Groups

## Geography

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- Throughout England

## Finances

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Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-04-05	£137	£271	-	-
2024-04-05	£28,607	£28,880	-	-
2023-04-05	£22,097	£28,960	-	-
2022-04-05	£17,644	£14,335	-	-
2021-04-05	£4,900	£1,471	-	-

## Trustees

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Name	Role	Appointed
CAROLINE AYERST		2018-01-17
Christine Julian-Huxley		2018-01-17
ISOBEL SMALLACOMBE		2018-01-17

**BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH**

England & Wales - Charity number 1177625

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# Accounts

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**Trustees Annual Report 2025-26**  
**BEST, Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth**  
**Registered Charity No: 1177625**

## **Foreword**

Although BEST's activities came to an end in October 2023 following our exclusion from HMP Wandsworth, we have kept charitable status as we intend to discover the true reasons why, after seven years of full-time unpaid service in the prison, our Director Geoff Smith was suddenly excluded, escorted to the gate and, in a ZOOM call on 22 December, Deputy Governor Cathy Panigel told us he "will never be allowed to work in the prison again".

The official information so far provided is inconsistent with our evidence and appears to rely on claims the exclusion followed numerous concerns about Geoff Smith's conduct, including:

- he represented a threat to security both in and outside the prison
- he made contradictory and misleading representations about BEST'S contacts with senior management when interviewed by Governor Panigel two days prior the exclusion
- he failed to observe the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding with the prison
- BEST had no real contacts with senior management and was, therefore, running a rogue operation in the prison
- BEST "had started to exceed its remit", and
- after excluding him, the top two Governors told him the exclusion was not final and remained subject to review, but he made no attempt to contact them

All the evidence we have indicates that none of these allegations have any basis in fact. Our evidence unmistakably points to the conclusion these allegations were concocted purely in order to show Geoff Smith in the poorest possible light to make his exclusion from the prison seem necessary - the true reason, we believe, being kept secret because the Justice Ministry knows the exclusion involved wrongdoing and has used its powers to keep this concealed and so protect itself and the officials involved from accountability, thereby placing itself above the law rather than adhering to its primary duty of upholding the law.

Although we cannot be certain this is right, it is the only conclusion we are able to reach in light of the considerable body of evidence available to us, which explains why we not only believe these are well-founded concerns, but also that the only way to establish the truth is for the Justice Secretary to authorise an open and independent assessment, as requested by Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP in May 2025. Furthermore, we believe that, if the Justice Ministry is honestly convinced our concerns are misplaced, it should welcome this as the only way to remove these well-founded concerns and show they are right.

Eight months after he was excluded from the prison, Geoff Smith was awarded an MBE for “outstanding services” to HMP Wandsworth in the King’s Birthday Honours List in June 2024 - raising the question: if official records indicated these allegations against him were true, why did the due diligence preceding this honour fail to detect this?

In its “substantive response” to the Subject Access Request Geoff Smith submitted on behalf of BEST in January 2024 covering 1 September - 30 December 2023 relating to four members of staff, the Justice Ministry refused to disclose anything about BEST on the implausible grounds it was “a third party”, shared only 42 words from anonymised emails by only two members of staff (clearly the top two Governors), claiming “we said we would review [the exclusion] and the decision wasn’t final” (although neither Geoff Smith nor anyone else in BEST ever received this message), and a handful of heavily blacked out emails, as shown below:

[Redacted]

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**From:** [Redacted]  
**Sent:** 25 October 2023 21:25  
**To:** [Redacted]  
**Subject:** [Redacted]

[Redacted]

**From:** [Redacted]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 25, 2023 9:20 PM  
**To:** [Redacted]  
**Subject:** [Redacted]  
**Importance:** High

We will devote this annual report to explaining the new evidence that came to light in 2025, followed by the case for BEST which Geoff Smith prepared when on 28 May his MP Dr Rosena Allin-Khan wrote to the then Justice Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, requesting what we regard as the only way in which our concerns about the exclusion and the biased and, we believe, lawlessly secretive way in which the Justice Ministry has thwarted our attempts to shed light on these matters - namely, an independent and transparent assessment to establish the truth.

## 1. Significant events in 2025

### 1.1. Governing Governor’s Andy Davy’s email to the BEST Trustees - 17 February 2025

On 17 February 2025 in reply to an email from the BEST Trustees seeking clarity about why BEST had been excluded from the prison and whether it might resume its activities there, we received a short email from the current Governing Governor Andy Davy, saying:

- “there were a number of concerns with Geoff and his behaviours/actions both in and out of the workplace”

- “there was also some uncertainties as to the exact work that was being done in line with the Memorandum of Understanding”, and
- “there were several recorded meetings with Geoff and the Deputy Governor to discuss the concerns, but this eventually led to him being excluded.”

We believe Governor Davy wrote this in good faith relying on prison records or what he had been told by his Deputy Governor Cathy Panigel, and comment as follows:

- We doubt the accuracy of the first claim because, on the day of the exclusion in his last hour in the prison Geoff Smith went to the Security Department to see if they could shed any light on why Governor Panigel had ordered his exclusion. There he met the most senior officer in Security who invited him into his office and explained that, earlier in the day, the top two Governors had ordered the exclusion because BEST’s contract with the prison “does not allow BEST to work in the prison”, which they found particularly concerning as it was a weakness sure to be picked up in a forthcoming security audit due shortly after Daniel Khalife’s escape. However, clause 2 of BEST’s contract with the prison simply requires BEST staff and volunteers to be security-vetted and key-trained before working in the prison, raising the question: if security concerns were the real reason, why did the Governors who ordered the exclusion fail to say anything about this, instead telling Security BEST’s contract “does not allow it to work in the prison”?
- We doubt the accuracy of the second claim because there never was a “Memorandum of Understanding” in written or any other form, and no previous concerns or uncertainty about “the exact work being done in line with” this Memorandum or BEST’s official remit had been reported to Geoff or anyone else in BEST: he routinely submitted monthly details of his activities to the Equalities Department and was always entirely transparent in his activities.
- We doubt the accuracy of the third claim because there was only one meeting between the BEST Director and Deputy Governor Panigel, prior to which he was for the first and only time throughout his years working at the prison locked out, and had to be let in and escorted to the meeting by Security i.e. the claim there were “several recorded meetings with Geoff and the Deputy Governor” before he was “eventually” excluded is misleading, raising the question: what led Governor Davy to think there were “several recorded meetings” between them before he was excluded?

## **1.2. Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP’s call for an “independent and transparent assessment”**

Shortly after Geoff Smith contacted his MP Dr Rosena Allin-Khan on 8 May 2025 raising his concerns about the exclusion and the various allegations made against him, on 28 May she emailed Shabana Mahmood, then Justice Secretary), as follows:

Dear Shabana and team,

I hope you are well.

I am writing to you today on behalf of my constituent Mr Geoffrey Smith MBE of 130D Earlsfield Road, London, SW18 3DS, who has contacted me in his capacity as the Director of BEST (Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals), a charity supporting foreign prisons in HMP Wandsworth in my constituency.

It is my understanding that Mr Smith was excluded from the prison in October 2023, shortly after the arrival of a new Deputy Governor following the Daniel Khalife escape. Mr Smith

has advised me that his Freedom of Information requests and appeals to the Ministry of Justice have failed to provide clarity on the reasons for exclusion.

Mr Smith has provided me with the following reasons for exclusion cited in internal records, which I understand are known via sources including the Independent Monitoring Board and the current HMP Wandsworth Governor, Andy Davy:

- Being a security threat inside and outside the prison
- Lying to the Deputy Governor
- Operating without a connection to senior management
- Exceeding the remit of the role
- Failing to respond to an invitation to review the exclusion
- The existence of multiple meetings with the Deputy Governor before the exclusion to discuss it

Mr Smith strongly denies all allegations and believes records may have been altered to justify the exclusion. Mr Smith has pointed to his award of an MBE in June 2024 for services to foreign national prisoners – with letters of support from senior Ministry of Justice and royal figures – suggesting no concerns were raised during due diligence.

As such, Mr Smith has raised his belief with me that his exclusion may be linked to political pressures. I understand that Mr Smith is concerned that his exclusion amounts to misconduct within the prison service. I appreciate that these are serious allegations and I would be thankful if, as a result, a transparent and independent assessment of Mr Smith's case could be provided as soon as possible.

There is no doubt, regardless of the exclusion, Mr Smith and his organisation have provided an invaluable service to the Prison and its inmates and it is in the interest of all involved parties to see an objective and fair resolution to these concerns. I am very grateful for any assistance you could provide with this issue.

Best wishes,

Rosena

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP**

Labour Member of Parliament for Tooting

On 30 May, Geoff Smith sent a representation of BEST's case to Dr Allin-Khan's office asking for it to be forwarded to the Justice Secretary and her team dealing with this. Unfortunately, as the person handling the case at Dr Allin-Khan's office was then on leave, it was not forwarded and the Justice Ministry has not yet seen this, though the document is reproduced under **3** below.

A copy of Lord Timpson's reply to Dr Allin-Khan's is shown below.

### 1.3 Lord Timpson's reply to Dr Rosena Allin-Khan's email

On 17 June 2025 Lord Timpson, the Prisons Minister, replied to Dr Rosena Allin-Khan's email as follows:



Ministry  
of Justice

**Lord Timpson**  
Minister of State for Justice

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

MP ref: RA69338  
MoJ ref: MC124414

17 June 2025

Dear Rosena,

**MR GEOFFREY SMITH MBE**

Thank you for your e-mail of 28 May on behalf of your constituent, Mr Geoffrey Smith MBE, of 130D Earlsfield Road, London, SW18 3DS, regarding his exclusion from HMP Wandsworth.

I am informed that the reasons for Mr Smith's exclusion were clearly set out in a letter of 7 November 2023 to his representatives. There were concerns that Mr Smith had crossed the line between providing support inside the jail and maintaining contact with prisoners following release. The information he provided regarding oversight of his activity at prison was inaccurate and inconsistent. In addition, the services that BEST were offering were being delivered by another charity which was contractually engaged to do so. Mr Smith was invited to discuss his exclusion in person but refused to engage further.

Mr Smith, as you note, has previously requested information about his exclusion under the Freedom of Information Act and via a subject access request (SAR). The Ministry of Justice has responded to all these requests and conducted a review of the SAR decision. It has been clearly explained to Mr Smith that data protection legislation prohibits disclosure of the personal information of third parties. He was also informed of his right to complain to the Information Commissioner if he was dissatisfied with the handling of his requests, and I understand that he did so.

I am assured that Mr Smith's complaints have been thoroughly considered by officials. If he remains unsatisfied, it is open to him to seek further legal advice.

Yours sincerely,

**Lord Timpson**  
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

## 1.4 Articles in Private Eye and Inside Time

Private Eye No. 1661 - 31 October - 13 November 2025

WANDSWORTH PRISON

### Locked out

**R**ETIRED solicitor Geoff Smith was awarded an MBE for his dedicated voluntary work with foreign nationals at HMP Wandsworth. However, he collected his award with a heavy heart, having been kicked out of the prison, his keys taken from him and escorted from the building with little explanation six months earlier.

Non-British citizens make up half of the London category B reception and resettlement jail's population, compared to around a tenth in the national estate. Geoff's charity, BEST (Befriending and Supporting Team), supported them with any needs based on their language and culture barriers or immigration status, as well as providing friendship to those who may not otherwise have had visitors.

He went in five days a week, unpaid, for seven years, even through Covid, and had become an integral part of the support services upon which overstretched staff depended. He said: "It's the most fulfilling work I've ever done. My most important task was to try to make sure the men did not feel ignored, as most of them are conspicuously vulnerable. Others included working with men at risk of suicide and self-harm, helping to prepare written documents with illiterate men or those with limited English, applying for education and in-prison work and supporting immigration applications."

Deputy governor Cathy Panigel had been at the prison just four days when she decided Geoff was working beyond his remit and constituted a security risk. After having him thrown out, she called him to a meeting and told him so.

The decision was greeted with widespread shock and dismay. The *Eye* has seen emails from senior staff who wrote to tell him he had "saved countless lives", "created vital links between uniformed staff and some of our vulnerable prisoners" and "taken an immense amount of pressure off front-line prison staff... all off the back of [his] own funding and time".

A report published by the Independent Monitoring Board said: "The amount of support and care provided to FNs [foreign nationals] dropped significantly as a direct result of the prison's decision to terminate the BEST contract... The Board had noted its admiration for the work of BEST in last year's report and there was widespread surprise and disappointment at the decision."

HMP Wandsworth was heavily criticised after the escape of Daniel Khalife while awaiting trial for spying for Iran in 2023. A



2024 inspection found serious systemic failings at the jail, including chaos on the wings, almost half the inmates on drugs, 10 recent suicides and high levels of self-harm and violence, prompting governor Katie Price to resign.

So why did Wandsworth remove a charity that was giving its time and energy at no cost? Geoff and the trustees of the charity, which has now been wound up, remain baffled. Geoff said: "I can only think that it was political and that I was considered responsible for the prison's high number of asylum claims, which was particularly unwelcome at a time when cell space was desperately needed owing to prison overcrowding."

