

Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Prisons in Wales, HC 101

Wednesday 21 February 2024

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 21 February 2024.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Virginia Crosbie; Ben Lake; Mr Rob Roberts.

Questions 79 - 135

Witnesses

I: Rebecca Hayward, Governor, HMP Berwyn; Amanda Corrigan, Governor, HMP Cardiff; Heather Whitehead, Director, HMP and YOI Parc; Chris Simpson, Governor, HMP Swansea; and Rob Denman, HMP Usk and Prescoed.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rebecca Hayward, Amanda Corrigan, Heather Whitehead, Chris Simpson and Rob Denman.

Q79 Chair: Good morning. Welcome to this session of the Welsh Affairs Committee. We are continuing our inquiry into prisons in Wales. I am delighted this morning to be joined by the governors of all the prisons in Wales. We are joined by Amanda Corrigan, Governor of HMP Cardiff, Heather Whitehead, Director of HMP Parc in Bridgend. We are also joined by Rebecca Hayward, Governor of HMP Berwyn, Chris Simpson, Governor of HMP Swansea and by Rob Denman, Governor of HMP Usk and Prescoed. Thank you all very much for joining us this morning in person.

The Welsh Affairs Committee did an inquiry into the prison estate in Wales back in 2019, so five years ago. Can I ask each of you to help us get a sense of what might have changed regarding the way the estate is being run in Wales and any specific challenges that might have developed in the intervening years? Perhaps Amanda Corrigan could go first.

Amanda Corrigan: Covid happened in early 2020, which had a catastrophic effect on how we were running. A lot of things had to change at pace, so we are rebuilding from that. Speaking for Cardiff, I think we are largely back to where we were in terms of rebuilding and getting a regime and activity back to where we need it to be. We are particularly experiencing capacity issues at the moment. The prison system across England and Wales is quite full, so there is a lot of work going on to manage the lack of spaces and the contingencies being activated to better manage the lack of space. That is the pressure that we are facing now.

We have been through quite a journey, but I think we are back on an even keel post-Covid and back to delivering business as usual.

Q80 Chair: Rebecca Hayward, at Berwyn over the last few years there has been a ramping up of activity levels, because it is a new prison. Can you give us a brief sense of how that has progressed and whether you are at full capacity now?

Rebecca Hayward: Yes, we are now full. We now offer 2,000 places. That came to be probably about October 2023, so we are now at maximum capacity. All of our activity spaces that we can offer are up and running, which is quite different to 2019.

Q81 Chair: What is the capacity level that you are operating now?

Rebecca Hayward: We offer 2,000 places and we are almost there on a daily basis. We are full.

Q82 Chair: Thank you. Mr Denman, Usk and Prescoed is a slightly different type of prison. Do we call it an open prison? Is that still the terminology?



Rob Denman: It is two, technically three, sites. Prescoed is the open site, which is 420 acres and that encompasses Cilwrgi Farm, which is a working farm. That is 260 open men, so there are no gates, walls or bars and a considerable proportion of the men go out to work every day in the community at various things. Usk is my other site, which is a closed prison in the middle of Usk. That is 276 and that is a site to treat men convicted of sexual offending.

Q83 **Chair:** In terms of the issues that Ms Corrigan highlighted around capacity in the estate, would you see something similar at the moment on your sites?

Rob Denman: We are. The challenge for us is around Prescoed because there has been a move to move people out of closed conditions into open conditions, those who are suitable to do so. Fortunately, we are full most of the time. We are at 260, and we are very rarely below 250, but mid-year, touch wood, our capacity expansion should be in place. That is an additional 80 spaces onsite, and then the challenge there is providing meaningful activity for the men and engaging with community partners to see that we can provide employment opportunities outside for those men.

Q84 **Chair:** Thank you. We will get into some of those more specific issues a bit later in the session. Mr Simpson, Swansea is one of the old Victorian prisons; is that correct?

Chris Simpson: It certainly is a Victorian prison. Much the same as Cardiff with respect to Covid: I have been Governor there for a year now and certainly the recovery period that we have experienced coming out of Covid has seen Swansea recover quite quickly. We were fortunate to have a very settled regime and a very settled establishment prior to Covid and that enabled us to get back to normal very quickly.

It was a matter of weeks before we were running full regimes again, but with Swansea certainly the pressures, with us being such an overcrowded prison—one of the most overcrowded in the country in terms of having double cells that were designed originally to be single cells—there is a pressure on us to fill those spaces with the pressures that are currently around capacity.

Q85 **Chair:** From your perspective, what is driving those capacity pressures? Is it delays in the way the system of remand works, with prisoners being on remand for longer, waiting for trials to come to court? Is it because of the sheer number of people getting custodial sentences?

Chris Simpson: Covid has had an impact on this again, in the Covid period when courts were not active. We have also seen a marked increase in the number of police officers that have been employed. Now we are catching up with the courts, that is putting the pressure on people coming through the system and into the prison system. With our element it is mainly around the management of things such as CSRA, cell share risk assessments, to make sure that we are holding people as safely as possible while maximising capacity at the same time.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q86 **Chair:** Heather Whitehead, Parc prison is a privately-run prison. Does that make a lot of difference to the way you are able to run your estate?

Heather Whitehead: There are some differences in being the director in a private prison. I have only worked in the private estate for six months and prior to that did 19 years in the public sector, so can draw that comparison. I echo what colleagues have said around the challenges from Covid and returning to as close to what we were delivering before, having learned some lessons from Covid, and delivering some improvements.

One of the big differences around Parc particularly during that period is that we came to the end of the 25-year contract and the prison was recompeted and awarded to G4S at the end of 2022. During that recovery period from Covid we also went through a significant change in terms of expectations of the new contract, requirements around the new contract and, critically, in terms of delivering services for prisoners, education provision, transition into a different provider and health delivery, moving to the health board away from a private provider. We are still working through with the mobilisation of that, as you would expect.

Q87 **Chair:** Does being a private provider give you more freedom in terms of some of the work you can do with prisons, in terms of some of the contracts you can go into? Do you have more leeway than your colleagues in the public estate?

Heather Whitehead: There are pros and cons for both sides. One of the key benefits is our ability to innovate and be agile. I was talking to colleagues before we came in and one of the things that we are doing at Parc is looking at innovative vulnerability assessments on arrival, so that we can try to pick up markers that might help us manage men more safely and allow us to be on the front foot around putting in place protective measures for them. There is definitely a greater degree of agility and an ability to pilot different technologies earlier and be early adopters, both for the private sector but also on behalf and in partnership with the public sector.

Q88 **Ben Lake:** Bore da. It is good to see you all. Thank you for coming this morning. You have all mentioned the Covid era regimes and the changes that you had to implement to try to prevent the spread of the virus within your estates. You have each mentioned that things have returned to some sort of normality and business as usual. I will begin by asking you, one of the issues that has been brought to our attention as a Committee. One of the concerns of the Covid era was that prisoners would often be kept in their cells for quite extensive periods of time, indeed, up to 23 hours a day at the height of the Covid restrictions. Could you very briefly tell us how things have changed and, typically, how long a prisoner might spend in their cell now in each of your estates? I appreciate it might be slightly different for Mr Denman in your case, but if I can start with Ms Whitehead.



Heather Whitehead: At Parc we have a really strong purposeful activity offer. I know you asked specifically about time out of room and that would vary between eight and a half to 10 hours for most men. The children get up to 10 and a half hours out of their room every day, which is the strongest offer in any YOI as recently confirmed by HMIP. The time out of room is good, but even more importantly what we are then doing with the men and children is critical.

We offer on average an over 30-hour purposeful activity week, which is a combination of work and enrichment activities for the adults at Parc and we offer significantly more for children, with a 35-hour week and a good over nine hours enrichment per week per child. Some of our men can access 40-hour working weeks within the prison.

Amanda Corrigan: Similarly, time out of cell is a slightly blunt instrument in that men standing around a pool table is not necessarily particularly productive. We are also working on enrichment, so I think three and a half to four hours would be the shortest that somebody might have access to come out of the cell if they were on a restrictive or basic regime.

Other than that, people are out on full-time employment. We are looking at acupuncture, yoga, chess clubs, crafting, that tier two activity, that softer activity, as well as the construction skills and the education—roofing, CSCS cards and so on, rail tracks. It is that purposeful and creative enrichment activity that is a particular focus for the jail.

