HMP Wandsworth – A Guide For Prisoners Families/Friends

HMP Wandsworth understands that having a family member or friend in prison can be a very difficult experience, particularly if your knowledge of prisons only comes from what you see on TV. This is a short guide covering some basic information about prison life.

If you have any more questions or anything is unclear please speak to staff during a visit or at the visitors centre, or visit one of the suggested links at the end of the guide.

HMP Wandsworth’s Role
Wandsworth mainly holds prisoners who are waiting for court cases or serving short sentences. We also have a Cat C unit (Trinity) for about 390 sentenced Category C prisoners (categories explained below). Wandsworth is one of the largest prisons in the country and we regularly hold over 1500 prisoners.

A Typical Day
It is hard to define a typical day as this can depend on the wing a prisoner is living on and if they have a job and what job this is. Prisoners normally start getting unlocked around 07:45 and are mostly locked up by 17:30 (19:30 on Trinity). However these timings depend on the wing regime and the individual. If a prisoner doesn’t have a job or attend education they will spend less time out of their cell.

Most of the prisoners on Trinity work full time, and have time out on the wing for association, domestics, and exercise in the evening. Prisoners on Heathfield (the main part of the prison) normally work half a day and have domestics and exercise
during the other half of the day. Heathfield doesn’t have evening activities apart from organised classes (such as bible study).

During lunch most prisoners return to their cells. Lunch is normally a cold meal (e.g. sandwich) while dinner is a hot meal (this varies at the weekend).

Prisoners get access to the gym and library on set days and times. They may also have visits, medical appointments or attend religious services.

**What do prisons look like?**
Wandsworth is made up of wings which have on them cells, food serveries (where meals are served), offices, showers, laundry rooms, storerooms, and some classrooms. There are also separate buildings holding the visits halls, gyms, library, more classrooms, workshops and medical clinics. There are exercise yards and an astro-turf.

Most prisoners have to share a cell. A typical cell has a bunk bed, cupboards, a screened off toilet, sink, and chair. Most prisoners have access to a TV and some have an in-cell phone.

Wandsworth has digital kiosks on each wing. These are where prisoners can get notices about things that are happening, send in applications, buy canteen items, add new phone numbers, and select their meal choices.

**Education/training/jobs**
There are lots of different activities and jobs available at Wandsworth. Some of these include:

- Wing cleaner/painter
- Working in the café/kitchen
• Maths
• English or ESOL
• IT
• Radio Wanno (prison radio station)
• Religious classes
• Dry lining
• Multi-skills
• Open University courses
• Reps or orderlies for different departments
• Textiles
• Recycling
• Barbering

There are also other workshops or courses offered including parenting courses, mindfulness, yoga, gym courses, and a choir. Many courses lead to qualifications which can be used on release.

Prisoners can apply to the courses or jobs they are interested in doing. They will then be assessed by security to see if they are suitable. Some courses or jobs are very popular so have longer waiting lists. Prisoners get paid for attending education or having a job.

There are also some jobs which are voluntary and are not paid. These include being a Listener (please see below) and being a Violence Reduction Rep.

Sometimes there are one off workshops, events or special courses brought in by external organisations. These are advertised on the kiosks on the wings, on Radio Wanno, and through the wing activity reps.
Support for Prisoners
There are many different people and organisations in Wandsworth to help support the men in custody.

**Safer Custody** – the safer custody department is the main point of call for any concerns you have about your loved one. They particularly focus on those at risk of self-harm and suicide, and manage the ACCT process.

**Listeners** – these are prisoners trained by the Samaritans to help other prisoners by listening to them discuss their worries. A prisoner can ask to speak to one at any time of day or night. The Samaritans can also be called for free from the in-cell phones.

**Chaplaincy** – we cater for a range of religious faiths with our largest being the Christian and Muslim communities. Chaplaincy also help organise attendance at funerals or visits to very ill relatives.

**Mental Health** – InReach support for those with mental health issues at Wandsworth. We also have a small inpatient unit for the more severe cases.