"Just before I was excluded, there were 143 asylum claims. Once a claim has been made, the claimant cannot be lawfully extradited or deported until it has been determined."

A Prison Service spokesperson said: "These claims are completely false and this decision was taken at an operational level for operational reasons. Governors retain discretion to restrict or withdraw services if they present risk to security, safeguarding or compliance or are no longer suitable for the prison."

Geoff sought further explanation through freedom of information requests, but the responses came back heavily redacted and offered no clue. He is appealing for a transparent review of the decision but is being stonewalled.

● BEST is not the only independent prison charity to have had its services rejected across the prison estate. The Clink, which has helped reduce reoffending among the thousands it has trained in culinary and hospitality skills, is fighting to keep the last of its prison restaurants open.

Unlocked Graduates, which recruited highly qualified staff into prisons, lost its Ministry of Justice contract last year. And earlier this year the MoJ axed restorative justice charity Sycamore Tree, saying it did not meet international standards, despite research showing it had a major impact on prisoner attitudes.

With prisons at bursting point, inmates kept in cells and excluded from meaningful activities and reoffending rates continuing to climb, the MoJ can hardly afford to turn down charity.

# Banned from helping prisoners

Inside Time reports

For seven years, retired solicitor Geoff Smith went into Wandsworth prison five days a week to help foreign national prisoners. He assisted men in filling out applications and immigration documents, applying for jobs or education, and finding other prisoners who spoke their language.

Geoff was the Director of a charity called BEST (Befriending and Supporting Team), whose 24 helpers – including a RC, a retired judge, and a retired doctor – also paid social visits to foreign national prisoners. The charity helped some prisoners by providing them with emergency funds. Most of Geoff's work was unpaid, and everything the charity did came at no cost to the prison or taxpayer.

In July 2024, in the King's Birthday Honours, Geoff's dedication was recognised with the awarding of an MBE for his "outstanding work for foreign nationals at HMP Wandsworth". Yet the medal left him feeling bittersweet – because just months earlier, he and his charity had been banned from working in the prison.

Since the ban was imposed in October 2023, Geoff has been trying to understand the reasons behind the decision. He has been offered conflicting explanations, and his efforts to investigate have run up against a brick wall of official secrecy.

Throughout that time he remained silent, for fear that any public comments would upset the authorities as he tried to negotiate a



Geoff: 'It was political'

return to the prison – but now he has taken the decision to speak out to Inside Time.

BEST began its work in 2016, when it was called the Wandsworth Refugee Network. Around half of the 1,400 men in Wandsworth are foreign nationals, many on remand awaiting trial. Since the use of official translators in the prison was patchy, part of Geoff's work to assist prisoners who spoke little English involved putting them in contact with other prisoners who spoke their language and could act as informal translators.

In September 2023, a terrorist suspect escaped from Wandsworth prison by clinging to the underside of a delivery van as it drove

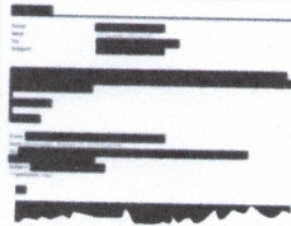
out of the jail. The escape was nothing to do with Geoff or BEST, but it led to the appointment of new governors and investigations into the prison's poor security.

In October 2023, a newly-appointed deputy governor summoned Geoff to a meeting where she questioned him about his charity's work. He was told he was banned from the prison, and made to hand back his keys.

Explanations he has been offered include:

- That he lied in the meeting.
- That BEST's contract never allowed it to work in the prison.
- That the charity was working beyond its remit.

Geoff denies all these claims. He says another incident, in which he inadvertently broke the rules by giving a newly-released prisoner a lift to a train station in his car, was resolved at the time with an apology and a promise not to do it again. Yet his efforts to have the ban overturned have been unsuccessful. When he tried to use the Freedom of Information Act to find out the real reasons for the charity being banned, he received uninformative replies – including copies of emails which were entirely blacked out (example below).



off has assembled a 13-page dossier of trib- to BEST's work from Wandsworth's gov- ors, staff and prisoners. A residential gov- or said: "Your service is invaluable to this lnerable cohort of prisoners. I know that y appreciate your independence, your hotic approach to their wellbeing, and your tensive knowledge both of prison and me Office processes. The presence of your rvice as an independent advocate is espe- ally valuable, providing foreign national isoners with a sense of hope and support, ich is all too often in short supply."

wing Custodial Manager said: "BEST is

offering an excellent service to the foreign national population, and has found ways to overcome issues that may affect their work."

Geoff suspects the real reason the authorities wanted him out was because BEST had supported foreign remand prisoners in making asylum claims – which is viewed by the Government as a method by which foreign national prisoners seek to avoid deportation. At the time of BEST's removal, around 140 asylum claims from Wandsworth prisoners were being processed.

In May this year, Geoff's local MP, Rosena Allin-Khan, took up his case and wrote to Prisons Minister Lord Timpson asking why he had been stopped from volunteering at the prison. In his response, Lord Timpson repeated official explanations for the decision, concluding: "I am assured that Mr Smith's complaints have been thoroughly considered by officials. If he remains unsatisfied, it is open to him to seek further legal advice."

BEST is not the only highly-praised charity to have been stopped from helping prisoners at Wandsworth in recent years. In November 2023, a month after Geoff was told not to return, the prison's volunteer Quaker chaplain, Liz Bridge, was dismissed after it was found that she had been making small cash gifts to prisoners. Her charity, the Wandsworth Prison Welfare Trust, which handed out playing cards, dominoes and paints to relieve prisoners' boredom, was also banned from operating.

At a national level, Sycamore Tree, a Restorative Justice course run by the Prison Fellowship charity, was banned from all prisons in England and Wales this year. And the Clink Charity, which once ran four prison restaurants training prisoners, is now battling to keep its last one open.

Geoff told Inside Time: "The Justice Ministry have been aggressively – and I believe unlawfully – secretive about my removal, because they know there is abundant evidence to suggest it involved numerous and serious irregularities. I can only think that it was political and that I was considered responsible for the prison's high number of asylum claims."

The Prison Service points out that another charity, Catch 22, is now contracted to provide help for foreign national prisoners at Wandsworth. A Prison Service spokesman said of Geoff's removal: "These claims are completely false and this decision was taken at an operational level for operational reasons. Governors retain discretion to restrict or withdraw services if they present risk to security, safeguarding, or compliance, or are no longer suitable for the prison."

## 2. Our response to Lord Timpson's letter

Lord Timpson has clearly relied on information given to him by the Justice Ministry, repeating the official line summarised by the official spokesperson who told Private Eye: "These claims are completely false."

This cannot, however, be seen as an adequate response to the evidence set out in this report, which clearly indicates that our concerns are reasonable and fact-based. Nor, in a country governed by the rule of law, can it be seen as proper procedure to dismiss this relying on the official claim that it is "completely false." Contrary to what Lord Timpson says in his letter, the

Justice Ministry has studiously ignored, rather than “thoroughly considered”, the concerns raised by BEST, as set out more fully in Annex A below.

Let it also be stressed that none of the evidence in Annex A came from the prison’s “substantive response” to the Subject Access Request our Director submitted in January 2024 or the subsequent appeal to the Justice Ministry, which yielded nothing meaningful on the basis of what we believe to be the spurious grounds that the law gives it effectively total powers of secrecy to answer any of the questions raised in Annex A. We suggest this is also at variance with the two most fundamental principles of natural law - namely, that no one should be a judge in their own case and that justice demands a fair hearing of the other side.

As Lord Timpson’s letter says the services “offered” by BEST were being “delivered by another organisation contractually engaged to do so”, we draw attention to the fact that BEST also had a contract with the prison, and the services we “offered” for seven years were delivered under a contract no less valid than the other contract to which he refers.

Believing the evidence would point any reasonable person to the same conclusions we have reached, and that a well-founded suspicion of cover-up would otherwise cause lasting damage to the Justice Ministry’s reputation, we ask the ministers responsible for upholding our country’s law and safeguarding its justice system to reconsider the matter and authorise an independent and transparent assessment of the case, as requested by Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP in May 2025.

### 3. Annexes A and B

Annex A sets out the evidence prepared by Geoff Smith in support of BEST’s case, explaining why we think:

- a) the MOJ’s version of events cannot be seen as reliable, fair, and truthful
- b) the MOJ has exceeded its lawful powers by laying claim to secrecy as a pretext for hiding wrongdoing of which it is aware
- c) the MOJ has failed to answer questions of fact which clearly go the heart of this case
- d) the allegations against Geoff Smith were not made in good faith
- e) the true reason for his exclusion was that he was blamed for the high number of asylum claims in HMP Wandsworth, and
- f) the MOJ has done its utmost to keep this concealed, knowing that letting in daylight would lead to consequences it thought better to avoid.

Annex B is a single-page document setting out BEST testimonials.

#### 3.1. Annex A

##### Concerns about the exclusion of BEST from HMP Wandsworth in October 2023

1	Background
2	Allegations made in support of BEST’s exclusion 2.1 Geoff Smith lied to the Deputy Governor / BEST had no connection with prison management 2.2 BEST’s contract did not allow it to work in the prison 2.3 BEST was acting beyond its remit

	2.4 Geoff Smith represented a threat to security in the prison 2.5 Geoff Smith represented a threat to security outside the prison
3	BEST's Subject Access Request (SAR): concerns relating to the prison's Substantive Response and the Justice Ministry's handling of our appeal
4	Relevance of the threat to withdraw Geoff Smith's keys in 2022
5	Conclusion

## 1. Background

On 26 October 2023, after working in the prison for nearly seven years, my keys were abruptly withdrawn and I and BEST were permanently excluded for reasons that were not made clear.

On 17 January 2024, I submitted a Subject Access Request (SAR) for "all emails, faxes, letters and other forms of communication ... that refer to Geoff Smith or BEST" from 1 September to 30 December 2023 relating to four members of staff, including the then-Governing Governor, Katie Price, and Deputy Governor, Cathy Panigel. As the prison's Substantive Response failed to yield any meaningful information, I appealed to the Justice Ministry, but this shed no further light on the information requested. However, through various other sources, including the Independent Monitoring Board and an email received by one of the BEST Trustees earlier this year [2025] from the current Governing Governor, Andy Davy, we have been able to find out significantly more about what prison records indicate as reasons for the exclusion.

We, the BEST Trustees and I, are deeply concerned this new information shows prison records indicate that, prior to the exclusion, I committed various acts of misconduct, including lying to the Deputy Governor, acting outside BEST's remit, that BEST had no connection with senior management and, therefore, no legitimate place in the prison, and that I represented a threat to security "both in and out of the workplace".

I regard these allegations as outrageous and believe there is evidence to disprove them, and appeal for the appropriate authorities to investigate:

- a) the integrity of records containing these allegations
- b) whether they can honestly be considered to have been made in good faith, and request
- c) their official withdrawal and correction of all such records, and
- d) BEST's reinstatement in HMP Wandsworth.

We are also concerned by the Justice Ministry's handling of the case, assuming sweeping powers of secrecy over the information requested in BEST's SAR. These concerns are also evidence-based and, we believe, sufficiently serious to merit investigation into whether the Ministry acted properly and impartially e.g. as authority for non-disclosure it cited parts of the Data Protection Act 2018 headed "Legal Professional Privilege" which applies only where "a duty of confidentiality [is] owed by a professional legal adviser to a client", and refused to disclose any information about BEST on the grounds it was a "3<sup>rd</sup> party."

Accordingly, this appeal extends to checking whether the Ministry's interpretation of the law was sound, and non-disclosure was claimed properly or for purposes of concealment.

A few weeks after Daniel Khalife's escape from HMP Wandsworth in September 2023, Governor Cathy Panigel arrived as its new Deputy Governor: prison conditions were, as confirmed by HMIP in April 2024, sufficiently poor to merit an "urgent notification" calling for it to be put into special

measures. Given the scale of the task facing senior management, it is notable that she chose to prioritise excluding me after nearly seven years of full-time work in the prison, during which BEST established a good reputation with staff and prisoners alike, enjoying consistent support from senior management, including the previous two Governing Governors, Jeannie Bryant and Graham Barrett. Governor Panigel, who was clearly the driving force behind the exclusion, ordered my exclusion within just 4 days of her arrival.

The speed with which she carried this out, her lack of consultation with prison staff (my understanding from several sources is that she refused to discuss anything about me or BEST with anyone, senior management included, other than Katie Price), the perfunctory procedures preceding the exclusion, call into question whether she reached this decision independently, based on knowledge acquired in her very first days at the prison. Had she consulted staff, she would have realised they overwhelmingly opposed the idea - as shown by their reaction following the exclusion when, in the words of one Governor who caught the general mood, it came as "devastating news", and was seen as harmful for morale, efficiencies and general prison welfare.

From actual events, it seems likely she arrived having been previously tasked with a) excluding BEST and myself from the prison ASAP, and b) maximising secrecy to conceal the true purpose of the exclusion (see 4 below), and the controversial and dubious manner in which it was executed.