Rebecca Hayward: We have a model of full and part-time employment, so most of our prisoners are engaged in purposeful activity. For those who only work part-time, they have time out of cell in the afternoons or the mornings depending on their schedule to do other activities. We offer access to gym and time in the open air in the evenings, so we have a comprehensive, purposeful activity offer.

There are a small number of people whose regime is not so expansive, but they are usually people who have joined us straight from court and are going through that induction period and time of assessment.

Q89 **Ben Lake:** So it is a significant improvement in terms of time spent out of cells compared to the Covid era?

Rebecca Hayward: Absolutely.

Chris Simpson: Not to repeat, but much the same as Amanda and my other colleagues have said in relation to that. A good indicator for us was following Covid we have had HMIP in our prison last March and one of their indicators is to look at how many people you have behind the cell door at 10.30 am and 2.30 pm and both of those showed up at below 8%, which is a good return. On top of that you consider our roll at the time was 408 and we had over 300 men in purposeful activity. That gives you some idea of the level of purposeful activity that is being engaged in,



but we are now trying to look at that downtime and getting some of the tier two softer measures in place.

Rob Denman: To say that prisoners were behind their doors 23 hours a day in every prison in the UK throughout Covid is wrong. I was the deputy at Swansea throughout Covid and we ran a workshop to produce scrubs for the NHS, we had a lot of cleaning parties out because cleaning was important, so we tried to engage with the men as much as possible and they were positive. There was positive interaction at that time to get as many people out in the open air as we possibly could.

If I refer to the current sites that I govern, Usk was the first to come out of Covid countermeasures in the UK, the first closed prison. We offer a full regime. All my men are convicted, so I run treatment programmes for those convicted of sexual offences. That is quite a live part of my purposeful activity. I have a busy education centre and I quite often attend OU graduation ceremonies. I have a woodwork manufacturing shop that employs about 30 men. I have a waste management shop that employs several men. I have a working laundry that employs several men.

A significant proportion of my men are older, so the Salvation Army provide for me a CAMEO centre, which is a day centre for older prisoners, and they spend their day engaged in purposeful activity. Of all closed sites in the UK, I provide more time out of cells than any other closed prison. The men are out of their cells from 7.45 am until lunchtime, when they go back in their rooms for an hour. They are pretty much open then until just after 7 pm most weekdays. It is a full regime.

As for all the other softer stuff, we had an Eisteddfod on the field outside the back of the prison, which was attended by most of the prison, we have walking clubs, a gymnasium. The exercise yard is open all day except when the rest of the prison is contained and Prescoed is an open prison, so if I go from the top down, so from Cilwrgi Farm down, I employ about 20 men a day looking after a dairy herd—about a million litres per year if you are interested in statistics.

Ben Lake: A lot of work.

Rob Denman: We have a groundwork academy running at the moment, so the blokes are learning how to use JCBs and prepare ground for building and carparks and so on, a forestry party. I provide a workshop that teaches people how to use telescopic handlers and forklift trucks. Down on camp itself—camp is the main residential part of Prescoed—there is all this stuff that I need to run camp, so catering facilities, where we not only produce our food, but we also provide some vocational training for the men, and cleaning parties and then, as I alluded to before, our outreach party is quite big.

At the moment, just under 100 men a day go out to work in the community, and that is in things such as Tesco at Magor, construction



HOUSE OF COMMONS

sites. Some of them are working on the Welsh metro system in the valleys, so an awful lot of activity across both sites, closed and open.

Q90 Ben Lake: If I could return to the Covid era regime very briefly, we have had quite a bit of evidence from prison officers and others about the experience of the Covid era regime. While there have been several concerns and certainly there is no suggestion that people want to return to the Covid era regimes, there have been some comments to the benefits of increasing the ratio of prison officers to prisons at certain times of the day.

As I say, there have been conflicting accounts on this matter, and I am interested to learn where the balance of opinion from yourselves would be in terms of that increase in the ratio of prison officers to prisoners. If I understood correctly, the suggestion was that, because prisoners were staggered in their ability to go out to some of the facilities, whether there is any benefit in those sorts of regimes. I will start with Mr Denman.

Rob Denman: It depends on the prison you are running. For Prescoed, no one is locked up. Historically and over the years, Usk has always run a full and open regime with a compliant and well-behaved population of men who engage actively in the definition of a community within the prison. There is a real feel for that, and the men are more invested and longer into their sentences as well.

It is in their interest that they do stuff, and they want to do stuff. That is one of the differences between working in Usk and working in other prisons. The prisoners want to do stuff, so they will come to us with ideas for groups, role-playing groups and bridge groups and bands. We have three bands, which can be quite noisy sometimes.

Amanda Corrigan: There were less incidents of violence during that time. There were less incidents of self-harm as well during that time, but you must look at that in the context of that time. There was a legitimacy to that restricted regime at that time, because the men could see on the TV that in the community people could not access the gym, they could not go out, they were not going to work, their families were not going anywhere, so there was a legitimacy to the restrictions that we had to put in place to get us through that time. Once that legitimacy has gone, if you then maintain those restrictions there will be pushback and that will exacerbate violence and exacerbate self-harm and problematic behaviours. To have one without the other would not work.

I think there is an element of human nature in wanting to do much less with much more people. We are not in that space unfortunately. It needs to work efficiently. There are a lot of men that we need to work with and deliver a positive regime to. That is not feasible in those tiny groups, unfortunately. I must say, though, using Cardiff as an example, self-harm is 38% lower in Cardiff today than it was in 2019, so we can do both.

Q91 Ben Lake: I was going to ask because it has been reported that incidents



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of self-harm and violence reduced during the pandemic era. I was interested to know what your thoughts might be as to the reasons for that.

Amanda Corrigan: Part of that is opportunity. If people are not out, the opportunity is gone. Nobody was coming in and out of the prison, so drugs and contraband and access to the prison was hugely restricted. There were no substances within the prison, so that illicit economy was reduced. There were lots of reasons for that, and people did feel safer. Some of those elements we have kept hold of.

The way I used to deliver canteen to a prison population has now changed. Whereas it used to be in an open environment where people could observe what other people had ordered, I saw improvements during Covid, so I have held on to that regime, that method, of delivering the canteen in a much safer way. Some elements we did learn from, and I held on to, but keeping people locked up and coming out in very small groups is not one of them. It is not desirable.

Heather Whitehead: I agree exactly with what Amanda Corrigan has said, but for me it is about balance. One of our priorities is to deliver a safe environment for those who we look after and for our staff. That is only one measure of what we want to achieve and while men did feel safer, and staff sometimes reported feeling safer during Covid, we could not deliver our obligations to rehabilitate those who are sentenced. There must be access to opportunities that are going to help people address their risk and change their behaviour to ultimately protect the public, and you cannot do that when men are on such a restricted regime. It is extremely difficult to access them.

There is however something in having higher staff-to-prisoner ratios and the benefits that brings. An example at Parc is our neurodiverse unit, where we do have higher staff-to-prisoner ratios, so that we can be more responsive to their needs. I agree in principle that you can deliver better services to those with more acute needs with a different ratio, but that does not always require a restricted regime. That requires us to use our resources in an efficient and agile way to ensure that we are responsive to that.

To add around practices, we learned so much during Covid and when I talk about enrichment, I would have been talking years ago in public sector prisons and probably private prisons about association periods, which was essentially free time with optional activities. What we did learn was that a safer environment is one where those activities are more structured and meet the interests and needs of the prisoners more effectively. Certainly, public and private have taken that forward in the way that we design regimes now.

Rebecca Hayward: I have only been in my current role since November, but I was governing two prisons in England during this time. I think focusing solely on self-harm does not give the whole picture. It does not



HOUSE OF COMMONS

explain the impact on general wellbeing that living in such a restricted way had, whether it is on the overall mental health of prisoners, or whether it is around hope and ability to understand progression and what a life beyond that can be. That is an important thing that we have considered in thinking about how we develop our regimes on offer post-pandemic.

The point about staff-to-prisoner ratios for me in my experience is that it is not just about the numbers of staff that are there. It is the quality of the relationship between the staff and the prisoners in that situation, and that is an important part of understanding how to safely design and model a regime and how it can operate in a productive way.

