



# HOUSE OF LORDS

## Justice and Home Affairs Committee

### Corrected oral evidence: Prison culture: governance, leadership and staffing

Tuesday 28 January 2025

10.35 am

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Members present: Lord Foster of Bath (The Chair); Lord Bach; Baroness Buscombe; Lord Dubs; Lord Filkin; Baroness Hughes of Stretford; Lord McInnes of Kilwinning; Baroness Meacher; Baroness Prashar; Lord Sandhurst; Lord Tope.

Evidence Session No. 7

Heard in Public

Questions 93 - 107

#### Witnesses

[I](#): Julia Killick CBE, former governor, HM Prison Service; Clare Pearson, Operations Director and former prison governor, HM Prison Service; Professor Lynn Saunders OBE, Professor of Applied Criminology, University of Derby, and former governor, HM Prison Service; Saj Zafar, leadership psychologist and former governor, HM Prison Service.

#### USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on [www.parliamentlive.tv](http://www.parliamentlive.tv).

## Examination of witnesses

Julia Killick, Clare Pearson, Professor Lynn Saunders, and Saj Zafar.

Q93 **The Chair:** Welcome to the seventh session of the Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee inquiry into prison governance. We are delighted to have four witnesses before us for the session today, and I would be grateful if each of you could just very quickly introduce yourself.

**Julia Killick:** I joined the Prison Service in 1998 as a direct-entry governor. I cut my teeth at Feltham, before running an immigration removal centre and a cat C trainer, and finally Holloway before retiring.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I joined the Prison Service in 1991 on the accelerated promotion scheme. I have managed four prisons and worked in 10. The final four were as governing governor. They were mainly cat C but also local prisons.

**Clare Pearson:** Good morning. I joined the Prison Service on the accelerated promotion scheme in 1999. I worked in 10 prisons. I governed four public sector prisons and also contract-managed a private sector prison. I was in the Prison Service for around 21 years.

**Saj Zafar:** Good morning. I joined the Prison Service in 1994 as a forensic psychologist before joining the accelerated promotion scheme in 2000. I went on to work at Scrubs, Pentonville and Feltham, and retired at The Mount seven years later.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. You are all very welcome.

Q94 **Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** Welcome, and thank you very much for coming to speak to us. Within the scope of this inquiry, one of the distinctive strands that we are particularly interested in is the experience of women in the prison system, as prisoners but also, particularly, as officers, and most particularly, because of our focus, as women in leadership positions. I am really pleased to see four women leaders or ex-leaders here with us today to help with that.

Just broadly, the first general question that I would like to ask before getting into a couple of more detailed nuances is how you see the role of the prison governor and whether—and, if so, how—your experience as a woman governor has influenced your understanding of that role. We have four people and do not have the time for each of you to answer—but, on this general one, perhaps I could ask each of you to comment briefly on that, and then I will dig down a little deeper.

**Julia Killick:** The role of a prison governor is about managing risk. It is an ultimate people job and is about influencing the fair treatment of staff, prisoners and visitors. Running a female prison is a very different job to running a male prison. The risk and the type of behaviour that you have to manage are very different.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** The prison governor's role is for the safety, security, operational management and day-to-day running of a prison. It is primarily

overseen by public protection, and that is the key focus. Everything that you do is concerned with public protection.

In terms of how it shapes you, as we have already said, as part of the accelerated promotion scheme, you are almost groomed and pointed in the right direction in terms of what you should be thinking about, what you should be doing and how you should do the job. My previous background was in social work. That underpinned my motivation for the role and the work, and, I hope, influenced the way that I carried out the job.

**Clare Pearson:** Not to repeat anything that my colleagues have said, there is also an aspect of leading a prison, whereby you take on the role as the figurehead and the person who is responsible for the moral standards of that particular institution—your own standards of behaviour, and the expectations of your staff team and of the prisoners who you are also responsible for. A huge aspect of the role is around safety. Everything that you do is focused on safety. It is absolutely about risk management, but safety more broadly and protection of the public.

**Saj Zafar:** Just to add to my colleagues, my perspective is slightly different. I was once asked what the challenges were of being a prison governor, and I said, “Young, Asian, Muslim and Pakistani”. I was one of the first to come into the Prison Service at that level, so my challenges were entirely different. I found that, respectfully, staff struggled to accept me as somebody who was in a leading position, and so most of my time was spent in building those relationships, building that trust and getting them to respect and accept that I was in charge, or that I was a figurehead. That is the slightly different element to what my colleagues are saying.

**Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** I could see some of your colleagues nodding, though. Although you have other characteristics that people may find challenging, being a woman was something that all of our visitors today related to.

**Saj Zafar:** Yes.

**Julia Killick:** Yes, absolutely.

**Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** Just digging a little deeper, could you think about and tell us what you see as the particular challenges, and also perhaps the opportunities, associated with being a woman governor, perhaps particularly, but not exclusively, in men’s prisons?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** The challenges are establishing credibility, to start with. From my perspective, although it is difficult to believe now, being young, female and, without wanting to be too immodest about this, relatively bright was quite challenging in that kind of environment. You were seen very much as a bit of a threat to some of the establishment and the hierarchy, and it is fair to say that it was really quite uncomfortable. At several points, I was not sure that I was going to stick it out and felt, “This is no place for me”. As I say, I have very strong values in terms of kindness and empathy and trying to see the best in people, but realistically

so, and these were characteristics that were not particularly thought of as good or valuable.