As I have only recently learned of the gravity of the allegations against me, evidently meant to make the exclusion appear necessary, I wish to make clear that I always tried to serve the prison's interests and maintain its security to the best of my ability, nor do I have any reason to think I did anything that could have given rise to reasonable suspicion I ever acted otherwise. Accordingly, I regard allegations that I may have intended to harm the prison, undermine its security, deceive its senior management, or exceed BEST's remit as outrageous.

In explaining the case background, I think it is essential to draw attention to the wider, political implications: Daniel Khalife's escape in September 2023 and the publicity it attracted raised awareness of poor conditions not only in Wandsworth, but also other prisons, which was unwelcome to the Conservative government then in power because of the forthcoming general election. I mention this because it lends plausibility to my hypothetical assumption the order for my exclusion came from a high-ranking political source, rather than HMPPS: if true, this would explain why the order for my exclusion was never challenged and, lower down the command chain, was seen as a duty to be carried out, regardless of legal constraints, the injustice caused, and the harm to both prison staff and prisoners - secrecy being paramount to exclude scrutiny and the risk of light ever falling on the dubious methods involved, not to mention the legal implications and their potential consequences.

As part of this appeal, I would, therefore, like to ask the appropriate authorities to establish where the order for BEST's exclusion originated and suggest it will be in the public interest to make clear whether the Justice Ministry:

- a) acted lawfully, properly and impartially
- b) was influenced by a desire to protect its own colleagues and procedures from scrutiny
- c) interpreted the law rightly and in good faith, and
- d) adhered to its primary duty of upholding the law.

## **2. Allegations made in support of BEST'S exclusion from HMP Wandsworth**

## 2.1. I lied to the Deputy Governor about BEST's connections with senior management / BEST had no such connections and was a rogue operation in the prison

Following my meeting with Governor Panigel on 24 October 2023, she recorded that I claimed connections with senior management which, having checked, she found to be false. That morning I was for the first time after working there for nearly seven years, locked out of the prison and, without being allowed to withdraw keys, let in by CM Brian Mansaray from the Security Department, who also escorted me to the meeting. This was the only time I met Governor Panigel and I am confident the following account of her questions and my answers is accurate:

- When she asked who "managed" BEST, I told her Steve Johnstone was the Governor responsible for BEST
- When she asked what I did in the prison, I described my work and said I also *worked closely with* Chaplaincy and the Equalities Department: the words *worked closely with* have been italicised because I am sure those are the words I used

Regarding the first point, in her email to me dated 25 October 2023, Governor Panigel wrote: "Steve confirmed to me today that he has not been managing BEST - this will be reviewed ...". This was surprising: Steve Johnstone was not only the Governor responsible for BEST, but also always very supportive both of me and BEST. In the previous year I met with him to discuss my concerns after a meeting with a Governor who threatened to ensure my keys were withdrawn if I repeated certain acts which I neither did, nor was even capable of doing (see 4 below).

It would have been inappropriate for me to ask for this meeting had Steve Johnstone not been the Governor for BEST, nor would he have seen it as appropriate to meet privately with me in his office [then on Trinity] to discuss this. Nor am I aware of anything prior to my exclusion to indicate Steve Johnstone stopped being the Governor for BEST: as the Equalities Department keeps records of such matters, and these appear not to have been consulted, verification would be possible by contacting the Department and/or verifying with Steve Johnstone himself.

Regarding the second point, in her letter of 7 November 2023 to BEST's lawyer George Hepburne-Scott, Governor Panigel wrote: "Geoff also told me that he was managed by our Diversity and Inclusion Lead along with chaplaincy - again when I checked with them, they denied managing him or the service that he provided." As well as being sure I said I "worked closely with" Equalities and Chaplaincy, there would be no reason on this or any other occasion for me to use such plainly inappropriate language as to say I was "managed" by Pauline Singfield, who was usually referred to as Manager of the Equalities Department, rather than "our Diversity and Inclusion Lead". Pauline had no management involvement whatsoever with me or BEST, which can also be verified by asking her.

Regarding Chaplaincy, I worked especially closely with the entire Chaplaincy Team throughout my years in the prison. They generously allowed me to work in their offices on Heathfield and I usually shared the smaller Chaplaincy office with Ibrahim Lewis, then Head of Chaplaincy at HMP Wandsworth. I clearly recall a short conversation with him specifically about Governor Panigel's email to me dated 25 October 2023: neither then nor at any other time did he mention she had contacted him to ask if I was "managed by Chaplaincy". I have also discussed my exclusion with the main members of the Chaplaincy team and none has mentioned Governor Panigel contacted them to ask if I was "managed" by Chaplaincy, which I think they would have mentioned had she done so. Furthermore, any enquiry whether they "managed" me would, I think, have come as a surprise, eliciting a response to the effect that it was not their function to "manage" me.

I therefore ask for clarity on the following:

- a) who in Chaplaincy did Governor Panigel contact ?

b) how did she phrase her enquiry ?

c) how did they answer ?

The impression given is that, as a result of her due diligence, she established that I answered her questions dishonestly, bringing to light something inexplicably overlooked over the previous seven years, namely that BEST had no connection to the prison's senior management and, therefore, no legitimate place in the prison.

As words I never uttered were put into my mouth and Governor Panigel must have known this would portray me as dishonest, I would like to know why she put these words into my mouth. Also, if these enquiries were, as she claimed, simply to find out more about BEST, why did she order Security to lock me out of the prison before she had even met me ? Although I had only one meeting of about 20 minutes with her, Governor Panigel's conduct towards me was incomparably more hostile than anything I had previously experienced from senior management (subject to 4 below), forcing me to conclude that, even before meeting me, her intentions were hostile and she was looking for a reason to exclude me.

In an email of 18 February 2025 to one of BEST Trustees, the prison's current Governing Governor, Andy Davy, wrote: "There were several recorded meetings with Geoff and the Deputy Governor to discuss the concerns, but this eventually led to him being excluded." No, there were not "several recorded meetings": there was only one, as described above, indicating another inaccuracy in prison records.

Governor Andy Davy also wrote, "there were also some uncertainties as to the exact work that was being done in line with the Memorandum of Understanding." Again, no: there was no Memorandum of Understanding, neither in written or any other form: everything I did was transparent and in line with BEST's SLA with the prison, including Induction of Foreign Nationals twice a week and regular attendance at ACCT reviews, all undertaken in response to calls from CMs, Safer Custody, SOs as well as uniformed and healthcare staff with the full knowledge and approval of senior management. After the lockdown ended, I also started submitting monthly reports of all my interventions to the Equalities Department and never received negative feedback or any suggestion I was exceeding BEST's remit or operating in unauthorised areas.

Accordingly, I would ask for these records to be checked as they appear to contain material errors of fact which led to foreseeable and extremely damaging consequences for BEST, myself and, above all, the prison.

If inaccuracies are found, I respectfully suggest it will be necessary to establish how and why they found their way into records that are meant to be honest, accurate, and fact-based.

## **2.2. BEST's contract did not allow it to work in the prison**

In a conversation that took place in the prison's Security Department with CM Mansaray shortly after 5pm on 26 October 2023, he told me that earlier that day Governing Governor Price and Deputy Governor Panigel told him they had decided to exclude me because BEST's Service Level Agreement did not allow me to work in the prison.

I went up to the Security Department because, when leaving the prison, my fingerprint was not recognised and I could not return my keys to the key cupboard in the usual manner. My concerns about Governor Panigel's intentions were further heightened by the tone of the email I received when, after sending her a copy of BEST's Service Level Agreement, as requested at our meeting, she replied without addressing me by name, saying "this is very out of date ... this will be reviewed and you will be informed once/if the services can continue." In view of all that had happened over the previous two days, I realised my exclusion had been ordered.

Aware these were my last moments in the prison, I went to the Security Department to see if they could shed light on a situation I could not understand. I found CM Brian Mansaray alone in the end office: after asking me to come in and sit down, he explained that, at a meeting earlier in the day, Governors Price and Panigel told him I was to be excluded for the reason given above. I will expand on this conversation as I think it raises questions that call for answer.

I said if BEST's contract was the reason for the exclusion, the obvious solution was to change the wording so it authorised me to work in the prison i.e. reflected what had been happening for the last seven years. CM Mansaray shrugged, as if this was not a decision for him. He went on to say there would soon be a major security audit which was sure to detect the prison was allowing someone to work in the prison in a way that was not authorised in the SLA: although CM Mansaray did not say so, I think he was repeating what the two Governors had told him, intending to highlight BEST's contract as the reason for the exclusion.

Shortly after this - and I remember it clearly because I was surprised that I just blurted it out, unable to hide my indignation, I said: "I've given you guys a lot of IR's over the years, including some really important stuff." CM Mansaray was silent for a moment, and then said: "I know."

The fact CM Mansaray was so candid about what Governors Price and Panigel told him lends credence to my belief Security did not see me as a threat to prison security, but a regular source of intelligence i.e. an asset, not a liability. If prison records now indicate "a number of concerns about [my] actions/behaviours both in and out of the workplace", there must have been a major change in prison records and I think it reasonable to ask for clarification what caused this, because I am not aware of any reason why the Security Department or anyone else would have any reason or credible evidence to suggest I was, or might become, a threat to security.

Accordingly, I ask for it to be established when prison records started indicating I was a threat to security, and on what evidence? I am not asking to know what prison records say, as I understand that, for entirely proper reasons, this is not allowed: but I ask for a check on the following:

- a) that such records exist
- b) the plausibility of the evidence on which such records are based, and
- c) whether they can honestly be considered as having been made in good faith.

If the recorded concerns first appeared in or after September 2023, I suggest it should also be established what explains such a sudden and radical change from my previously good record to a record indicating my conduct gave rise to numerous concerns "both in and out of the workplace."

To be clear about the wording of BEST's Service Level Agreement, clause 2.1 provides:

"Any of the provider's staff and volunteers who wish to come to the prison more than three times, not including the use of social/legal visits, will all go through vetting and attend either key training or security awareness training before the service commences, or before they join the service if it has already commenced."

As I was security vetted and key trained in early 2017, I would like to know why Governors Price and Panigel told CM Mansaray that BEST's contract was the reason for my exclusion? The most plausible answer appears to be the most obvious, namely:

- it never occurred to them I would have occasion to talk with anyone in Security ever again, let alone discuss the reason for my exclusion with one of its most senior and respected officers

- unaware he was disclosing highly sensitive information I was never meant to know, CM Mansaray shared this information with me because he trusted me enough to do so and saw no reason not to
- Governors Price and Panigel said the contract was the reason for my exclusion because they realised Security, better than anyone, knew I was not a threat to security, so they thought it better to indicate to Security that my exclusion was in no way security related

Accordingly, I ask for explanation why, on 26 October 2023, Governors Price and Panigel told prison Security I was being excluded because BEST's contract did not allow me to work in the prison, and how this can be reconciled with records indicating my "actions/behaviours" represented numerous security concerns both in and outside the prison.

### **2.3. BEST was "acting beyond their contractual remit"**

This was the reason given to the Independent Monitoring Board by former Governing Governor, Katie Price viz. page 22 of the IMB report published in August 2024: <https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/13/2024/08/Wandsworth-IMB-2023-24-annual-report.pdf>.

Prior to this, no one in BEST had any idea this was another reason for the exclusion. As the IMB report indicates, the BEST Trustees and I are not alone in thinking BEST's exclusion was ill-advised and harmed the prison, as indicated below:

"The amount of support and care provided to FNs [Foreign Nationals] dropped significantly as a direct result of the prison's decision to terminate the BEST contract in October 2023. The Board had noted its admiration for the work of BEST in last year's report and there was widespread surprise and disappointment at the decision, which the Board was told by the Governor was because "they were acting beyond their contractual remit." An extremely valuable and effective resource, admired by men and staff, had been lost to the prison."

The allegation BEST was also "acting beyond its remit" raises further questions, namely:

- in what way(s) was BEST considered to be "acting beyond" its remit ?
- why didn't Governor Price or anyone else in the prison ever notify me of this ?
- why did she tell the IMB this was the reason for the exclusion, without mentioning the surely weightier reason that I also posed a threat to prison security ?
- even if true, would this justify immediate withdrawal of my keys and permanent exclusion ?

Everything I did in the prison was undertaken in response to requests from senior management, CMs, SOs, Safer Custody, or - in infrequent situations of emergency - Chaplaincy or Healthcare: also, all my interventions were reported to the Equalities Department each month and senior management were kept fully informed and, prior to October 2023, supportive and positively encouraging, including Governing Governors Jeannie Bryant and Graham Barrett, George Pugh, Rob Grimes, and Steve Johnstone (the latter three being former Governors responsible for BEST), and George Clay, who was formerly Governor for Foreign Nationals.

As records indicate so many different concerns about my conduct, I am forced to wonder if it was thought the sheer number of allegations would make the case for excluding me seem overwhelming - it being perfectly well-known that, in all truth, there was no justification.