Chris Simpson: What strikes me most about that, when we are talking about the Covid regimes and what we had then and what we have now, is that you are managing a prison in two very different ways. One is to keep people safe and restrict movement. We did not have available a lot of the purposeful activity, visits were not taking place, people did not have access to their families, so we had to manage the prison in a different way.

Because of the numbers that could be out and mixing at any one time, it caused that higher staff-to-prisoner ratio, because we were out in groups, but then you must look at the deficits of that. There was no purposeful activity, people were not going to education, they were not maintaining work. It became the same old, same old, each day. Now, given the choice, I think any of us here would most definitely want to produce a regime that gives people access to opportunity and with that opportunity comes the hope we are trying to give people for their release. We are trying to release people back into the community in a better way.

Rob Denman: May I make one further point? I think we were aided, and I think this needs stating about Welsh prisons, with the quality of the relationship between staff and prisoners. I remember throughout Covid being at Swansea and we were the conduit to the men inside. They were saying, "Governor, we are not getting visits," and I was saying, "I have just been across to Tesco. I have queued up and there is no one in the centre of town, no one at all". They did not see that, and the staff were their window into a bizarre world, and it was bizarre for us, as members of staff.

A 60-mile commute on the M4 when you do not see another car is a bizarre thing. That is reflected in the reports that we have had from HMIP, consistently over the years, commenting on the quality of relationships at both sites between staff and prisoners, and that quality of relationships enables you to run a regime that is progressive, that does cater for the men and does care for your staff as well.

Q92 **Ben Lake:** That is very useful. I think I am right in concluding then that where there is a benefit for increased prison officer-to-prisoner ratio that could perhaps be achieved in other ways and not necessarily be so



restrictive in the regime.

Finally, you have all mentioned wellbeing, and a concern of course has been raised with us as a Committee at the instances of self-harm and suicide. What actions can be taken? Ms Corrigan, you mentioned that self-harm rates have reduced again recently. What actions can you take to try to address instances of self-harm and suicide?

Amanda Corrigan: Going back to relationships, which is important, we know the men that are coming in. We get to know the men quite well. We have the facilities to be able to assist them. It is also important to note that these things do not operate in isolation. The levels of wellbeing in the community where my catchment is are quite low, and suicide and self-harm in the catchment area of the community where my men come from is quite high. It does not operate in isolation. They do not suddenly develop the problem while in custody. It can certainly exacerbate the problem, but it is a concentration of those issues in the community distilled down into the prison.

As for enrichment activity, some of those softer activities, some of these guys have been excluded from school and had difficult experiences along the line, so it is adapting your provision. The neurodiversity hub has helped us to access some of these guys, with diagnosis of some of the issues, so that you can get expert assistance to deal with them, mental health diagnosis as and when it is required. Having access to all those services quite early on to make those assessments, evaluate where this individual is and how we can best support them while they are with us is probably—

Q93 **Ben Lake:** Do you find any difficulties in accessing some of those external services, mental health support, other health services?

Amanda Corrigan: No. Recruitment issues can fluctuate within healthcare but nothing that would prevent me from providing those services. Access to services in custody is probably quicker, more efficient, and probably outstrips what is available in the community, if I am honest.

Chris Simpson: Looking at self-harm rates in Swansea, in 2019 we were well over 400. If you look at last year it was just over 100 and that has come down year-on-year over that period. I think it is the staff-prisoner relationships. It is the way we can interact with individuals, refinement of our processes. The app process has undergone a review, which has led to a more person-centred approach now with each individual.

The neurodiversity hub has opened up in Swansea. We are seeing fantastic results from that, but it is also the use of other things that we have available. We have a section of D wing in Swansea that is handed over to veterans, where we house the veterans. They do some incredible work to bring people from a place where they are quite vulnerable and low and do some work with them, one-to-one work. We are talking about work with neurodiverse individuals as well, on advice, working in conjunction with the neurodiversity hub where we see people going from



HOUSE OF COMMONS

being very reclusive and not engaging to holding down a job within the prison and engaging with the regime.

It is not just about the processes that we have. It is how we can utilise everything, so it is that full, prison-wide approach to it.

Rebecca Hayward: Certainly for us with a large group of people, a large population, we have done a lot of work around understanding what that complicated population of people looks like, what their needs are, as Chris says, and trying to respond to some of that, whether it is our veterans, our first-time people in custody, our people who have personality disorders.

When you govern a prison you begin to understand the vast array of complicated issues that people bring with them into custody. For us, it is about having those risk assessment processes and ways of thinking in place to identify because everybody's case is different. There are themes that we can all identify about what drives self-harm or issues of mental wellbeing in our prisons. Identifying that and responding to is it the key, certainly for us in the largest public sector prison in England and Wales.

Rob Denman: We need to look at the story behind the statistics. There is a disproportionate effect that men who exhibit continual self-harm behaviour throughout their time in custody have on your statistics. To echo some of the stuff that my colleague has said, if I think about Usk, I have 276 men all serving long sentences for serious sexual offending. They come to me with an extremely complex set of challenges, and for some, self-harm has been almost a lifestyle choice. They may have survived the care sector; they may have survived significantly traumatic family events and family abuse, and self-harm is just part of what they do. We try to divert them from that obviously, and some of the therapeutic regimes that we run, the treatment schemes that we run, seek to do that, but these are challenging, difficult and damaged men.

Heather Whitehead: To add, similar to Becky, Parc is a very large prison and, as Amanda said, we filter through individuals with very complex needs into a very concentrated space. As the largest prison in South Wales most of them live at Parc and we have a very high number of men who arrive at Parc with a very risky background in terms of self-harm. We look after children, men convicted of sex offences, we serve the courts for those men and then we also have a train and resettlement function. We must cater across the board.

What works well is good, early days in custody assessments and making sure that we spend enough time up front settling people and trying to understand their needs, while managing the risk of reassessing individuals, which can be quite harmful. We try to make sure that we work through that.

Self-harm remains a very significant challenge for me at Parc. As Rob says, I have a very small number of men who will account for over 20%



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of the incidents. We have some very prolific self-harmers whose needs are very complex and acute. Last year we had seven men sectioned and I have five waiting now.

Some things that might help is a substance misuse service that can meet more effectively the significantly increasing demand. At Parc, from 2019 to now, those receiving psychosocial support from Dyfodol has increased threefold and we have a significant amount of the population on opiate replacement therapy, which clearly impacts self-harm and violence.

There is better provision in England for men with personality disorders and that significantly impacts levels of self-harm at Parc in accessing those services. The length of time it can take for someone to access a secure bed in a health service is too long. The assessments take a long time. Once we have a bed committed to, our timeframes are pretty good, but going through that process can be convoluted and very damaging for that individual's health.

Some things that we try to do to mitigate that risk is we have a dedicated safer custody unit, which is specifically for those individuals who are in crisis or who are awaiting mental health beds, where we can work with health partners to deliver better care, but ultimately a prison is not able to deliver the care and clinical support that that individual needs.

My experience around mental health services is mixed. We have a good relationship with the health board, we are working on an initiative now to allow some of our men to access community-based mental health services because we are short-staffed at Parc in terms of a mental health nursing team, so we are trying to keep that parity with the community. What I do see is fluctuating waiting lists because of that, which is simply about capacity and demand, and sometimes those two do not align continuously.

Q94 Tonia Antoniazzi: I was on the Committee when we made the report five years ago and visited everywhere apart from Berwyn, so I am very aware of the issues and what you have been through and the journey you have been through, particularly with Covid. We talk about mental health, and you spoke well about how things have changed, where you are and what you do with diverse people and veterans.

One of the things that I have a real issue with is how people have contact with family. You talk about neurodiverse people. I have had elderly people who cannot access the system of booking in, so I am booking in a visit with a parent or a family person, and with their issues they are unable to access the outside because of their conditions, whether it is because they are elderly and they do not have a fingerprint to access the system in Parc, that was one of them, or if they are neurodiverse and they do not have the access to the system to get the parent in.

When you have these great whizzbang systems in place, if it is not accessible to a person who is in there because of their age or their



HOUSE OF COMMONS

wellbeing, how are you counteracting that and ensuring they have that access with the outside world, which will help them?

Chair: Keep the answers nice and short because we are up against time.