**Healthcare** – we have healthcare available 24 hours a day and facilitate clinics in the prison and external hospital appointments. There is also a small inpatient unit for those in need of special care.

**Keyworkers** – all prisoners have a keyworker who is an officer who visits them every couple of weeks to discuss any issues they have and to encourage them to use their time in prison productively.
CGL – CGL run the substance misuse service at Wandsworth. They work with those struggling with drug or alcohol addictions.

Violence Reduction Team – the VR team try to prevent violent incidents and work with those most frequently involved in them.

Equalities – The Equalities team investigate discrimination complaints, support those with protected characteristics, and help celebrate diversity.

If you are concerned about a prisoner please call 020 8988 4000 and request to speak to safer custody. A welfare check will always be done.

IEP and Adjudications
The Incentive and Earned Privileges scheme rewards positive behaviour and punishes negative behaviour. There are three levels a prisoner can be on:

- Basic – if their behaviour is poor
- Standard – what most prisoners are on
- Enhanced – if they are very well behaved and contribute positively to prison life

Those on Basic get privileges withdrawn (such as access to a TV) and those on Enhanced get extra privileges (such as additional visits). IEP level also effects how much money prisoners can spend on canteen every week.

If a prisoner breaks a rule they can also be put on report which means they have an adjudication in front of a governor. This is a bit like a mini-court where a governor hears the evidence and decides if they are guilty or not. Punishments can include not being allowed to buy canteen, stopping pay, and cellular confinement. For some serious offences (such as possession
of a mobile phone) a judge will attend and, if the prisoner is found guilty, the judge can give them additional days (or prospective days if on remand) on their sentence.

Family Services at Wandsworth
Family support is extremely important in reducing reoffending. Even a small amount of contact can make a big difference.

Information about visits and ways to keep in touch with prisoners (including email and voicemail) can be found on the visiting information page on the Wandsworth prison finder website.

In addition to visits there are many other family based services at Wandsworth. These include courses and workshops on parenting and healthy relationships. Other services include:

- **Family Days**: monthly extended visits for dads and their kids. They are more relaxed than normal visits and include a range of fun games and activities.
- **Homework Club**: monthly visit for dads to help their children with their homework.
- **Storybook Dads**: dads can record themselves reading a story which is then sent home for their children to listen to.

There is also a Family Engagement Worker who supports those with more complex family relationships, including where social services are involved, bad news needs to be delivered, or a visit needs to be held outside of the main hall.

Money, Canteen and Property
Each week prisoners can order canteen using the money in their accounts. Items on the canteen list include pin credit, snack food, different toiletries, confectionary, cards and fizzy
drinks. A prisoner’s IEP level effects the amount they are allowed to spend.

Prisoners can also order items such as stereos from catalogues on the kiosks. These are separate from canteen orders.

Prisoners can get money through work and education, and can also have money sent in by family and friends. Information on how to do this is on the website.

Information on prisoner property and handing in property is also on the prison website.

**Sentences and Categories**

Prisoners at Wandsworth can either be convicted or on remand. This can impact on things such as the number of visits they are allowed and the clothes they can wear.

A couple of weeks after being convicted and sentenced a prisoner will be categorised. The category (A, B, C or D) a prisoner is given depends on their risk, offence, and sentence length.

Cat A – highest risk. Wandsworth does not normally hold Cat A prisoners but may hold someone as a Potential (Pot) Cat A for a few days while waiting for confirmation on whether the prisoner will be a Cat A. Pot Cat A prisoners cannot have social visits or phone calls while at Wandsworth. If a prisoner does meet the criteria for Cat A they will be transferred to another prison.

Cat B and Cat C – Wandsworth holds both Cat B and Cat C prisoners and also transfers them to other prisons.
Cat D – low risk. Cat D prisoners can be transferred to open prisons where they will be able to leave on day release. Prisoners are very unlikely to be made Cat D if they have more than two years left to serve. Due to limited spaces moves to Cat D prisons can take a bit of time.