### **2.4. I represented a threat to security inside the prison**

In his email of 18 February 2025 to BEST Trustee Isobel Smallacombe, the current Governing Governor at HMP Wandsworth, Andy Davy, said he had “been advised ... there were a number of concerns with Geoff and his behaviours/actions both in and out of the workplace.” This was the first time anyone in BEST knew of concerns relating to my conduct “in the workplace”, and I will respond to this before considering claims I also represented a threat to external security.

I think the fact that I always did my best to serve prison security is evidenced by my reputation with prison staff, and reflected by the frequency of Intelligence Reports I sent to the Security Department via Mercury. These IRs related to matters that were clearly important for prison safety and wellbeing, occasionally including intelligence about staff corruption.

As it is necessary to spell this out in answer to the very serious allegations about my conduct, if prison records indicate I represented a threat to internal security, I wish to make clear:

- I think these allegations have no factual foundation whatsoever, nor do I believe there can be any credible evidence to support them
- Subject to the exception only of Governors Price and Panigel, I am not aware of anyone working in the prison who thought I ever had been or might ever become a security threat
- Of those in the prison who contacted me afterwards, all expressed astonishment at my exclusion e.g. “this is devastating news” (Head of Healthcare), “a massive blow” (one of the Governors), “disgusting” (a CM), “gob-smacking” (another CM), “devastating ... [you have been] a fountain of knowledge [who] created vital links between uniformed staff and some of our vulnerable prisoners” (Safer Custody)
- at the end of the week before my exclusion, in a private conversation after Inductions with one of the longest-serving and most respected Governors, why did he tell me how appreciative staff were of my services, concluding by urging me to “keep it up”: this Governor had recently [and perhaps was still] heading the prison’s anti-drug strategy and, had there been concerns my “behaviours/actions” posed a threat to prison security, he would have known and it seems inconceivable he would have spoken to me in such terms
- outside the prison, I am not aware of anyone who gives any credence to these allegations: instead, they are concerned the exclusion showed the sinister side of prison life, including contempt for the law and cloaking irregular procedures in secrecy to hide the truth and shield those involved from scrutiny and accountability

On the handful of occasions Security spoke to me about concerns, they were minor e.g. that on one occasion in 2019 I passed through a gate and failed to lock it, or when I inadvertently entered the prison with a passport, and in 2020 [?] CM John Bailey, one of the prison’s most respected uniformed officers working in Security, suspected a CD I had brought in for a prisoner on an ACCT may have contained drugs: which of course it did not and, after making it abundantly clear that everything brought in for prisoners had to pass security checks and go through the X-Ray machine, was satisfied my actions were certainly foolish, but in no way malicious or a continuing threat to security. I honestly believe that whenever I had any dealing with Security, they saw me as truthful and well-intended, not as a security threat.

## **2.5. I represented a threat to security “outside the workplace”**

In a letter dated 7 November 2023 to the *pro bono* lawyer acting for BEST, Deputy Governor Panigel wrote: "I was made aware by our security department of several concerns around Geoff Smith crossing lines between support inside the jail and boundaries once prisoners were released. This included collecting prisoners in his own vehicle to drive them to various destinations once released amongst other wider security concerns which I am not proposing to share or disclose to you as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party."

It is notable she made no mention of the security threat that, as I discovered for the first time in February 2025, I supposedly also represented to security inside the prison, which seems odd as such a threat would normally be seen as higher-risk than a threat to security outside the prison. Although Governor Panigel alludes to "several concerns" I failed to observe proper boundaries "once prisoners were released", she mentions only one which I will briefly describe to show the circumstances and how it was resolved by the Security Department immediately after it occurred.

When leaving the prison on the evening in question, I witnessed a heated exchange between gate staff and a prisoner who had just been released without his property, which was still inside the prison. This was clearly developing into a dangerous situation, as staff kept telling him to go away and come back next day, which he could not afford to do as he had a travel pass only valid on the day of release. As this was about to lead to violence and needless arrest at the gate, I said I would go back into the prison, recover the property, and bring it out - which I duly did. However, he had to get to Clapham Junction to catch a train but had no idea how to get there, so I drove him to the station.

Unbeknown to me at the time, driving him in my car was a breach of security procedures and I was, entirely properly, reported and interviewed by Security - specifically, Martin Lavender and CM Mansaray. They wanted to know if my involvement with the prisoner had been pre-arranged (it had not), and whether I was paid or received any benefit in return (I was not, either on this or any other occasion). Security explained the proper procedures viz. prior permission from the Duty Governor is needed when helping a prisoner "through the gate" like this, and in emergency a prisoner can ask to spend a further night in the prison. I promised to observe the proper procedures in future and, as Security allowed me to continue working in the prison, this indicates they accepted I told the truth and trusted me to keep my promise, which I of course did.

Why then did Governor Panigel cite this incident, resolved by Security months earlier and clearly seen as historical, as the only evidence supporting her claim I represented a threat to security outside the prison ? As she sought to lend weight to this by referring to "other wider security concerns" she was not prepared to share with "a 3rd party", this gives rise to further questions:

- why didn't the Security Department, on this or any other occasion, ever raise any of these "other wider concerns" directly with me ?
- why do I have not the slightest idea what any of these "other wider concerns" might be?
- if I truly represented a threat to prison security, why did she tell Security the reason for my exclusion was that BEST's contract did not allow me to work in the prison ?

In view of the gravity of the allegations against me, I think it is reasonable to call for honest answer to these questions. My concerns are deepened by the way in which the Justice Ministry imposed effectively total secrecy on the information requested in my SAR, citing clearly inapplicable provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Regrettably, I must make it clear I have no confidence in the integrity of prison records and cannot recover my confidence until it is independently established whether these very serious allegations against me were fair, factual and made in good faith.

### **3. BEST's SAR: concerns relating to HMPW's Substantive Response and the Justice Ministry's handling of BEST's subsequent appeal**

Over 80% of the document purporting to be the "Substantive Response" to my SAR in January 2024 was the text of the last email I sent from my prison account before being excluded on 26

October 2023. The rest comprises just over 40 words from heavily redacted emails which, though anonymised, were clearly between Governors Price and Panigel. As the concerns I raised about the Substantive Response in correspondence with the Justice Ministry were clearly of fundamental importance to our appeal, but entirely ignored, I repeat some of the more important concerns raised by copying from the email I sent on 17 May 2024:

“I am doubtful that the words disclosed in these emails accurately reproduce the text of the emails sent at the time and, as part of this appeal, I want the authenticity of what was contained in the “substantive response” to be checked by a trustworthy independent source, such as HM Inspectorate of Prisons .... because it appears evident to me and would, I believe, be equally evident to any reasonable and impartial person, that HMPPS Briefing & Correspondence Team has cooperated with the prison authorities in HMP Wandsworth in seeking to keep the requested information secret, and, as I think the MOJ is biased in favour of HMPPS Briefing & Correspondence Team, I wish to stress the need for this check to be **independent**, and would ask the MOJ to recuse itself of any involvement in this because, regrettably, I think it would do all it possibly can to support HMPPS Briefing & Correspondence Team and the prison authorities, aiming to keep secret anything that might show the Ministry, HMPPS Briefing & Correspondence Team, or the prison authorities in anything other than a favourable light.

I also request that, as part of this independent check, it should be established whether, after 5:30 pm on 26 October 2023, Deputy Governor Panigel and/or Governing Governor Katie Price emailed me via my prison account - [geoff.smith2@justice.gov.uk](mailto:geoff.smith2@justice.gov.uk) : I request this because correspondence and remarks subsequently made by Deputy Governor Panigel suggest that, after ordering my exclusion, she invited me for further discussion with a view to allowing me back into the prison to resume the work I was doing as the Director of BEST prior to exclusion, but I failed to respond: however, I never received any such invitation and am curious as to the reason: should it transpire she and/or Katie Price emailed me via [geoff.smith2@justice.gov.uk](mailto:geoff.smith2@justice.gov.uk) after excluding me, they must have known I could not receive any email sent to that address, and request, a) these emails to be fully disclosed, as they clearly relate to me personally, and b) an explanation of why any emails were sent to this address, as it must have been known I could not receive them.”

In a ZOOM call with the BEST Trustees on 22 December 2023, Governor Panigel said: “Geoff will never be allowed to work in the prison again.” I find it impossible to reconcile this remark with the contents of the Substantive Response, suggesting she and Governor Price made clear to me the exclusion was not final and remained open to review, but I never responded.

I therefore request for the above checks to be carried out to make sure the text disclosed in the Substantive Response is identical to the text contained in the emails the Governors sent at the time, and for clarification of how I was, supposedly, informed their decision to exclude me was not final and remained open to review.

#### **4. Relevance of the threat to withdraw my keys in 2022**

In early March 2022 Governor Mark Whyment (now retired), called me into his office and, in the presence of Custodial Manager Sonya Hunter, who remained silent throughout, told me I “need to remember who’s in charge round here”, and then accused me of “contacting the authorities in Budapest and the NCA, causing me and my colleagues a great deal of extra work”, adding “if you do this again, I personally will make sure you have your keys withdrawn, is that clear ?”

As there was not a shred of evidence to support this allegation, and I saw it as an attempt to bully me, I tried to raise a grievance but was told I could not because I was not employed by HMPPS. I eventually saw the Deputy Governor at the time, Mia Motter, who said she thought this was a "misunderstanding" and felt Governor Whyment and I should get together to resolve the matter, after which it seemed pointless to pursue, so I dropped it. This was the incident about which I spoke with Steve Johnstone as Governor responsible for BEST, as mentioned in 2.1 above.

The most likely explanation for this meeting - indeed, the only explanation I can find - is that its true purpose was to warn me to stop supporting prisoners with asylum claims, because he saw asylum as a hindrance to his work on extraditions and deportations. If this was his intention, he would have been disappointed to see that I ignored his warning and continued supporting prisoners in this way. I mention this because it may have led to consequences, conceivably undertaken with like-minded colleagues, of which I will never know. What I do know is that a colleague in OMU subsequently told me that, when the Latvian authorities flew over to collect a prisoner and could not as he had claimed asylum, the police were "absolutely fuming" and, though I have no idea who this prisoner was or whether I was in any way involved in the case, their anger was aimed personally at me.

In these murky circumstances, I feel it is appropriate to make clear:

- a) asylum is a lawful human right and an issue any organisation working with Foreign Nationals in a British prison is bound to encounter
- b) my involvement in asylum was invariably confined to supporting those who asked for help preparing their claim and submitting it to the prison's Home Office Immigration Team
- c) I worked closely with the Immigration Team and always enjoyed good relations with them
- d) if I had denied this support to prisoners, this would have been unlawful and, I believe, contrary to the norms and traditions of British justice
- e) work on asylum took appreciably less than 5% of my time, as can be verified by the monthly reports I sent to the Equalities Department summarising my interventions
- f) I was never paid in money, kind or otherwise for this or any other support I gave prisoners
- g) I never encouraged prisoners to claim asylum or did anything to promote asylum
- h) aware bad faith may have been attributed, I stress that I always operated in good faith

Asylum has long been a controversial area of the law. But the legal right to claim asylum is universal and does not exclude people held in prison, British or foreign. No matter how strongly some may oppose it, only parliament has the right to change the law and, if this fundamental principle is ignored, the rule of law ceases to exist. The threat is particularly dangerous if it comes from within the justice system, especially when secret procedures can be used to conceal improper conduct and the law interpreted to serve "in-house" interests, such as hiding wrongdoing and presenting the outcome as due process.

With this said, it is only realistic to accept that some working in the justice system dislike prisoners claiming asylum and, for what it is worth, I also think the law on asylum needs to be tightened. Furthermore, if some thought I caused the complications this leads to, they may also have seen my exclusion as desirable. However, I was discharging my duty properly and in accordance with the law. Nevertheless, some may have thought my exclusion would yield such advantages it justified whatever means were needed to achieve it and, knowing there was no genuine reason to exclude me, sought to concoct concerns that would make my exclusion appear a) necessary, and b) the outcome of proper procedures and due process - believing all would be well so long as the truth was kept secret among the few who "needed to know."

However understandable that may be, the point I wish to stress is that the law cannot be overruled, especially by people the justice system relies on to uphold it.

It would have been possible to tell me to have no further dealings with asylum and refer all such cases to the Immigration Team, but this was not done. Even nine months after the exclusion, the IMB reported that BEST was seen as “an extremely valuable and effective resource, admired by men and staff [but was now] lost to the prison”. It is striking how the arrival of Governor Panigel marked a change from years of support and good relations with staff and senior management to such sudden and catastrophic deterioration that with immediate effect it led to my exclusion and termination of all BEST activities, including prison social visits by our team of two dozen volunteers.

It is, thus, feasible some in the justice system may have seen my exclusion as desirable, especially when cells had to be urgently freed up to cope with the overcrowding crisis: to them my exclusion may have appeared “the right thing to do”, and any injustice caused to a small prison charity was more than off-set when compared to “the bigger picture” and the practical benefits that - I think wrongly - were expected from this.

To anyone unfamiliar with prison realities - and lack of such familiarity is partly what inclines me to think the order for my exclusion originated from a high-ranking political source, rather than HMPPS - the number of asylum claims at HMP Wandsworth must have been shocking viz. at the time of my exclusion, there were just over 140, equivalent to nearly 10% of prison cell-space.