Heather Whitehead: We do have a biometric system, you are right, but we have workarounds, for people who struggle to access that. I am disheartened to hear that someone has struggled to access that. We have systems to allow people to access visits of course where there are different needs and that goes across all kinds of disability and access issues.

We have a dedicated family support team at Parc and our provision is excellent. We have a high use of video calls where people are quite far away from home, because 19% of my population are from England and struggle to see their families because of the distance that they have to travel. We do lots of video calls, and we do some great work with men, meeting with their children, having their teachers in and having homework clubs and bringing children in for their birthdays and doing those kinds of things, because family contact is so important.

That is an area where we perform well at Parc, and I am disappointed if someone has written to you because they have not been able to access that because we can address that. We have a high availability of visits also, so we should not see men not able to have that family contact.

Q95 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** It was a while ago. How does that transition to another prison work? If you have had that good relationship with a family how does that then work if you send somebody to Berwyn or maybe to Cardiff?

Heather Whitehead: We would rarely do that. We might send them to Rob, but generally we would receive from Cardiff or Swansea. I suppose in some circumstances, we may send to Berwyn for a local release but generally not. That for me is through good quality offender management. We have one core offender manager who should do a comprehensive handover for all our individuals who are moving either for a progressive move to access interventions or for a resettlement plan. All that planning happens before individuals move.

We have some great examples, particularly with children, where we have moved children into secure children's homes for example and my team still visit months later to ensure we have that good transition. All those things you cannot pick up in a written record, we are able to talk to the staff and do some of that, and handholding for those kids who need that support from someone they trust and know.

Chair: Has the question been answered fully?

Tonia Antoniazzi: Yes.

Chair: If there is anything to add from any other prison.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Rebecca Hayward: Very quickly, I think we have a very digitalised system in place and acknowledge that there will be times, whether it is people in prison or families outside, when people struggle to use that. We do have ways to work around it. Perhaps sometimes it just takes a while to pick up that there are issues, but I can think of numerous examples where we have provided those solutions.

Q96 **Chair:** I am going to bring in Rob Roberts but just very quickly, Heather Whitehead, about seven or eight years ago I visited Parc prison and I saw an amazing project that brings prisoners together with their children. I think it was an award-winning project. Does that still happen at the prison?

Heather Whitehead: Yes. We have a lot of ways in which we bring prisoners and their children together, but we will also get teachers to talk to the men about their children's work at schools and things like that. All those things are happening. I think you are talking about Invisible Walls, which does still exist and operates now in several other Welsh prisons.

Chair: Cardiff, yes. Rob, over to you. Nice and brief.

Q97 **Mr Roberts:** Good morning, everybody. I have a lot of things to cover, so I shall start off. Mr Denman said it is often about the story behind the statistics, which is super-important, and Ms Hayward said when we were talking about Ben Lake's question it is not all about self-harm, but it is about general wellbeing. There are a lot of things that happen in prison that are unquantifiable. I want to talk about inspections, which is everyone's favourite word, I am sure.

Dr Rob Jones, author of "Prisons in Wales 2022 Factfile" said: "One thing I often struggle with is looking at an inspection that says that things have improved and then looking at some of the data I get and seeing that these things sometimes do not speak to one another". So, the inspection reports do not always align with the experiences of those serving sentences. We have had a lot of evidence from prisoners as well. How effective do you think the current system of inspection is in assessing with the hope of improving prison performance? As you have just gone through we were there on feedback day. Was it all you hoped?

Amanda Corrigan: Yes, it was really good. I think they are very effective. I think they are frustratingly effective at times, because they do unearth things that sometimes as a team we are not aware of as happening. I am slightly frustrated. I do not know if it is appropriate, but if the inspections had all been poor, I am not sure if they would have been challenged. I think they probably would have been accepted as evidence, had they been poor, but because they have been good it has been challenged. Our statistics completely support.

They said it was a safe prison. Assaults on staff are the lowest in our comparator group. Assaults on prisoners I think is the second lowest in our comparator group. Self-harm is the second lowest in our comparator



group, so what is going on? The statistics—you experience, you walk through the prison—all support what HMIP find.

Sometimes we feel that there is a theme that HMIP are pursuing and it was purposeful activity for a long time, because they felt that there was a torpor within the service in responding to Covid and bringing things back to where they should be, so they were very hard on purposeful activity in all the prisons they visited and exacting in their analysis. I think they do a very scrupulous job and give us quite a difficult time.

When you look at the number of prisons currently that are in back-to-back urgent notification, special measures, there are a lot of extreme measures being used with frequency in England, but none of the prisons in Wales have been affected.

Q98 Mr Roberts: Because we are talking about Cardiff, just before you came in we were discussing the visit that we had there recently. Probably the most poignant part of that day, and I think everyone who was there would agree, was when we spoke to some of the prisoners there was not a dry eye in the room. For some of these physically intimidating men to be pouring their hearts out about their hopes for the future, it touched everyone in the room. It was an amazing experience. Does the inspection regime capture the essence of things such as that?

Amanda Corrigan: They start the process of a huge prisoner survey—so they speak to prisoners a lot and that is a useful resource for us to take away, because it would usually reveal some stuff that we need to work on going forward. They talk to a lot of prisoners as they go around.

Q99 Mr Roberts: Mr Denman, inspections?

Rob Denman: Inspections. I have been through a number in my years. I would say everyone likes a bad news story, but no one likes a good news story. I suppose that is what sells newspapers. What I would say is, the inspectorate come to us as critical friends and it can sometimes feel that they are quite critical. I think they do an amazing job and certainly since I have been in Wales the inspections I have been involved in are more than reflective of what happens on the ground.

On your point about being in a room full of physically intimidating men, if you indulge me I will tell you a brief story. I was leaving Prescoed about a month ago one evening and there were two large men who I know to be from the Travelling community—very big, intimidating men. One was reading a sign, and the other one was repeating what he had read out. As I walked past he said, “Oh, evening, Governor. He was just teaching me to read”. Now, for someone like that to say something like that to me, to expose themselves in such a way, I think speaks volumes for the quality of what we do in Welsh prisons. I would say we deserve our reports, and they are from a critical friend, and I think the inspectorate does a good job.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Simpson: I think it is important to point out, as Amanda said, the amount of prisoners that are spoken to certainly at Swansea last March when we had our own inspection, the report that we received back that showed the results of those surveys and focus groups and so on, showed a very clear picture and showed a picture consistent with what I thought would be found. That for me is the good thing, but HMIP do not just rely on that.

They then triangulate by going to speak to the Department and looking at the evidence and the minutes of the meetings—so they do triangulate that data and I think it is done in a very fair way. If there is something that they are unsure of they will come to speak to us, and we will have that conversation, for us to be able to add clarity. It is done over a period of a week, so they are not going to experience everything that the prison has to offer but if they are in doubt or they have questions they will come to us and speak to us. We then have a chance to share what does take place and to put them in the picture, so I find it a very fair process.

Rebecca Hayward: I agree. I think that the results of an inspection, when you look at that report, give a very comprehensive and effective view of what is happening in a prison and what the outcomes for people are. If you look at raw data—which is a very small set, particularly if you look at publicly available data, not what we have access to—it does not tell the story of how the good work that we all do in our prisons in Wales is translating into outcomes for prisoners.

Q100 **Mr Roberts:** Interesting. So if you could change one thing, what would you change about the inspection regime and the way things are reported?

Rebecca Hayward: I am not sure I would change anything. I think that the methodology for inspections has evolved, as it does, and in recent times we have been consulted as governors about how we feel about that changing, whether it is the way that the expectations are written and if they meet the current way that we do business and the current outcomes that we expect.

We have seen the introduction of leadership as a section in inspection reports, which I think perhaps we were nervous about, but it has not been perhaps the way that it might have come across. It has been another useful tool to understand the impact of senior leadership work in a prison. I think that the prisoner survey particularly is incredibly effective in understanding how people experience life in prison, to the point where I have used it myself at intervening periods between inspections to measure progress. I personally do not have any significant issues around changing it.

Q101 **Mr Roberts:** That is interesting. One of the people that we have had before us previously, Katie Fraser, from Women in Prison, talked about Welsh women serving in English prisons. She said: "sometimes what I read in a report is not backed up by what I actually see in prisons...often, I read these reports and think, 'Oh, it's great! Things do seem to be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

improving, definitely. There is a focus on looking at self-harm rates, but it does not mirror what women are actually telling us". Context is everything. Do the inspection reports adequately capture the content and the nuances as well as they should?