Prisoners’ categories get reviewed every year or six months depending on their sentence. To move to a lower category prisoners need to show they have reduced their risk by showing positive behaviour and completing their sentence plan if they have one.

Transfers
Some prisoners stay at Wandsworth for their whole time in prison. This is either because it is a short sentence or because they fit the criteria for Trinity. Trinity normally takes those who are Cat C, being released into London, within two years of their release date.

Since Wandsworth needs space for those going to court, sentenced prisoners are often transferred to other prisons. Cat C and Cat B non-court prisons normally have better facilities for addressing offending behaviour. Each prison has a different criteria for who they accept. This is based on category, sentence length, home area, and offence.

Prisons we frequently transfer to are: Brixton (C), Isis (C), Onley (C), The Mount (C), Wayland (C), Swaleside (B), Ford (D), Isle of Wight (B), Lowdham Grange (B), Highpoint (C), and Littlehey (C).

Prisoners can ask to go to certain prisons but this is not a guarantee they will go there.
Release
When most prisoners are released they are on licence which means they have to have meetings with probation and abide by special conditions, such as not leaving the country without permission. Some men will have conditions specific to them (e.g. not to go to a certain area).

Most prisoners are released half way through their sentence. If they don’t follow the conditions or if they break the law again they can be recalled (sent back to prison). While on licence offenders are managed by probation.

Some prisoners are eligible for HDC (Home Detention Curfew). This is early release on tag and means the offender has to be at a certain address during set hours of the day (normally 7pm-7am) and wear an electronic ankle tag. If a prisoner is eligible they will be asked to submit an address. The address will then be checked by probation, social services and the police, and the prison will decide if it is suitable. If it is your address you will be contacted to confirm if you are happy for the offender to live with you while on tag.

Three months before release (or less if a shorter sentence) CRC will meet with prisoners to discuss their release. They can then help with referrals for things like benefits and housing if needed.

On the day of release, the men will normally be released in the morning (from about 9:30am) and most offenders will have a probation appointment to attend that day. The information about this is on their licence which they will be given a copy of in reception.
Jargon busting
There are lots of words and phrases used in prisons which can be confusing. Here are a selection of some of the most used:

**ACCT** – someone is put on an ACCT when they are at risk of self-harm or suicide. When someone is on an ACCT they will be observed frequently by staff and have weekly reviews with a Supervising Officer to try and solve their problems and give them additional support.

**Association/domestics** – this is a period of the day when all prisoners are out on the wing and have time to socialise, get showers, use the landing phones, and use the kiosks. On some wings there are activities like table tennis and pool. It will normally lead on or be preceded by exercise, which is time outside on the yard.

**VO** – Visit order. Convicted prisoners need to have VOs to have a social visit. One VO = one visit. A VO is given on the day of conviction and then one is given two weeks later and so on. Prisoners on enhanced IEP are given extra VOs.

**CRC** – CRC are the probation service for lower risk prisoners. They also work in the prison to help prisoners approaching release by sign posting them to other services and making referrals.

**NPS** – National probation service. They manage higher risk prisoners.

**OMU** – Offender Management Unit. OMU are responsible for liaising with the courts, updating records, calculation release dates, transfers, public protection, categorisation, HDC, releases, offender management and sentence planning, and extradition.
Support for You

www.nicco.org.uk – National information centre on children of offenders. Lots of information and resources to help you and your children with the imprisonment of a loved one. Including:

- Suggestions for how to speak to your child about their dad being in prison
- Benefits that you may be entitled to if your partner is in prison
- Information on attending court
- Child friendly film on what prison is like

https://www.gov.uk/help-with-prison-visits - getting financial support with visiting prison

https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/ - PACT run HMP Wandsworth’s visitors’ centre

https://www.prisonersfamilies.org/ - 0808 808 2003 free phone line providing advice and information on all aspects of the criminal justice system.