Subject to evidence not yet provided, this still appears to me the most plausible reason for my exclusion from the prison - and is, indeed, the only rational explanation I can find.

## **5. Conclusion**

It is hard to understand why, if the allegations against me are true, I was awarded an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours list in June 2024. I was congratulated in a letter from Dame Antonia Romeo DCB at the Justice Ministry and received a card from Phil Copple, DG General Operations HMPPS, and Colonel (Ret'd) John Boyd OBE wrote expressing Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal's view that the award was “well deserved recognition of [my] outstanding services to Foreign National Prisoners.” I mention this as it seems unlikely the due diligence preceding the award failed to detect any indication of my allegedly improper conduct, or that such high-ranking and well-informed people would have written in these terms had they known of them.

I would ask those who have read this far to bear in mind how easy it can be to present evidence in a way that points to a seemingly unanswerable conclusion, particularly when records are secret and all that is known of the allegations against which I am defending BEST and myself derives from sources such as the IMB report and a short email to a BEST Trustee from the prison's current Governing Governor.

In this case, for example, it would be possible to ask the Security Department to prepare a report on me, making clear it was meant to show me as a threat to security because my exclusion was considered desirable for reasons that could not be disclosed - or, if disclosed, had to be kept secret: thus drawing attention from the person commissioning the report and making it seem Security had produced it independently and in urgent response to the concerns raised.

It therefore seems necessary to establish when prison records first indicated I represented a threat to security and, if records were later redacted or altered, to establish when such changes were made. Furthermore, do prison records corroborate claims of “several incidents” I

represented a threat to security outside the prison? If concerns about my “actions/behaviours” first appeared shortly before or at any time **after** my exclusion, it seems reasonable to ask:

- a) what made my good record over the preceding seven years suddenly so bad it called for instant dismissal and permanent exclusion from the prison ?
- b) can it honestly be said records casting me in this light were made in good faith ?

As evidence of BEST’s and my own previously good reputation in the prison, I attach testimonials by Jeannie Bryant, former Governing Governor at HMPW, George Pugh, former Residential Governor at HMPW and Governor for BEST, Scott Deacon, Custodial Manager at HMPW, and Ibrahim Lewis, former Head of Chaplaincy at HMPW, now Head of Chaplaincy at HMP Pentonville - please refer to Annex B.

Finally, I would like to stress that I will extend full cooperation to any investigation into these matters and do all I can to ensure, in our prisons as elsewhere, the law is upheld and justice is defended.

### 3.2. Annex B



#### 1. Staff testimonials for BEST, HMP Wandsworth

*I have worked in HMP Wandsworth since 2018 and had nothing but positive feedback from staff and prisoners. We in Chaplaincy derive great enjoyment from having BEST as a working partner and I truly hope your charity goes from strength to strength and can realise its hugely beneficial potential - Ibrahim Lewis, Head of Chaplaincy HMP Wandsworth, February 2023*

*Thank you for the work that YOU and BEST do... it’s so important and adds a richness and hope to the very difficult life of foreign nationals living within this environment. I wish you all the very best for the future, and that you go from strength to strength - Jeannie Bryant, Governing Governor 2017-19*

*Your service is invaluable to this vulnerable cohort of prisoners. I know that they appreciate your independence, your holistic approach to their wellbeing, and your extensive knowledge both prison and Home Office processes. The presence of your service as an independent advocate is especially valuable, providing foreign national prisoners with a sense of hope and support, which is all too often in short supply - George Pugh, Residential Governor HMP Wandsworth and formerly Governor responsible for BEST*

*My professional opinion as a Custodial Manager on a residential unit, is that BEST is offering an excellent service to the Foreign National population, and has found ways to overcome issues that may affect their work, for example, language and cultural barriers, prison regimes and policies, and the occasional incidents.....” CM Scott Deacon, Custodial Manager C Wing*

## 2. Prisoners' and former prisoners' testimonials for BEST

*I can't speak highly enough of what BEST have done for me. Their help has been unconditional and without the assistance of BEST I would have been returned to prison. The work they do is immeasurable. Without them and their aid, the world would be a lesser place... **John***

*BEST treat us with respect - **Mariusz***

*BEST has stayed with me and that has meant everything - **Said***

*When I see you I see I hope - **Osama***

*They don't rush us, they listen to what we say and then they get things done – **Robert***

*May your charity live forever ! **Bianca Bosnic, relative of a former prisoner***

*In our culture if you say you'll do something, it's important you keep your word: when BEST says they'll do it, they do it: it means a lot – **Damian***

BEST Trustees:

Isobel Smallacombe

Christine Julian-Huxley

Caroline Ayerst

The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Report above.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees



Christine Julian-Huxley, Trustee

29<sup>th</sup> January 2026

**REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1177625**

Independent Examiner's Report  
Financial Statements for the Year Ended  
5 April 2025  
for  
BEST Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth

**CONTENTS OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2025**

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## **INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH**

In accordance with the Charities Act 2011 Chapters 1 and 3, I report on the charity's financial statements for the year ended 5 April 2025, set out on pages 5 and 6.

### **The respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner**

Section 130 (1) The charity trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounting records kept in respect of the charity, which are sufficient to show and explain all the charity's transactions, and which are such as to disclose at any time, with reasonable accuracy, the financial position of the charity at that time.

In applying Section 133, the charity's gross income for the financial year ended 5 April 2025 did not exceed £250,000, therefore the charity trustees, in respect of that year, elected to prepare a receipts and payments account, instead of a statement of accounts under section 132(1).

In applying the Section 133 (b) the charity's gross income in for the year ended 5 April 2025 did not exceed the accounts threshold as specified in section 133 (account and statement an option for lower-income charities), in accordance the charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for the year ended 5 April 2025 under section 144 (2).

It is my responsibility to:

- Examine the financial statements under section 145,
- to follow the procedures set out in the general directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act), and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

### **Basis of independent examiner's statement**

My examination was carried out in accordance with general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair' view and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

**Independent examiner's statement**

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention

1. which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in, any material respect, the requirements:

- to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; and
- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act

have not been met;

or

2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed



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Emma Ekwegh  
10 Allesley Road  
Olton  
Solihull  
B92 7ED

11 January 2026

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2025**

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted fund	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2025 Total funds	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2024 Total funds
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>				
<b>Incoming resources from generated funds</b>				
Voluntary income	137	-	137	28,607
Investment income	-	-	-	-
	<u>137</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>137</u>	<u>28,607</u>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>				
<b>Charitable activities</b>				
Resources Expended on Charitable Activities	-	-	-	13,660
Support costs	271	-	271	15,220
Governance costs	-	-	-	-
	<u>271</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>271</u>	<u>28,880</u>
<b>NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCES</b>	(134)	-	(134)	(273)
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>				
Total funds brought forward	<u>189</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>189</u>	<u>462</u>
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>	<u><u>55</u></u>	<u><u>-</u></u>	<u><u>55</u></u>	<u><u>189</u></u>

**DETAILED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2025**

	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2025 £	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2024 £
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>		
<b>Voluntary income</b>		
Donations	60	28,236
Gift aid	77	371
Sundry	-	-
	<u>137</u>	<u>28,607</u>
<b>Investment income</b>		
Interest on savings	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>28,607</b>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		
<b>Charitable activities</b>		
Help to Detainees and Mentees	-	13,287
Post-release support	-	259
Prison Visitor Expenses	-	114
Membership fees	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>13,660</u>
<b>Support costs</b>		
Bank charges	-	-
Salaries	-	14,000
Website fees	271	603
Printing	-	-
Office expenses (incl. Postage and stationery)	-	188
Sundry	-	429
	<u>271</u>	<u>15,220</u>
<b>Governance</b>		
Accountancy fee	-	-
Other professional fees	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total resources expended</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>28,880</b>
<b>Net (expenditure)/income</b>	<b>(134)</b>	<b>(273)</b>

**BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH**

England & Wales - Charity number 1177625

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# Accounts

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**Trustees Annual Report 2024-25**  
**BEST, Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth**  
**Registered Charity No: 1177625**

**Foreword**

The last year has confirmed our view that BEST's exclusion from HMP Wandsworth in October 2023 was a lawless act that damaged the prison, its only benefit being to corroborate the conclusion reached shortly afterwards by HM Inspectorate of Prisons that the "systemic and cultural failures [of] poor leadership at every level of the prison, from HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice" were sufficiently serious to merit the issue of an urgent notification i.e. recommend for the prison to be put into special measures.

Our subsequent attempts to shed light on the reasons for BEST's exclusion have been so utterly dismissed by the Justice Ministry that we think it appropriate to use this report to record our abiding concerns, not simply that the little we know about BEST's exclusion from HMP Wandsworth in October 2023 suggests this may have involved numerous and serious irregularities, but also that the Justice Ministry has done its utmost to keep virtually everything relating to this hidden by spurious claims it is empowered to throw a blanket of secrecy over matters we believe the law entitles us to know.

Accordingly, we start this report by affirming what we wrote last year - namely:

- "we never had any clear explanation why, after 7 years of full-time working in the prison and so much support from virtually all staff, including the previous two Governing Governors, it was suddenly decided to take away [our Director] Geoff Smith's keys and exclude BEST from working in the prison, or who actually took this decision", and
- "the abrupt, arbitrary and aggressively disrespectful way in which [the exclusion] was handled has seriously shaken our confidence in the rule of law," adding
- in its insistence on effectively total secrecy about these matters, the ministry nominally responsible for upholding justice in this country has, in our opinion, conducted itself in a manner inimical to the most fundamental principles of justice in its true meaning - namely, truth, fairness, impartiality, and the rule of law.

As an update of how things currently stand, we have divided this year's report into the following sections:

1. A summary of allegations made against BEST and its Director at the time of the exclusion, and why we regard them as unfounded
2. Our attempts to shed light on the reasons for the exclusion, and how the Justice Ministry blocked them
3. Why we have decided BEST must now be disbanded, and

4. Details of the appeal BEST intends to make to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP, calling for an independent investigation into the true circumstances around BEST's exclusion from the prison and the way in which the Justice Ministry thwarted our appeal to obtain relevant information about this under the law on freedom of information

## **1. The allegations made against BEST and reasons given for its exclusion from HMP Wandsworth**

### **1.1. The reason given to Security: "BEST'S contract does not allow it to work in the prison"**

In his final hour in the prison on 26 October 2023, BEST's Director, Geoff Smith, spoke with a senior member of Security who told him the Governing Governor and Deputy Governor had earlier that day decided to withdraw his keys because BEST's contract "does not allow you to work in the prison", leaving the Governors no choice but to exclude BEST, particularly as this was bound to be picked up in a forthcoming security audit [this was shortly after Daniel Khalife's escape in September].

However, clause 2.1 of BEST's Service Level Agreement says: "Any of the provider's staff and volunteers who wish to come to the prison more than three times, not including the use of social/legal visits, will all go through vetting and attend either key training or security awareness training before the service commences".

As Geoff Smith was security vetted and attended key training in early 2017, why did the Governing and Deputy Governors give the Security Department this as the reason for withdrawal of his keys and BEST's exclusion from the prison ?

### **1.2. Geoff Smith made numerous false representations about BEST's connections with senior management**

On Monday 24 October, Geoff Smith was for the first time in 7 years locked out of the prison, entering without keys under escort by a senior member of Security who told him the newly-appointed Deputy Governor Cathy Panigel wanted to meet him: in her account of what was said at this meeting, Governor Panigel claimed Geoff Smith "told me that he was managed by our Diversity and Inclusion Lead along with chaplaincy - again when I checked with them, they denied managing him or the service that he provided."

Geoff Smith has an entirely different recollection of what he said viz. that he "worked closely" with Chaplaincy and the Equalities Department: although they were close colleagues, neither had any management involvement of any kind with BEST, and he is sure he would not, on this or any other occasion, have used such obviously inappropriate language to describe his relationship with Chaplaincy or the Equalities Department.

He thinks Governor Panigel's record is materially misleading, putting into his mouth words he never spoke: words, furthermore, that raise serious questions as to his integrity and suitability for prison work, insinuating that he wished to mislead the Deputy Governor by suggesting BEST had connections to senior management which, thanks to her enquiries, were shown to be fictitious, thereby strengthening her claims that BEST had no connection with senior management and, therefore, no right to work in the prison.

### **1.3. BEST had no supervising Governor**

One of Deputy Governor Panigel's first questions during this interview was who "manages" BEST. Although the question was phrased in a way he had never previously heard, Geoff Smith took it to mean who was the Governor responsible for BEST, so he identified the person concerned. However, Governor Panigel later recorded that the Governor concerned "confirmed" to her that he had nothing to do with BEST.

This is a question of recorded fact and, as we find Governor Panigel's version hard to understand, we feel clarity is required in relation to a) how exactly she phrased the question to the Governor concerned, and b) how exactly he answered. This was a Governor who had always been highly supportive both of Geoff and BEST, and we are at a loss to understand why, as we are confident he was the Governor responsible for BEST - and not long before had spoken privately to Geoff about matters they would only have conferred on if he was, in fact, the Governor responsible for BEST - he would wish to deny this, particularly as he must have known it would show Geoff and BEST in a poor light and strengthen the argument Governor Panigel was evidently keen to build - namely, that BEST had no connection with senior management and, therefore, no proper standing in the prison.