Rebecca Hayward: I think they do. I think back to your point there is a whole set of data, consultation, qualitative information that is looked at to come to a conclusion from those inspection teams that spend time with us. Some of that is the views of prisoners, but not all of it.

Q102 **Mr Roberts:** A private prison. Are you inspected in exactly the same way, or are there any changes in the way that you are inspected and reported on?

Heather Whitehead: I am inspected in the same way, but Parc is inspected in two ways because it has children and adults. The children's inspection cycle is much more regular, as you would expect. It used to be annual. It is now biannual with the independent review of progress every year. I have the team in at least once a year at Parc and then the adult side would be exactly the same as the rest of my colleagues in Wales. I would second what they have said.

There is a huge survey. Everyone has their chance to have a say, but equally there are focus groups of individuals and as much as data is only one piece of information I completely agree so is the qualitative information that comes from prisoners. Of course, with any inspection that is a snapshot at a period in time. There is always going to be a limitation about it. You can extrapolate it over three years and expect to see the same thing. There is always going to be that limitation.

Can I answer the question you asked Becky, which was: would there be one thing that I would change? I have had this conversation with the Chief Inspector. For children particularly the quality and provision of education is so important. I have had a conversation about whether they would consider measuring both what the prison provides in terms of good, meaningful enrichment activity for children to grow and thrive from what is an assessment of education provision and education quality. I think both are important. Although we do get a measure of both, they are part of one area of the inspection framework.

Chair: Very briefly, please, Rob.

Q103 **Mr Roberts:** I will ask one of you, because hopefully the answer is the same across the board. Mr Simpson, how much notice do you get when inspectors are coming in? Do you always get notice and when you do get notice do you tell your men that it is happening?

Chris Simpson: Yes, we do inform people that there will be an inspection. It is very little notice. Ours was an unannounced inspection, which really is unannounced. I literally have the phone call on a Monday morning to say that they will be with us, and this was on the Friday afternoon, they will be with us on the Monday morning. They turn up and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

then they go straight away into the process of the evidence-gathering on week one and then the inspection on week two. There is no warning. It is a genuine snapshot of how you are.

Amanda Corrigan: For mine recently they phoned me up Monday morning and 15 minutes later they were in the jail. There is nothing you can do about that.

Mr Roberts: Sounds like a lot of fun. Thank you very much.

Chair: It is almost the equivalent of a mystery shopper.

Q104 **Virginia Crosbie:** Thank you, Chair and chroeso. Thank you so much for coming here in person. It is very much appreciated. My questions relate to staffing. The recent Independent Monitoring Board report talks about staffing shortages in all the prisons apart from Swansea. When there are staff shortages which services get cut first and how does that make it so much harder for you to have purposeful activity?

Amanda Corrigan: We are currently overrecruited, so that is not to say that we do not have staff shortages on a given day. We send some staff out on detached duty to support other sites and with sickness, training and other things going on you might find yourself short of staff on a given day, but we are overrecruited, so we are not understaffed, just to make that point.

It would vary. You have a certain number of tasks that are flexible tasks, so the flexible tasks would take the hit first. You have a regime management plan that will guide and control that, so you can do a certain amount when you have a certain amount of staff in and then you will flex that so that the same people are not impacted, and you spread and minimise that impact as much as you can.

The first thing you do is you get work and education out and get them into their activities, because that is the most important thing to do and then you would reconvene and have a look at what you can do with what you have left. Mandatory drug testing would possibly be dropped, there might be some work in the decency team that might get dropped because you need to redeploy those staff, there might be some stuff in the safety team that might need to get dropped for an hour or a morning while you supplement other areas of the jail. The very last thing that would be stopped would be activities. Work and education always goes ahead.

Sometimes in my own jail I might be short of staff on the evening duty, so I might bring them back a little early from work and education to ensure that they get their hour of association, they can get a shower, get a cell clean, have a chat with each other and relax before collecting their meal and finishing the day, but that would be a major impact.

Heather Whitehead: Similar to Amanda Corrigan. We are overrecruiting. I am not quite fully staffed. We anticipate being fully staffed probably late summer and staffing is a challenge. When you are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

recruiting at pace, we talked earlier about what makes prisons safer and staff-prisoner relationships being so important. Having an inexperienced staffing group is an operational challenge and that is something that we are experiencing at Parc in trying to put the right provision in to support them, to onboard them well and to support them during that first six to 12 months so that they can do their role effectively.

In terms of how the regime is impacted, almost identical to Amanda Corrigan. There is a framework within which we make those decisions. We make sure at weekly meetings that we balance the impact across all areas. We prioritise purposeful activity as much as possible and where we do have to curtail regime because of on-the-day challenges that might get thrown at us, such as individuals needing to go to hospital for appointments that are last minute or medical emergencies—I have an older population too—those things can blindside us a little bit and then we have to redeploy our resources.

We would do some similar things, maybe say to the men, “Come back an hour or two early so you are not missing out on all of your opportunity to book your visits or to order your canteen,” and do all those things that are important to them, but work and education are sacrosanct. We protect those at all costs because that is a benefit for the majority.

Rebecca Hayward: The same methodology and priorities. At Berwyn we are not yet fully staffed, although the picture is vastly improved to what it has been. We recognise that delivering the things that are important to us but consistently is important, so that regime management planning process is used. Our regime is designed around putting a lot of activity into the core day, less in the evenings, because we know that we have had challenges around staffing. Now we have an opportunity to think about that again, but maximising purposeful activity is the core part of that plan for us.

Chris Simpson: As you mentioned, Swansea have been blessed with the staff provision, but that has not stopped us from having our staffing reduced within that because as Amanda Corrigan pointed out earlier because we were so well off those that were less fortunate than us we were supplying detached duty. That does impact what we can deliver but much the same methodology as already stated.

We would look to absolutely keep the activity and education onboard. I think everyone here would say that the bed watches and the escorts all tend to come along at once as well, so that is one of those things that does have an impact. Staff sickness rates: I happen to have several staff with serious illnesses at the moment and that will impact. There are so many factors that will impact the staffing of the establishment, but we are up to our total staffed figure now.

Rob Denman: Again we are in the fortunate position of being fully staffed. We do operate a regime management plan so if we must reduce the regime for any reason we can do so in a formal, constructive manner.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The men would be involved in that. Over the past weekend we had five medical escorts go out because I have an ageing population, but the men were kept informed, and we said that we had to do this. We had to restrict their regime and they were absolutely onside with that, and it all passed well. The detached duty as well, that has an impact, but we are a national service and I want to support my colleagues elsewhere in the estate through detached duty to ensure that they can provide meaningful regimes for those men and women in those prisons as well.

Q105 Virginia Crosbie: Following on from that, the report said that your staff retention was poor, and we have 40% of staff saying that they intend to leave the prison service in the next five years. Presumably this has an impact if they are leaving within five years in your team. You spoke about how important the team is. What is being done in terms of trying to get officers to stay?

Rob Denman: We are lucky in Wales. We are lucky in Usk and Prescoed. We do not suffer that. People tend to stay with us as an establishment for a long time and have long, lengthy and fulfilling careers. I accept that is the case elsewhere in the UK and I would say probably some of the challenges are regional. It is to do with the cost of living for some people.

Most of my service was in central London. I did a long time at Wandsworth; I did a long time at High Down and the remuneration packages for staff meant that they were not able to pay their rent. That was not an aid to retention, but the recent pay rise has made a significant impact on that. Some of the measures that have been introduced around staff safety such as PAVA and so on have made a difference and retention rates are improving and recruitment rates are improving nationwide.

Q106 Virginia Crosbie: Mr Simpson, has the prisons strategy White Paper made a difference in Swansea?

Chris Simpson: Certainly. From the staffing element we have one of the best retention rates in the country. It has not been something that has been impactful on that. Other elements of the staffing White Paper have impacted greatly such as the introduction of employment hubs and the Employment Advisory Board with an independent chair who comes in to assist us with our work. That leads us into great things in the community and with businesses to attract employment opportunities on release and so on.