The Equalities Department kept a copy of our Service Level Agreement and a record of the Governor responsible for BEST: proper consultation with that department would have brought this to light, raising these questions: a) who did Governor Panigel contact in the Equalities Department, b) what did she ask, and c) why did the enquiry she claims to have made not bring to light the identity of the Governor concerned? To the best of our knowledge, BEST always had a Governor to whom it was responsible, and if - unbeknown to anyone in BEST, it did not - Clause 3 of our Service Level Agreement makes clear it was the prison's duty to notify us.

Governor Panigel's claim that BEST was operating without any accountability to senior management also suggests that, prior to her arrival in October 2023, prison senior management was unaware that it had for years harboured a rogue operation, unaccountable to nobody but itself. We consider this incredible and, if evidence to the contrary is required, we can provide testimonials from custodial managers and prison governors making clear, not only that senior management was aware of BEST's work in the prison, but also that they supported BEST and valued its services.

In besmirching the reputation of our Director and portraying BEST as a rogue operation without any connection to senior management, we believe Governor Panigel's record was neither fair nor accurate, and think a more accurate record would have shown these insinuations against BEST and its Director were groundless and should never have been used to promote a perception that BEST lacked proper standing to continue its work in the prison.

### **1.4 Geoff Smith was a security risk**

In a letter dated 7 November 2023 to the *pro bono* lawyer acting for BEST and challenging the exclusion as unlawful, Deputy Governor Panigel claimed: "I was made aware by our security department of several concerns around Geoff Smith crossing lines between support inside the jail and boundaries once prisoners were released. This included collecting prisoners in his own vehicle to drive them to various destinations once released amongst other wider security concerns which I am not proposing to share or disclose to you as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party."

Again, we are concerned by the way this shows Geoff Smith in a bad light, evidently to cast yet further aspersions on his character, in this instance by suggesting his exclusion was required for security reasons. Although Governor Panigel alludes to “several concerns” supporting her claims, he is aware of only one such incident viz. when leaving the prison on the evening in question he witnessed a heated exchange between gate staff and a prisoner who had been released from the prison, although his property was still inside: believing this was a dangerous situation that, unless de-escalated, was about to lead to violence and arrest at the gate, he said he would go back into the prison, recover the property, and bring it out - which he then did: it then came to light that the prisoner had a travel pass valid for that day only and had to get to Clapham Junction, though he had no idea how to get there, so Geoff drove him there and directed him to the station. We believe his version is accurate and a situation that might otherwise have led to an assault against staff and needless re-arrest at the gate was thus prevented, and our understanding is that Security concluded Geoff acted in good faith and accepted his promise to observe proper Security procedures in future.

As Governor Panigel has seen fit to cast these further aspersions on the character of our Director, suggesting Security drew her attention to these concerns, seeking to lend weight to her allegations by referring to “other wider security concerns” - conveniently unspecified because she was not prepared “to share or disclose” anything about these sensitive details with “a 3<sup>rd</sup> party” - her claims give rise to the following questions:

- why does Geoff Smith have no recollection of any of the “several” similar incidents she refers to ?
- why did no one in the prison - Security, in particular - ever raise any of these concerns directly with him ?
- if these and the “wider security concerns” alluded to really threatened prison security, why did she tell Security he was being excluded because BEST’s contract did not allow him to work in the prison ?

These are questions which merit honest answers, including in relation to whether these allegations of multiple security concerns around Geoff Smith were grossly exaggerated to lend credence, not simply to the suggestion he had to be excluded for reasons of security, but also so it would seem the secrecy which under usual circumstances properly applies to prison security might be improperly used to suggest information that legitimately belongs in the public domain should be kept secret - specifically, to prevent proper and impartial scrutiny of whether the prison’s top management handled the matter in a manner that might reasonably be expected of them.

Our concerns are deepened by knowing how assiduously the Justice Ministry upheld this effectively total secrecy by citing what appear to us to be clearly inapplicable provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 - of particular concern being the possibility high-ranking figures in the Ministry may have interpreted the law in a way no healthy justice system could possibly countenance - namely, to interpret it in a way designed to conceal wrongdoing.

Our doubts about this will remain until they are proven to be misplaced.

#### **1.5. BEST “were acting beyond their contractual remit”**

This was the reason given to the Independent Monitoring Board by the previous Governing Governor, Katie Price viz. page 22 of its most recent report, published in August 2024:

<https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/13/2024/08/Wands-worth-IMB-2023-24-annual-report.pdf>. This was the first we learnt that, in addition to the allegations mentioned above, Governor Katie Price also claimed BEST “were acting beyond their contractual remit.”

As the IMB report shows, we are not alone in entertaining serious misgivings about BEST’s exclusion, and below we quote from what the IMB had to say on the subject:

“The amount of support and care provided to FNs [Foreign Nationals] dropped significantly as a direct result of the prison’s decision to terminate the BEST contract in October 2023. The Board had noted its admiration for the work of BEST in last year’s report and there was widespread surprise and disappointment at the decision, which the Board was told by the Governor was because “they were acting beyond their contractual remit.” An extremely valuable and effective resource, admired by men and staff, had been lost to the prison.”

However, we were powerless to respond to this allegation previously because, prior to publication of the report in August 2024, we had no idea a) the previous Governing Governor had made this allegation, or b) that she claimed it was the reason for BEST’s exclusion.

This raises further questions, namely:

- in what way(s) did Governor Price consider BEST was “acting beyond its remit” ?
- why didn’t she or anyone else in the prison notify BEST ?
- was this sufficient reason to subject our Director to the humiliation of instant dismissal and being escorted to the gate by Security ?

We consider it symptomatic of the malaise afflicting the prison that its leadership at the time saw fit to make such reputationally harmful allegations, which we believe to be completely unsubstantiated, as if they were licensed to say whatever they wanted about others working in the prison - whether true or false, regardless of how such allegations might damage the standing, morale and motivation of people spoken of in these terms - evidently confident that, if this was wrong or led to material harm, sympathetic colleagues in high places within the justice system “had their backs” and could be relied on to make sure anything incriminating or unflattering would be swept under the carpet, showing the system and its leadership in the best possible light and ensuring that, if any wrongdoing were done, those responsible would remain unaccountable.

Unless and until we have clear reason to think otherwise, we will continue to feel concerned that - having done nothing wrong - BEST was ruthlessly and unlawfully persecuted, and the only reason our attempts to find out more about its exclusion from the prison is that those in high places in the justice system wish to keep hidden matters that a healthy justice system would recognise should be seen in the clear light of day.

To the above we should add that in the King’s Birthday Honours List in June 2024, the BEST Director, Geoff Smith, was awarded an MBE for “outstanding services” to the prison. It was a great honour for him and everyone associated with BEST and stands in marked contrast to the way in which, just over half a year earlier, he was escorted to the prison gate under circumstances portrayed as disgrace.

## 2. Our attempts to shed light on the reasons for BEST's exclusion

On 17 January 2024, acting on behalf of BEST and with our full authority as BEST Trustees, Geoff Smith submitted a freedom of information Subject Access Request to HMP Wandsworth, requesting information about him and BEST from 4 members of staff over the period 1 September to 30 December 2023. After numerous chasing emails, a "substantive reply" was eventually received on 9 May 2024, disclosing just over 40 words from 4 heavily redacted, anonymised emails from 2 two members of staff, believed to be Governing Governor Katie Price and Deputy Governor Cathy Panigel.

This is not the place to go into all the reasons we were dissatisfied with how BEST's correspondence with HMPPS was handled, or what we see as the blatantly biased way in which the Justice Ministry dismissed our appeal - the entire process appearing to us a cosy in-house affair in which HMPPS and the Justice Ministry were for all practical purposes one and the same, the nominal difference between them creating a convenient illusion there was no conflict of interest and, as the appropriate appeal body, the Justice Ministry was acting fairly and impartially by ensuring daylight was blocked from shining on areas where, if there was no impropriety, there would be nothing to hide and, we believe, the law intends there to be transparency.

As this was, characteristically, ignored by the Justice Ministry, we draw attention to a point we feel merits a more serious answer than it has received hitherto. The only disclosures from staff emails, all dated 27 October 2023, contained in the "substantive response" were as follows:

- Hi [REDACTED] - I'm forwarding to you as I can see you weren't in the distribution list [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] FYI - interesting that we weren't copied into this [REDACTED] FYI Kind regards [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] My thoughts exactly. Yet we said the decision wasn't final and we would review it. Kind Regards [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] That's really interesting [REDACTED]

In the appeal BEST submitted to the Justice Ministry, we suggested "any reasonable, impartial person would regard [this] response as a brazen attempt to evade the law, and recognise the claimed exemptions supposedly authorising refusal to provide the information requested are untenable in law, unconscionable in practice, and should, therefore, be disregarded".

One of the questions raised in this appeal - characteristically, ignored by the Justice Ministry - relates to the claim the Governors "said the decision wasn't final and we would review it": specifically, we feel clarification is needed on why neither Geoff Smith nor anyone else in BEST ever received notification from the Governors that "the decision wasn't final" and they "would review it" ? In our appeal, the point was phrased as follows:

[We are] doubtful that the words disclosed in these emails accurately reproduce the text of the emails sent at the time and, as part of this appeal, want the authenticity of what was contained in the "substantive response" to be checked by a trustworthy independent source, such as HM Inspectorate of Prisons. **NB** because it appears evident [to us] and would, [we] believe, be equally evident to any reasonable and impartial person, that HMPPS Briefing & Correspondence Team has cooperated with the prison

authorities in HMP Wandsworth in seeking to keep the requested information secret, and, as [we] think the MOJ is biased in favour of HMPPS Briefing & Correspondence Team, [we] wish to stress the need for this check to be **independent**, and would ask the MOJ to recuse itself of any involvement in this because, regretfully, [we] think it would do all it possibly can to support HMPPS Briefing & Correspondence Team and the prison authorities, aiming to keep secret anything that might show the Ministry, HMPPS Briefing & Correspondence Team, or the prison authorities in anything other than a favourable light.

[We] also request that, as part of this independent check, it should be established whether, after 5:30 pm on 26 October 2023, Deputy Governor Panigel and/or Governing Governor Katie Price emailed [Geoff Smith] via [his] prison account - [geoff.smith2@justice.gov.uk](mailto:geoff.smith2@justice.gov.uk) : [we] request this because correspondence and remarks subsequently made by Deputy Governor Panigel suggest that, after ordering [his] exclusion, she invited [him] for further discussion with a view to allowing [him] back into the prison to resume the work [he] was doing as the Director of BEST prior to exclusion, but [he] failed to respond: however, [he] never received any such invitation and [we are] curious as to the reason: should it transpire she and/or Katie Price emailed [him] via [geoff.smith2@justice.gov.uk](mailto:geoff.smith2@justice.gov.uk) after excluding [him], they must have known [he] could not receive any email sent to that address, and [we] request, a) these emails to be fully disclosed, as they clearly relate to [him] personally, and b) an explanation of why any emails were sent to this address, as it must have been known [he] could not receive them.

Furthermore, in a ZOOM call with the BEST Trustees on 22 December 2023, Deputy Governor Panigel unequivocally stated "Geoff will never be allowed to work in the prison again." We find it difficult to reconcile this uncompromising statement with the claim she and Governor Katie Price had let him know the decision to exclude him from the prison was "not final" and that they "would review it." To be clear, the reason he never responded to the message these two Governors claimed to have sent is that he never received it.

We are also doubtful about how the Justice Ministry claimed effectively total powers of non-disclosure under the Data Protection Act 2018. Their acknowledgement that we were right in arguing Schedule 2, paragraph 19 of the Data Protection Act 2018 - headed "Legal Professional Privilege" and applicable only in the context of a lawyer/client relationship - did not apply led to further "disclosures" so devoid of anything meaningful we construed them as intended to show us "who was boss", demonstrating their contempt both for the appeal and for BEST, as the organisation with impudence sufficient to bring the appeal - viz. these further "disclosures" comprised:

- A heavily redacted copy of BEST's contract with the prison - although, as a contracting party, we obviously already had our own copy of the entire contract
- Heavily redacted copies of the letter from the *pro bono* lawyer representing BEST to Governor Panigel on 1 November 2023 and her reply on 7 November - although, as BEST was the client, the lawyer had already supplied us with copies of his entire correspondence with her, and
- Copies of:
  - An entirely blacked-out email dated 25 October 2023 sent at 21:25
  - An entirely blacked-out email dated 25 October 2023 sent at 9:20 pm, showing only "Importance: High" at the top

- An entirely blacked-out email dated 25 October sent at 3:06 pm, showing only that it was sent by Geoff Smith
- An entirely blacked-out email dated 5 December 2019, showing only that it began "Hi Geoff"
- A redacted email dated 5 December 2019, showing only "Hi [REDACTED] - Thank you - I will come up to your office some time after 9:30 on Monday morning – Kind regards, Geoff Smith"

We considered their response to our request for an explanation why Schedule 2, paragraph 16 of the Data Protection Act 2018 - the other part of the DPA 2018 claimed to give them such sweeping powers of non-disclosure in relation all "emails, faxes, letters and other forms of communication ... that refer to [Geoff Smith] or BEST" (as per our Subject Access Request of 17 January 2024) - similarly unsatisfactory, as we were told "a reasonable explanation [had]" been given for this, though we have been unable to find anything resembling this description in any of the correspondence we received.