There are elements of the White Paper, such as staffing for Swansea, which was the previous element. It has one of the best retention rates in the country. It is somewhere people want to be. The staff-prisoner relationships are good, which I think in Wales you will find as an underpinning factor. We have spoken about the staff-prisoner relationships, but I think they underpin quite a lot. The retention of staff is very good. Our communication is very good with our prisoners, and it is telling them the story and letting them know what the situation is.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Much as we have said about Covid, much as we have said about changes to regime, no matter what it is, there is that communication and that relationship that I think benefits the Welsh prisons

Rebecca Hayward: It is a combination of internal and external factors. There is no doubt that the pay award has helped. We are starting to see a much more diverse group of colleagues come back to join us as new prison officers.

There is the work we have done around our new colleague mentors, specifically identifying people to welcome our new colleagues into the team and support them in their first six to 12 months. We have done work around even small things like inviting people's families, when they are new joiners, to come into the prison for a short tour and experience the environment so that they can be supportive of their family members when they become prison officers. It is bringing all of that together, I think, as well as focusing on exit surveys with people when they have chosen to move on to something else, to understand why, how much of that is within our gift and how much is not, and coming up with a specific strategy for our prison to maximise the opportunity we have to keep people with us. It is working.

Q107 **Virginia Crosbie:** Good to hear; thank you. At Parc, how are you maximising the experience of other officers with those who are less experienced?

Heather Whitehead: We have a well-developed mentor scheme already in place and we have done some work around having SLT coaches aligned with new staff as well. I am just about to expand that whole offer to a new buddy scheme where individuals will be buddied up as well. We are able to look at how we can take someone in a supportive way through that first year, balancing that with additional training because of course we do all of our own recruitment and training as well, as a private prison. It is a challenge when you are doing it at such volume.

Similarly, if the MoJ is going to run an effective mixed economy in terms of prisons, private and public, there is a real need for us to all be cognisant of where we are in terms of pay points so that one party does not lose pace. We have struggled with that in the private sector and that has impacted retention, where we have lost staff to public sector. We also have staff who return. A bit like Ms Hayward said, we have had people come back.

One of the things we can do that is quite different and unique in the private sector is look at our total rewards package and localise it. We do lots of work to understand why people are leaving, lots of engagement with staff to understand what their experiences are and what would make that better, and we are able to be agile in then shifting that total reward package for staff to make sure that it is attractive for them and that it targets the things that they think would enable them to stay at Parc.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q108 **Virginia Crosbie:** Thank you. And in Cardiff?

Amanda Corrigan: Resignation rates are low at Cardiff. I think this month I have had more people asking to come back than looking to go. That is good.

Q109 **Virginia Crosbie:** What is their reason?

Amanda Corrigan: Sometimes a little bit of “the grass is greener”. Sometimes, even though the shift pattern is quite flexible—there is weekend working and evening working—people think that they might be able to do better elsewhere and then find out that they cannot and seek to come back. Sometimes that is quite a positive news story, when people see people coming back.

The pay rise definitely did help post-Covid. As a business planning priority, I had staff development and wellbeing because when you are in crisis management, staff development and wellbeing is the first thing that goes out the window. You are just managing the situation and not managing your staffing group. We have worked hard on that.

We are a pilot site for structured supervision, which is upskilling band 4 staff to get alongside band 3 staff and support and upskill them and provide support in a lot of different ways, which HMIP recognised as good practice and will be highlighted in our report. I started a staff council, and we had a staff development group so that people were exposed to shadowing opportunities. It is a big organisation, geographically and in terms of scope. There are a lot of opportunities out there. Just opening people’s eyes to the fact that there are opportunities, and you can develop this and take it in a different direction does help as well.

Q110 **Chair:** On the subject of balance between experienced staff and inexperienced staff, when Terry McCarthy from the Prisoner Officers’ Association was giving evidence to us he answered a question about unhealthy relationships between staff and prisoners. He said that there is a problem not just in Welsh prisons but across all prisons of a lack of sufficient experienced staff to guide younger staff, I think he said, to quote him, in the difference between right and wrong and at what point you are crossing a line. Is that a fair comment from Mr McCarthy? Does anybody want to lead on that?

Rebecca Hayward: As a prison governor with quite an inexperienced group of staff, if we are talking about right and wrong in terms of corruption and things like that, I do not think it requires an experienced colleague to point that out. I do think it definitely helps where you have experienced colleagues who are professional and effective in their work, who are passing that culture forwards to people who are starting their careers.

A lot of the work we are currently doing is on how to almost manufacture that experience because we have had high volumes of new colleagues join us, much like Heather. It is thinking differently about how we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

effectively pass that knowledge and experience on and give our new staff confidence. I do not think it is quite as straightforward as “experienced colleagues working with new people equals great outcomes”.

Q111 Chair: Without wanting to get into any individual cases whatsoever, just with regards to HMP Berwyn, there has been a fair bit of media reporting of some of the issues there. Would you say there has been a particular problem at Berwyn, or is what some of the tabloids have been reporting on in terms of relationships between staff and prisoners something that is common across the estate?

Rebecca Hayward: What you see with Berwyn is probably the same story repeated many, many, many times in different places, which gives, I think, a sensation of there being a much bigger issue. We have had evidenced cases of wrongdoing where there has been follow-up via criminal processes. I do not think that is particularly different from other prisons in England or Wales. It is still a very tiny minority of colleagues who join us who find themselves in that spot. The vast majority of our colleagues are professionals.

Q112 Chair: Is there an issue about younger female officers needing protection when they start these roles?

Rebecca Hayward: As someone who joined the service as a young female officer, I think that I did not particularly need support. I draw on my own experience. We do a significant amount in our service now for all colleagues who are at that point of joining to open their eyes to the risks and vulnerabilities, whether it is how people interact on social media around things because that is a part of our lives now, or just about how to build those productive relationships with people and how to set your own boundaries. We do that for everyone. Probably what we see is that we have a small minority of stories that are repeated many, many times.

Rob Denman: May I make a point, sorry, Chair?

Q113 Chair: Yes, Mr Denman. I am going to ask Amanda Corrigan because I think you wanted to say something on that question.

Amanda Corrigan: I just bristled slightly. We have all been women who have joined the job. It is challenging, but it is challenging for anybody. It is an unusual environment, and you have to learn to adapt to that and find your way, and having experienced colleagues around you can help you. I do lots of work with women coming into the service, talking about drawing your line and your professional boundaries and scope. You are an officer when you join, you are not a woman anymore. We are all officers. Some young men, especially working in a local jail, have grown up in the same neighbourhoods as the guys who are now on the other side of the door, and sometimes there is a bit of a bravado and a misjudgement in that relationship as well. It is something that anybody could be prone to, that we are very much alive to and that we have lots of strategies and interventions to be able to support people with.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q114 **Chair:** Thank you. Mr Denman?

Rob Denman: Sorry, Chair. I was just going to say that I spent about five years seconded to the Met Police investigating corruption in London prisons and, news story-wise, there is a certain amount of salaciousness around it. We investigated a number of former colleagues and there is a quite even spread across the demographic. I would say that there are, or there were, just as many older, middle-aged men who fell foul of being involved in inappropriate relationships as younger women. I think that the concentration on female colleagues is unfair, to be honest.

Chair: That is a very helpful corrective. As you were saying, Ms Haywood, there has been a lot of reporting of some of these cases.

Q115 **Mr Roberts:** Just on that point, in the police service there is direct entry. You can come in as an Inspector or as a Superintendent in very rare circumstances. Is it your experience that most people who rise to your positions have started as an officer on the floor, or is it that you tend to have people who come in as maybe a Deputy Governor or at that level? Is it a rise-up thing or is it an "insert" thing, generally?

Heather Whitehead: Mixed economy.

Amanda Corrigan: Yes, it is a mixture of both.

Chris Simpson: Both.

Q116 **Mr Roberts:** Do you find that people who start on the floor are more effective as governors as they come up, or not?

Heather Whitehead: I hope not, because I am a direct entry.

Amanda Corrigan: There you go, you have the mixed economy in front of you.

Mr Roberts: Absolutely. Very good.

Chair: Anything more to add? Otherwise, I want to bring in Tonia because Tonia does need to leave early.

Q117 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Thank you, Chair. Talking about accommodation when prisoners leave, we have heard that the type of accommodation that they go into—basically, the squalid conditions and the high rate of alcohol and substance misuse surrounding them—is meaning that they are re-offending and then coming back into the system. Do you agree with that assessment and is that something that you are seeing? Because they do not have the appropriate accommodation, are they coming back in? I will start with Amanda.

Amanda Corrigan: Accommodation on release is a huge issue. It is a huge issue in the community also. There just is insufficient accessible and affordable accommodation for families out there, and certainly for ex-offenders and people leaving prison there just is not sufficient out there. It is a huge issue for us and one that we cannot control within the prison.



it is a concern, and it is a worry, and it definitely has an impact on rehabilitation. Being homeless is a complicating factor and sometimes factors into people being recalled into custody and causes issues there.

Some of the accommodation that people are referred to, the multi-occupancy buildings—I will not mention any names—do have high levels of alcohol and drug use. If you are trying to abstain, if you have left, you have done the ISFL, the Incentivised Substance Free Living, and you have gone through all the mental preparation, and then the only accommodation available to you is there, that dents confidence, it dents resolve and some people fail at that first hurdle. In terms of supporting desistance, it is very unhelpful.

Q118 Tonia Antoniazzi: Obviously, there are multiple agencies involved in this approach. You have your probation people, you have your housing authorities, and you have your local authority. I am aware of that because I have friends who work in those areas. It is problematic. Housing is an issue for everybody, not just prisoners coming out.

I just want to know what additional support is needed. How do we address this? What are your ideas, particularly Rob, because you are nearer to it with your prisoners as they are in an open prison? What are the issues? What do we need to do? What has to be done to address this, basically?

Rob Denman: We are quite fortunate with the men leaving Prescoed because a lot of them are in ROTL placements, they are working out and they already have a settled home life or settled accommodation to go to. With Usk it can be an issue because all of our men are under MAPP arrangements somewhere. There is far more of a multi-agency approach to trying to find somewhere to accommodate them on release and a lot of them go into approved premises anyway.

You have alluded to it. When I sit in on MAPPA boards, and I sit at SMB level, I see housing colleagues who have nowhere. The choice is that they house that man who is a MAPPA 3 leaving my place, or they house a family who are in bed and breakfast accommodation. It is difficult. The level of stock is difficult for social housing.

Amanda Corrigan: It is a very different problem at Rob's place. Discharge and leaving the prison is a much more planned process. You have time. You know that date is coming, and you have a long run up to it. In places like mine and Chris's, I am discharging 130 men a month and the average length of stay is four to six weeks. That is not a lot of time.

Q119 Tonia Antoniazzi: That is the thing. In Cardiff and Swansea, you are having that high turnover, and local people as well, and they are just going back into the same habits and the same issues.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Simpson: It is beyond our control to a certain degree, but we have to ensure that we are on the right boards, and we are committing to the right engagement to try to highlight this as often as we can.

I suppose it is down to us to try to do something in a slightly different way. I am currently trying to set up a workshop. This has come about, as I say, through White Paper stuff, the Employment Advisory Board. We have an employer in the community who wants to come in and make a considerable investment in the establishment, but who also understands these issues and is willing to pay a more realistic wage to train people for employment on release within the window manufacture area.

They will enter into a compact with us where they will save a vast majority of their money. Most of the money will go to help their family at home, because of cost of living, and then the other chunk will go to save for accommodation on release and transport costs on release, so that their ability to maintain that employment is there. That is the key. If you have not got that accommodation in place, then the employment suffers as well, and they get that backward step scenario.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Thanks, Chair.

Q120 **Chair:** Very good. Recent statistics that I saw suggested that employment outcomes for prisoners leaving prisons across England and Wales were generally getting better. Is that true for the Welsh prisons as well?

Rob Denman: Absolutely, yes.

Chris Simpson: Yes, very much so.

Q121 **Chair:** Does that feel like a temporary phenomenon, or is it part of a longer-term trend where basically you are getting very good at what you are doing in terms of preparing prisoners for going outside?

Amanda Corrigan: I think we are much better. It may well plateau. You cannot get a job if you do not have a house. If you have nowhere to live, you cannot get a job. There will come a point where that will cut us off, I think.

Rob Denman: The challenge for me, Chair, is men convicted of sexual offending. Finding employment for them post-release is difficult. We do an awful lot through the EAB to try to engage with employers and potential employers to get those men into settled employment. That is difficult. Nationwide, that is a difficult picture for all MCOSO prisons.

Q122 **Chair:** Are you encountering many problems for prisoners with lower-level CRB information being able to get suitable employment when they leave? I am not talking about the higher-level sexual offences.

Rob Denman: Are you talking about a spectrum of offending?

Chair: I am talking about prisoners generally.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Rob Denman: Prisoners generally.

Chair: In terms of the CRB checks, if we still call them that, the employment checks.

Chris Simpson: We are taking away some of the mystifying element of that through the Employment Advisory Board. I have people sitting on my Employment Advisory Board who are direct employers in the community, who sit there and make an offer of employment during that meeting. It is a much better process. They have bought in to the processes that we are trying to achieve. They have bought in to that as a way of working and will make genuine employment offers. We see it now. We have had people go out. The people in the room who are making those offers are there and it is a realistic thing, and they understand the risks and they understand the processes because we can discuss those in that forum.

Rob Denman: At Prescoed I have employers approaching me, looking to employ men.

Chair: There are enormous skill shortages out there across the economy. Apologies if I was unclear at all. Rob, please.

Q123 **Mr Roberts:** Thank you. I will talk a little bit about population. In October, the prison population apparently reached over 88,000 in England and Wales, and there were less than 500 spare places in the whole system. The Ministry of Justice says that it will rise to 94,500 by March 2025. How confident are you in your establishment's ability to cope with such a rise in the prison population?

Amanda Corrigan: It is challenging. There are no two ways about it. We have not been asked to take more. I hold 779 and I have not been asked to take any more than 779. We would not overcrowd in that respect, would stay to the number we have, and people would be bumped to where there were spaces. I do not habitually lock out. I am a pressure valve for the south-west and West Midlands. It is challenging, there are various measures that have been invoked in order to relieve some of that pressure and we are coping so far.

Heather Whitehead: Similarly, we have an agreed operational capacity, and we are not expected to go beyond that. Last year we did bring some additional prisoner places online in response, to support the wider pressures.

The impact that has, of course, is on the percentage of men living at Parc who are from England or out of area. It grows and that can cause stability challenges, not only because we have to move the population around to accommodate those additional people but then, of course, all the challenges of being far away from home and being, as Amanda described, bumped around a system to where the spaces are. It can be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

disconcerting for those individuals, and it can destabilise already complex individuals.

From our perspective, I am confident, with our recruitment plans, our staffing plans and our delivery models, that we are able to cope when the prison is full. We are never far off being full anyway. We are used to operating at that level.

Q124 **Mr Roberts:** Do you ever go over full? What happens if you go over?

Heather Whitehead: No, we do not.

Q125 **Mr Roberts:** Never happens?

Heather Whitehead: No. I am not a local prison generally anyway; I only receive from the courts for men convicted of sex offences, and we always keep spaces. When we declare how many spaces we have, we always keep spaces to make sure that we can meet the court demands there, but those numbers are generally very low. I would receive from other prisons. There is a system where you declare the number of spaces available, and you would never be allocated over that.

Q126 **Mr Roberts:** Has anyone had ever had a circumstance where you were overcapacity? It does not happen?

Amanda Corrigan: No, it does not work like that.

Q127 **Mr Roberts:** There are safeguards in the system to stop that?

Amanda Corrigan: If more people are in court than Bristol can hold, then Bristol will send the residual to me, and I will take them. If there are more in court than Birmingham can accommodate, I will take the additional.

Q128 **Mr Roberts:** Cardiff, as I recall, is a transitory prison. You are getting people in and then generally moving them on.

Amanda Corrigan: Yes. We will hold them until their next court appearance, usually.

It absolutely does cause problems. I hold regular prisoner forums, and when the numbers of men from out of area go up I hold forums with the men from out of area just to gauge how it feels when they land and what the issues are. Obviously, there is anxiety about family contact and family visits. How are they going to get here? When will I get to speak to them? We do things slightly differently. Each jail does things just very slightly differently, which can be unhelpful. The lucky thing is that we are a safe and stable prison and that usually reassures people quite quickly, but if we were not in that position then it would be very difficult.

Q129 **Mr Roberts:** Ms Hayward, you mentioned earlier on, I think, that Berwyn is almost at capacity.