The outcome of our appeal was, therefore, that the Justice Ministry had interpreted the Data Protection Act 2018 to mean that, although the Director of BEST, clearly acting with the authority of the BEST Trustees, had submitted a Subject Access Request about BEST to HMP Wandsworth, the Ministry considered itself empowered to refuse disclosure to anyone in BEST of any information about it on the grounds that it was "a third party."

We consider this a manifestly unreasonable interpretation and inimical to the law's true intention, and wish to make clear that our concerns in relation to all of the above will remain until they are proven to be misplaced.

### **3. Why we have decided to disband BEST**

With great regret and after careful consideration, we have decided to disband BEST. As we have been unable to operate in the prison for over a year and no one from BEST has conducted a prison visit in that time, we are unable to work towards the goals which have inspired everyone who has volunteered with BEST and supported us for the last eight years, or perform any of the objects defined in our founding constitution as a charity. As mentioned in last year's annual report, the exclusion of BEST in October 2023 forced us to abort a major fund-raising campaign we planned to launch at the end of that year and, as we are unable to use donations for the charitable objectives for which they were intended when we were still an active charity, we are no longer taking donations and earlier this month (January 2025) we agreed a donation of £5,000 intended for BEST should be made over to another prison charity that remains active.

In what seems the unlikely event of BEST ever being asked to resume activities in the prison, we have considered the possibility of re-forming as a new iteration of BEST, if possible extending our remit to include befriending and supporting British, as well as foreign prisoners. However, that seems a long way off and, for the reasons explained above, we anticipate that later this year BEST will cease to exist as a charity.

### **4. BEST's forthcoming appeal for an independent investigation into the reasons for BEST's exclusion from HMP Wandsworth and whether the Justice Ministry handled our appeal in a manner that was fair, impartial and duly respectful of the law**

In February 2025, BEST will appeal to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP, calling for an independent investigation i.e. independent of the Justice Ministry, into the reasons for BEST's exclusion from HMP Wandsworth in 2023 and the way in which the Ministry dismissed our attempts to shed light on these matters by due process of law, and - unless there is genuinely lawful reason to do otherwise - for the investigation to publish its findings, giving clear and honest answers to the following questions:

- what was the real reason for BEST's exclusion from the prison ?
- who was responsible for the decision ?
- was it a lawful decision and, if so, what is the applicable law ?
- did the exclusion constitute, as we have been advised, a breach of contract ?
- did the prison's senior management handle the exclusion in a manner consistent with standards that might reasonably be expected of them ?
- was BEST's application to find out more about the exclusion under freedom of information laws treated properly and impartially, and did the Justice Ministry conduct our appeal in a manner consistent with its duty to uphold the rule of law and the spirit of justice ?
- if the investigation learns of any wrongdoing on the part of HMPPS and/or the Justice Ministry and/or any government minister(s) - including the improper exercise of powers entrusted to them as custodians of the law - will the investigation also publish these findings and confirm that due process of law will follow and those responsible will be held accountable ?

Finally, we wish to repeat our thanks to all who have volunteered with, donated to, or otherwise supported BEST, including the many in HMPPS and healthcare staff who cooperated with us and supported BEST so strongly over the years - it was our great pleasure to work with so many decent, talented and committed colleagues and we will always treasure the memories of our fruitful cooperation with all of you.

BEST Trustees:

Isobel Smallacombe

Christine Julian-Huxley

Caroline Ayerst

The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Report above.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees.



Christine Julian-Huxley, Trustee

25<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1177625**

Independent Examiner's Report  
Financial Statements for the Year Ended  
5 April 2024  
for  
BEST Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth

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## **INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH**

In accordance with the Charities Act 2011 Chapters 1 and 3, I report on the charity's financial statements for the year ended 5 April 2024, set out on pages 5 and 6.

### **The respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner**

Section 130 (1) The charity trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounting records kept in respect of the charity, which are sufficient to show and explain all the charity's transactions, and which are such as to disclose at any time, with reasonable accuracy, the financial position of the charity at that time.

In applying Section 133, the charity's gross income for the financial year ended 5 April 2024 did not exceed £250,000, therefore the charity trustees, in respect of that year, elected to prepare a receipts and payments account, instead of a statement of accounts under section 132(1).

In applying the Section 133 (b) the charity's gross income in for the year ended 5 April 2024 did not exceed the accounts threshold as specified in section 133 (account and statement an option for lower-income charities), in accordance the charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for the year ended 5 April 2024 under section 144 (2).

It is my responsibility to:

- Examine the financial statements under section 145,
- to follow the procedures set out in the general directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act), and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

### **Basis of independent examiner's statement**

My examination was carried out in accordance with general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair' view and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

**Independent examiner's statement**

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention

1. which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in, any material respect, the requirements:

- to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; and
- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act

have not been met;

or

2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed



---

Emma Ekwegh  
10 Allesley Road  
Olton  
Solihull  
B92 7ED

18 January 2025

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2024**

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted fund	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2024 Total funds	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2023 Total funds
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>				
<b>Incoming resources from generated funds</b>				
Voluntary income	28,607	-	28,607	22,097
Investment income	-	-	-	-
	<u>28,607</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>28,607</u>	<u>22,097</u>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>				
<b>Charitable activities</b>				
Resources Expended on Charitable Activities	13,660	-	13,660	16,534
Support costs	15,220	-	15,220	12,426
Governance costs	-	-	-	-
	<u>28,880</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>28,880</u>	<u>28,960</u>
<b>NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCES</b>	(273)	-	(273)	(6,863)
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>				
Total funds brought forward	<u>462</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>462</u>	<u>7,325</u>
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>	<u><u>189</u></u>	<u><u>-</u></u>	<u><u>189</u></u>	<u><u>462</u></u>

**DETAILED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2024**

	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2024 £	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2023 £
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>		
<b>Voluntary income</b>		
Donations	28,236	21,911
Gift aid	371	186
Sundry	-	-
	<u>28,607</u>	<u>22,097</u>
<b>Investment income</b>		
Interest on savings	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<u>28,607</u>	<u>22,097</u>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		
<b>Charitable activities</b>		
Help to Detainees and Mentees	13,287	15,755
Post-release support	259	751
Prison Visitor Expenses	114	28
Membership fees	-	-
	<u>13,660</u>	<u>16,534</u>
<b>Support costs</b>		
Bank charges	-	3
Salaries	14,000	12,000
Website fees	603	269
Printing	-	-
Office expenses (incl. Postage and stationery)	188	124
Sundry	429	30
	<u>15,220</u>	<u>12,426</u>
<b>Governance</b>		
Accountancy fee	-	-
Other professional fees	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total resources expended</b>	<u>28,880</u>	<u>28,960</u>
<b>Net (expenditure)/income</b>	<u>(273)</u>	<u>(6,863)</u>

**REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1177625**

Independent Examiner's Report  
Financial Statements for the Year Ended  
5 April 2024  
for  
BEST Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth

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2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed



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Emma Ekwegh  
10 Allesley Road  
Olton  
Solihull  
B92 7ED

18 January 2025

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2024**

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted fund	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2024 Total funds	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2023 Total funds
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<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>	<u><u>189</u></u>	<u><u>-</u></u>	<u><u>189</u></u>	<u><u>462</u></u>

**DETAILED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2024**

	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2024 £	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2023 £
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>		
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**BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH**

England & Wales - Charity number 1177625

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# Accounts

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**Trustees Annual Report 2023-24**

**BEST, Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth  
Registered Charity No: 1177625**

**Foreword**

The year began well with a major improvement in fund-raising, more than doubling our previous best and, subject to one or two brief interruptions, this meant we could keep providing emergency funds for prisoners throughout the first three quarters of 2023. Our core activities remained much the same as in previous years, and we were able to consolidate further BEST’s truly excellent working relations with Officers on the Wings and the Healthcare team, as well as Chaplaincy and the partner organisations we work with. Our official duties included twice-weekly conduct of Day 3 Inductions for Foreign Nationals, and throughout the year there was an increase in our involvement in SASH cases and ACCT reviews, which came to account for nearly 25% of casework. BEST volunteers continued attending visits to inmates in the Social Visits Hall, with the active number of volunteers conducting regular prison visits remaining at just over 20.

The Table below summarises BEST work in the prison over the first nine months of 2023.

**BEST at a glance: 1 January to 30 September 2023, HMP Wandsworth**

Inductions	Referrals			TOTAL
	Direct from the kiosk and prisoners on the Wings	From Wing staff	From Chaplaincy and partner organizations	
<b>436</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>2,218</b>

Source: BEST statistics as supplied each month to the Equalities Department

As part of a wider growth strategy, we had planned to launch our first major fund-raising campaign in the build-up to Christmas, but decided we had to shelve this after 26 October, when our Director, Geoff Smith, was escorted to the Gate by Security after the Governing Governor and Deputy Governor decided earlier that day to withdraw his keys. During a ZOOM call with the Trustees on 22 December the Deputy Governor told us he would never be allowed to work in the prison again. Following prolonged discussion at a Trustees’ meeting in early January, we eventually came to the unanimous decision these circumstances unfortunately left us with no choice but to suspend our charitable activities.

We felt that, as BEST would no longer be able to have a full-time representative working in the prison, it would be impossible for BEST to continue functioning effectively e.g. we would no longer be regularly receiving essential details from within the prison, like names and numbers of men requesting a Social Visit from our volunteers, or be able to follow up on support needs as detailed in volunteer reports following a Social Visit, or get information from the official inductions conducted by BEST, or from BEST surgeries or Foreign National Reps etc. Without a full-time BEST representative working in the prison, giving us access to essential information of this nature, we felt the quality of support provided by BEST would be so massively downgraded that we had no choice but to suspend charitable operations.

As Trustees we wish to make clear the following:

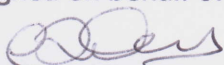
- We never had any clear explanation why, after nearly 7 years of full-time work in the prison and so much support from virtually all staff, including the previous two Governing Governors, it was suddenly decided to take away Geoff Smith's keys at the end of October and exclude BEST from working in the prison, or who actually took this decision
- We wish to stress that neither Geoff nor anyone connected to BEST has been involved in any misconduct and, to the best of our knowledge, notwithstanding the decision to exclude BEST from the prison, BEST was and we believe still is well regarded across the prison, not just by prison and healthcare staff, but also, of course, the prisoners
- The abrupt, arbitrary and aggressively disrespectful way this was handled has seriously shaken our confidence in the rule of law: everything surrounding these events has been excessively secretive - "all cloak and daggers", as one member of prison staff has called it - and in our view showed disturbing disregard for due process, decency, fairness, and justice in the proper sense of the word
- We also believe the decision was taken without anything remotely resembling proper regard for what staff at HMP Wandsworth thought, and that it has been clearly harmful to the prison - harming the morale of already hard-pressed prison and healthcare staff and, obviously, prisoners, and we believe removal of BEST as an organisation clearly playing an important role in helping to reduce incidents of SASH and violence can only lead to a worsening of the prison's already disturbingly poor conditions
- We wish to thank all who have volunteered with BEST, and those who have supported and taken an interest in our charity, including our generous donors, especially the Quakers, AB Charitable Trust, 1845 Charitable Trust, and All Saints, Fulham
- Finally, we wish to thank all in HMP Wandsworth who have helped BEST so much and supported us so strongly over the years - it was truly our pleasure to work with so many decent, talented and committed colleagues: we will always value your cooperation and the courage, commitment, and professionalism shown by so many of you

BEST Trustees:

Isobel Smallacombe  
Christine Julian-Huxley  
Clare Howarth  
Caroline Ayerst

The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Report above.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees.



Christine Julian-Huxley, Trustee

8<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH**

England & Wales - Charity number 1177625

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# Accounts

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**Trustees Annual Report 2021-22**  
**BEST, Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth**  
**Registered Charity No: 1177625**

### **Foreword**

As the restrictions imposed throughout the pandemic receded, the year brought fresh challenges for HMP Wandsworth, particularly as a result of the high number of staff departures, worryingly including some of the best and most experienced uniformed officers. For the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year BEST maintained its full-time unpaid presence in the prison 5 days a week, assisting staff on the Wings, colleagues in Healthcare, and partner organisations and making a vital contribution to the combined efforts that keep this under-resourced prison as safe, decent and humane as possible - working especially closely with Wing staff, Healthcare and Mental Health, and, of course, our colleagues in Chaplaincy who kindly allow BEST to share their resources and operate from the Chaplaincy office. Although our main focus is and will remain the prison's foreign national population, who throughout the year typically comprised 45% of the prison population, equivalent to some 680 men, over the past 12 months we started working with a higher number of British nationals, especially those deemed particularly vulnerable, notably including young prisoners, those suffering depression, ones who never receive Social Visits from friend or family - with British prisoners currently accounting for about 25% of the Social Visits our volunteers made in the year.