Rebecca Hayward: Yes.



Q130 Mr Roberts: With the population predicted to go up by—gosh, what is that—nearly 10%, does that concern you at all? Do you think that you are going to need to expand? What are your thoughts on that?

Rebecca Hayward: My thoughts are that we will stay at 2,000 places, simply because I do not think there is any opportunity for us to get any bigger and to be able to offer the things that would be there basically for people. No, I do not have any concerns about getting any bigger than 2,000.

Chris Simpson: It is the same with me. We have an operational capacity. I have a certain amount of beds. Once those beds are full, it is my job to do the effective management of my population, to hold them safely and to maximise the amount of beds that I have available to me.

As I said earlier with the CSRA situation, the cell share risk assessment, if I deem that it is not safe to share accommodation and it is only a double cell that I have available because all my single cells are appropriately being used, then I have to make that decision to block that space. I would make that decision and I would never look to go above that. It is about the safety of what we do at the same time.

Q131 Mr Roberts: One of the things we noticed when we were in Cardiff—I do not know if this is constant—was that the double cell that we went in was the same size and shape as the single cells, you just had a bunk bed in there and you expected two people. Everyone is nodding. That is the same all the way across.

It is a common trigger for violence, apparently, as has been identified. Submissions from prisoners highlighted lack of privacy, lack of hygiene, having to eat two feet away from open toilets and things like this. How big a problem is having to share cells? Is this something that you do an awful lot in your prisons and is it a big issue? Would more space allow you to have more single cells, and would that be a benefit and so on? Mr Denman.

Rob Denman: I have two completely different prisons. Usk is, I think, fourth in the league table of overcrowded prisons in the UK. They are small cells. None of my men eat in their rooms because we have communal dining. That is one of the ways in which we counteract that sense of overcrowding, plus we have, as I have said, a very open and productive regime with a lot of activities.

Prescoed, on the other hand, is an open prison and we are planning at the moment to increase capacity there by 80 beds. They are all single cells. They are not cells, actually; they are rooms of a temporary Portacabin type—an ISO container, if you know what one of those is. It a very high-tech pod that the men all live in, with showers and single beds.

The challenge will be who I am getting in to fill those 80 beds, the men that I am getting in. We specialise at Prescoed in people serving longer sentences because that gives us far more time with them, and they have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

far more time with us to affect those effective resettlement outcomes. We have managed to remain full up to this point and we have plans to fill up those 80 spaces in a safe and productive manner. I am confident that we can meet the challenges ahead.

The service has introduced a number of schemes. There is the Temporary Presumptive Recategorisation Scheme, TPRS, and we are now going through ECSL, where people with 18 days left to serve, under certain criteria, are released early. There are a couple of pressure valves that the service has put in place, and they seem to be working.

Chris Simpson: Can I just make a point as well? When you look at the negatives that are raised in regard to sharing, there are also a lot of positives to be taken from that as well. The loneliness factor for some people is combatted when they share a cell with somebody. There is a support factor. We are very careful and very prescriptive sometimes in who will share with who to provide that support, and people willingly will do that because they see it as a benefit. They get a sense of purpose out of it themselves in helping another individual. I think there are a lot of positives to be taken from the sharing of cells as well.

Mr Roberts: Do I have time?

Chair: Very briefly because we are running up against the deadline.

Q132 **Mr Roberts:** Government have announced a few things to reduce prison populations as well—suspending less than 12-month sentences and so on. Is there any one particular area that you think, gosh, Government could change this particular policy and that would assist with the overcrowding in prisons? You are immediately nodding. You must have an idea of the tip of your tongue. Mr Simpson, what could Government do to change things?

Chris Simpson: Some of the recall processes in some of the short sentences, where somebody comes in for a seven-day sentence—they have to go through that immediately. They might come in to me on a Wednesday and be gone by the end of the week because of the weekend being taken into that consideration. They are there for a matter of a couple of days, where all we are doing is identifying risk, identifying need, and then they are gone again. That extremely short seven-day turnaround is something that impacts on us greatly, takes up the space, and what do we have time to achieve within that seven days?

Mr Roberts: We heard similar things, I think, from the staff in Cardiff as well. Any other suggestions, other than that one thing? Wonderful. Thank you.

Q133 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We are drawing to an end. Could I perhaps end with a couple of quick questions, if I may? I am sorry to return to the theme of conditions for officers but again it is a bit driven by the media, this question, in that there has been some reporting in the last couple of weeks of a particularly nasty attack on an officer at Parc Prison. Last



HOUSE OF COMMONS

week it was covered in the Welsh media. Are those kind of incidents now outliers? How common an experience is it for prison officers in Wales to be the subject of a violent attack? Heather Whitehead, it was Parc Prison I think that incident related to.

Heather Whitehead: It was. That was a very extreme incident, as you will have seen. Violence is a very real challenge for me at Parc and that ranges from low-level violence, staff injured during restraints, to more targeted assaults, but I can confidently say and assure you that those kinds of incidents are definitely outliers and are extremely rare.

Working with children, we do see much higher rates of violence across the whole of the youth custody service because of some of the development issues around child and adolescent behaviour, risk-taking and impulsivity. To be candid, violence is a risk for us, and violence rates are too high. Although HMP found that our systems for managing that and responding to that are good, those instances occur too frequently. We are absolutely committed to working with law enforcement partners to make sure that we fully pursue individuals who exhibit those levels of violence, but equally that we have good multi-agency case management of those individuals so that we can reduce the risk of that, because unfortunately it is a real risk that my staff face.

Q134 Chair: Historically speaking, and the cumulative experience here in front of us is pretty substantial, would you say that there is a picture of a declining trend of attacks on officers, is it as it has always been, or is it going up? I do not know whether any of you can give us a sense of what the trend feels like.

Heather Whitehead: It is probably difficult for us to comment for the whole of Wales.

Amanda Corrigan: Yes. Violence against staff is low, I would say, in Wales. Nationally, across England and Wales—and it is only anecdotal; I have no statistics—it feels like staff are potentially more likely to be attacked than they were perhaps when I joined, 20-odd years ago.

Rob Denman: There are things that influence. I was the Head of Res at High Down Prison when the Spice wave hit us and that was a problematic time. That was a substance being brought into the prison that presented some unique challenges and led to a lot of violence.

Chris Simpson: I suppose one thing that would evidence it is that when we are looking at the violence within the meetings that we have set up and the forums where we look at it, certainly in Swansea, it is at such a low level that we do not have the ability to look at any trend analysis or anything like that. It is looked at on an individual basis. That is all violence. That puts it in perspective, maybe, a little bit.

Q135 Chair: That is helpful. Thank you very much. Coming back to the visit that we did two weeks ago to HMP Cardiff, one of the things that made a real impact on me was hearing the officers and the staff, as we were



HOUSE OF COMMONS

walking around the prison for those couple of hours, talk about respect, the staff's respect of the prisoners and respect from the prisoners to the staff—that theme has been touched on a few times in your answers this morning—and then finishing that visit with the session that Rob has already referred to, where we sat down with a group of prisoners and talked in a remarkably open and frank way, and the prisoners themselves, without any prompting, talked about feeling respected.

A lot of people do not understand a lot of what goes on inside the prison estate and their opinions and perceptions are shaped by films, media stories or whatever. Is this a new phenomenon in prisons, this very frank and open language about being respected and needing to give that respect and receive it, or is that something that is always been a feature of the service across your careers?

Chris Simpson: I think it has always been around, certainly in my experience. I have done 32 years in the job now and when I look at the total expanse of my career, that respect has always been there. We are a community within the community and there is very much that feel in most of the establishments that I have worked in.

I think the respect comes across in the relationships. If people did not feel that those relationships were as good as they are, I do not think you would have experienced what you experienced, with people willing to share, and share to the level they do. Likewise with other people. At graduation ceremonies from the incentivised drug-free living units, there is not a dry eye in the house. It is absolutely right. It is something really powerful to be a part of. That is what we are trying to achieve throughout the establishment. Certainly, I think the relationships are the key.

Chair: Thank you very much. Unless there is anything else to be asked or to be said from yourselves as witnesses, I think we will draw the session to a close. A huge thank you. I am conscious that we have probably only just scratched the surface of some of these very big and challenging issues, but we are grateful for the insights that you have given us and thank you to my colleagues for their questions.