Although fund-raising improved, with income reaching an unprecedented high of £17,000, finances remain a cause for concern and, potentially, a threat to BEST's survival. Despite recognition as an integral and vitally important part of life at HMP Wandsworth, we receive no financial support from the prison or any other official body, and continue to rely on the generosity of private donors, local churches and larger charitable organisations, notably the AB Charitable Trust, the Quakers, and the 1485 Trust. As BEST is the only organisation in the prison providing emergency funds to prisoners, this represents the lion's share of our outgoings and in 2022 amounted to just over £12,000.

### **The year in summary**

BEST's impact in 2022:

- Saw over 1,800 prisoners, with over 3,250 separate interactions
- Inducted over 500 new inmates
- Supported over 400 men with immigration issues and helped over 70 make an asylum claim
- Supported over 300 men facing extradition
- Provided emergency funds to over 1,000 prisoners and immigrants in detention
- Helped over 60 men detained under immigration powers apply for immigration bail, successfully in about 33% of cases
- Involved in over 325 SASH cases (SASH = Suicide and Self Harm)

- Conducted regular BEST surgeries on the Substance Abuse Wing: Wednesdays 14:00 – 16:30, typically attended by 12-15 men
- 20 BEST volunteers regularly conducted Social Visits to prisoners throughout the year.

*"As BEST operates from the Chaplaincy office I have had the pleasure of seeing at first hand why BEST has established its reputation as one of the most highly respected and valued organisations operating in the prison, and why it is held in such high regard by prisoners and staff alike for its excellent service standards, commitment to prison welfare, and contribution to prison morale. As Chaplaincy is also a front-line service, we are in a good position to see the impact your charity has on the lives of the men in our care. I have personally worked in HMP Wandsworth since 2018 and had nothing but positive feedback from staff and prisoners. We in Chaplaincy derive great enjoyment from having BEST as a working partner and I truly hope your charity goes from strength to strength and can realise its brilliant and hugely beneficial potential."* **Ibrahim Lewis, Head of Chaplaincy HMP Wandsworth, February 2023**

### **The Year Ahead**

In the year ahead our main focus will be to raise the funds needed to strengthen our infrastructure and start paying full-time workers who can grow BEST's charitable impact and help us achieve our true potential as one of the most beneficent, effective and respected charities working in the criminal justice sector.

### **Thanks to our donors**

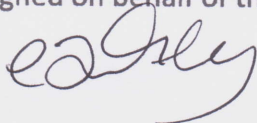
We would like to thank all those who have supported BEST with generous donations, most notably including the Quakers, St. Luke's Church, Battersea, the AB Charitable Trust, the 1485 Charitable Trust and the growing number of private donors who have been so generous in supporting BEST.

### **BEST Trustees:**

Isobel Smallacombe  
Christine Julian-Huxley  
Clare Howarth  
Caroline Ayerst

The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Report above.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees.



Christine Julian-Huxley, Trustee

3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023

**REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1177625**

Independent Examiner's Report  
Financial Statements for the Year Ended  
5 April 2022  
for  
BEST Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth

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In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention

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Signed



---

Emma Ekwegh  
88 Abbots Road  
Mitcham  
CR4 1JW

24 October 2022

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2022**

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted fund	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2022 Total funds	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2021 Total funds
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>				
<b>Incoming resources from generated funds</b>				
Voluntary income	17,644	-	17,644	4,900
Investment income	-	-	-	-
	<u>17,644</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>17,644</u>	<u>4,900</u>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>				
<b>Charitable activities</b>				
Resources Expended on Charitable Activities	10,146	-	10,146	1,030
Support costs	4,189	-	4,189	441
Governance costs	-	-	-	-
	<u>14,335</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>14,335</u>	<u>1,471</u>
<b>NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCES</b>	3,309	-	3,309	3,429
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>				
Total funds brought forward	<u>4,016</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>4,016</u>	<u>587</u>
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>	<u><u>7,325</u></u>	<u><u>-</u></u>	<u><u>7,325</u></u>	<u><u>4,016</u></u>

**DETAILED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2022**

	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2022 £	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2021 £
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>		
<b>Voluntary income</b>		
Donations	16,843	4,870
Gift aid	60	30
Sundry	741	-
	<u>17,644</u>	<u>4,900</u>
<b>Investment income</b>		
Interest on savings	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<b>17,644</b>	<b>4,900</b>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		
<b>Charitable activities</b>		
Help to Detainees and Mentees	9,591	529
Post-release support	448	469
Prison Visitor Expenses	77	2
Membership fees	30	30
	<u>10,146</u>	<u>1,030</u>
<b>Support costs</b>		
Bank charges	-	-
Salaries	2,500	-
Website fees	234	225
Printing	333	108
Postage and stationery	97	60
Office expenses	269	-
Sundry	756	48
	<u>4,189</u>	<u>441</u>
<b>Governance</b>		
Accountancy fee	-	-
Other professional fees	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total resources expended</b>	<b>14,335</b>	<b>1,471</b>
<b>Net (expenditure)/income</b>	<b>3,309</b>	<b>3,429</b>

**BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH**

England & Wales - Charity number 1177625

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# Accounts

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## **Trustees Annual Report 2020-21**

**BEST, Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth**

**Registered Charity No: 1177625**

### **Foreword**

In another year dominated by the pandemic, we are pleased to report that BEST was again able to continue a 5-day week in the prison, underscoring its importance in a prison where Foreign Nationals comprise half the prison population, currently equivalent to some 700 men. Let's here dwell on one remarkable achievement at HMP Wandsworth: so far not a single prisoner or member of staff has died from Covid. Needless to say, this does nothing to diminish the hardships endured since the pandemic began, or the challenges ahead: but it is still an achievement not even the rosier optimist would have predicted at the start of the pandemic and it augurs well for the future of HMPW and, indeed, the charity of which we are so proud to be Trustees.

### **The year in summary**

As 2021 nears its end, the all-too familiar restrictions of the last 20 months appear to be easing - making it easier for prisoners to access Education, Exercise, Activities, seeing a welcome resumption of duties by the Immigration Team, though a return to pre-lockdown freedom of movement on the Wings is still eagerly awaited i.e. an end to the regime of 23-hours a day "behind the door". Of particular importance to BEST has been the resumption of Social Visits.

As social visiting is such a crucial aspect of our activities, it seems worth explaining that prior to the pandemic we had 25 volunteers regularly conducting prison visits, falling at the height of the pandemic to 7 who (when this was allowed) continued visiting their men who requested a BEST visitor. Our recruitment drive over recent months has brought in 15 new volunteers, suggesting that by this time next year we can realistically expect, not just to have recovered from the losses of the pandemic, but to have more BEST volunteers than ever before.

Inside the prison BEST has supported more than 1,000 individual prisoners, helping over 300 deal with immigration issues, over 40 with asylum claims and more than 50 make immigration bail applications, with bail granted in approximately 33% of cases. Each month BEST typically engages with not less than 15 men at risk from suicide or self-harm (SASH), including regular attendance at ACCT reviews i.e. the multi-party interview with prisoners deemed to be a SASH risk, identifying the support needed, the frequency of future observations and, generally, what measures need to be taken to keep the prisoner as safe and well as possible. With the help of colleagues at the Ministry of Justice and the Finance Department at HMP Wandsworth we have also created a BEST account from which emergency funds can be allocated to the most needy and vulnerable i.e. for phone calls to lawyers and loved ones, reading material, "distraction packs" or whatever is needed to help them cope with prison life.

On D Wing, the Substance Abuse Wing, we have continued with the weekly BEST surgery on Wednesdays attracting 15-20 men per week, dealing with familiar issues such as understanding official papers, challenging - and no less frequently seeking to expedite - deportation, extradition, contacting loved ones, chasing unreliable lawyers, liaising with healthcare, complaints, preparations for release etc. Every month we receive over 80 applications for BEST support from prisoners using the prison kiosk with over 100 additional referrals from prison officers, partner organisations and prisoners approaching us directly on the Wings.

From George Pugh, Residential Governor, HMP Wandsworth we received the following testimonial: *"Your service is invaluable to this vulnerable cohort of prisoners. I know they appreciate your independence, your holistic approach to their wellbeing, and your extensive knowledge of both prison and Home Office processes. The presence of your service as an independent advocate is especially valuable, providing foreign national prisoners with a sense of hope and support, which is all too often in short supply."*

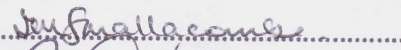
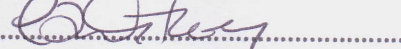
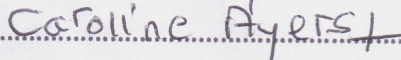
### **The Year Ahead**

In the year ahead our most important challenge will be to raise funds to start paying our full-time workers i.e. transforming BEST into a professionally operated charity. We plan to raise more than £25,000, and once this target has been reached we will approach some of the larger charities seeking a transformational donation, so that as well as employing staff to work in the prison we can hire experts where we most need them - notably including an IT expert who can help us to manage and improve our website and a fund-raiser.

### **Thanks to our donors**

We would like to thank all those who have supported BEST with generous donations, most notably including the Quakers, Bill Travers for running a sponsored half-marathon and raising over £1,000, St Luke's Church, Battersea, All Saints Fulham and all who have privately donated so generously to BEST.

BEST Trustees:

Isobel Smallacombe	
Christine Julian-Huxley	
Caroline Ayerst	

**REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1177625**

Independent Examiner's Report  
Financial Statements for the Year Ended  
5 April 2021  
for  
BEST Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth

**CONTENTS OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2021**

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Detailed Statement of Financial Activities	6

## **INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF BEST BEFRIENDING AND SUPPORT TEAM FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN HMP WANDSWORTH**

In accordance with the Charities Act 2011 Chapters 1 and 3, I report on the charity's financial statements for the year ended 5 April 2021, set out on pages 5 and 6.

### **The respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner**

Section 130 (1) The charity trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounting records kept in respect of the charity, which are sufficient to show and explain all the charity's transactions, and which are such as to disclose at any time, with reasonable accuracy, the financial position of the charity at that time.

In applying Section 133, the charity's gross income for the financial year ended 5 April 2021 did not exceed £250,000, therefore the charity trustees, in respect of that year, elected to prepare a receipts and payments account, instead of a statement of accounts under section 132(1).

In applying the Section 133 (b) the charity's gross income in for the year ended 5 April 2021 did not exceed the accounts threshold as specified in section 133 (account and statement an option for lower-income charities), in accordance the charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for the year ended 5 April 2021 under section 144 (2).

It is my responsibility to:

- Examine the financial statements under section 145,
- to follow the procedures set out in the general directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act), and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

### **Basis of independent examiner's statement**

My examination was carried out in accordance with general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair' view and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

**Independent examiner's statement**

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention

1. which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in, any material respect, the requirements:

- to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; and
- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act

have not been met;

or

2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed



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Emma Ekwegh  
88 Abbots Road  
Mitcham  
CR4 1JW

28 December 2021

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2021**

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted fund	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2021 Total funds	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2020 Total funds
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>				
<b>Incoming resources from generated funds</b>				
Voluntary income	4,900	-	4,900	1,995
Investment income	-	-	-	-
	<u>4,900</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>4,900</u>	<u>1,995</u>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>				
<b>Charitable activities</b>				
Resources Expended on Charitable Activities	1,030	-	1,030	1,534
Support costs	441	-	441	356
Governance costs	-	-	-	240
	<u>1,471</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,471</u>	<u>2,130</u>
<b>NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCES</b>	<b>3,429</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,429</b>	<b>(135)</b>
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>				
Total funds brought forward	<u>587</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>587</u>	<u>722</u>
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>	<b><u>4,016</u></b>	<b><u>-</u></b>	<b><u>4,016</u></b>	<b><u>587</u></b>

**DETAILED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2021**

	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2021 £	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2020 £
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>		
<b>Voluntary income</b>		
Donations	4,870	1,800
Gift aid	30	-
Sundry	-	195
	<u>4,900</u>	<u>1,995</u>
<b>Investment income</b>		
Interest on savings	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<b>4,900</b>	<b>1,995</b>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		
<b>Charitable activities</b>		
Help to Detainees and Mentees	529	60
Post-release support	469	1,469
Prison Visitor Expenses	2	5
Membership fees	30	-
	<u>1,030</u>	<u>1,534</u>
<b>Support costs</b>		
Bank charges	-	-
Website fees	225	179
Printing	108	104
Postage and stationery	60	39
Sundry	48	34
	<u>441</u>	<u>356</u>
<b>Governance</b>		
Accountancy fee	-	240
Other professional fees	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>240</u>
<b>Total resources expended</b>	<b>1,471</b>	<b>2,130</b>
<b>Net (expenditure)/income</b>	<b>3,429</b>	<b>(135)</b>