In terms of opportunities, we are talking about the early 1990s, from my point of view. At that time, there was, shall we say, an absence of talent, for want of a better way of putting it, and it was comparatively easy to be successful and to shine. If you were good, hard-working and cared about the job, that was comparatively unusual, so it was easier to shine, regardless of your gender.

**Julia Killick:** Another opportunity is to be a role model for the other female staff in that prison. By definition in a male prison, there is a maximum of only 25% female officers, and so having a female governor was really good for them. Role modelling, mentoring and coaching them for their future careers is a big opportunity.

**Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** Picking up on the point about role modelling for others, what about kindred spirits to give you support in the role, given those challenges, or support of one sort or another? Were there people who would understand what you were facing and give you some support?

**Julia Killick:** Personally, no.

**Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** Were there no kindred spirits around you?

**Julia Killick:** No.

**Clare Pearson:** From my perspective, it was necessary to seek those out. Usually, in my experience, where I found those kindred spirits, they would be other senior females across the country. Although that offered the opportunity to have calls and to talk things through, they were not with you day in, day out. It is really important for everybody to understand that prisons are very insular. You step in in the morning, and you are very consumed by whatever goes on within those walls, so it can be quite an isolating experience, even with the kindred spirits in other establishments across the country.

**Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** Did you meet blatant misogyny, and also racism?

**Julia Killick:** Yes.

**Saj Zafar:** Yes.

**Clare Pearson:** Yes.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** Yes.

**Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** Was there no support in relation to that either?

**Julia Killick:** There was also inappropriate and sexual behaviour by staff working not only for you but with you, in a very competitive culture. If you are working in a male prison—this is a small thing, but it matters—there are not many facilities for women. The female changing rooms were usually outside, so you could not use the gym easily. You were really made to feel that you were a minority.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** Overt sexual comments and sexualised behaviour was pretty common in my time. The more senior you get in the system, the less likely that is to happen to you personally, although you do see that happening still. It is really important, when you get to a position, to be able to challenge that. As the governing governor, having a zero tolerance for such things, and people knowing that, is really helpful. Therefore, you can make a difference, on a small scale, in your individual prison by having that zero tolerance. Growing up in that situation these days, it is fair to say that quite a number of people would have probably got custodial sentences for some of the things that happened to me.

**Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** Just finally, before I move on, what kinds of behaviours did you develop to, in your terms, establish your credibility in the face of such discrimination?

**Clare Pearson:** I spent my career trying to get to the most challenging opportunities that I could, which is why I spent much of my career in high-security male environments. In my view, that made my credibility without question. I could equally run and lead in a male dispersal environment. That shaped my career aspirations.

**Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** As a final sub-question, we have been hearing a lot about the question of governor autonomy, now and previously, and how that is constrained, particularly in the public sector. When it comes to governor autonomy, did you find that women and men governors were treated any differently in terms of ability, and that they were allowed to exercise that?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** Following on from what Clare said, the type of prison was quite difficult. For a long time, high-security prisons were a complete no-go for women. There were absolutely no women in senior positions in high-security prisons. It was not considered to be a woman's job.

From my own personal experience, my first governing governor's role was in a women's prison, and I have to say that I felt I got almost total autonomy to do exactly what I wanted, which was a bit of a shock. I was thinking, "Why have you let me do this?" It was a bit scary, really, from that point of view as well, albeit very exciting. It also meant that you could really change things and make a difference to individuals' lives, but also to individuals' families. It made a massive difference.

It really depends. The culture was very macho. I do not know whether it still is. I left three years ago, but it was very macho, and there were certain roles for women and for men. To give you an example, even at a junior governor grade, I was told that I could not be a security governor, because a security governor was too tough, and I was not tough enough. I was more of a touchy-feely, nice, "You are more of a rehabilitation or resettlement-type person. You are not a security governor". I have to say that I was quite pleased with that, because it looked like a boring job. That is another subject, but that was said to me.

**Saj Zafar:** I worked in all-male spaces throughout my career, and so, for me, finding my allies was really important. I must say that some very good male allies came through for me.

Just following on from the last question that you asked, I found that the leadership style for women and men is very different. When you enter the Prison Service, it was very autocratic and directive, and I felt like I was doing a lot of self-editing to fit in and to be accepted. There was a lot of self-editing until I obtained the level of confidence and maturity to be able to say, “No, I can be my true self”, but that was a long time coming.

Q95 **Baroness Meacher:** I would like to direct a question mainly to Julia and Lynn, although, of course, the other two must contribute if they wish to. What are the main qualities needed to be a leader in a women’s prison? To what extent do these qualities differ from those needed to be a leader in a men’s prison?

**Julia Killick:** It is about the management of risk. In a male prison, you are managing the risk of violence towards others and concerted indiscipline. You are doing a lot of command and control. In a female prison, you are managing self-harm risk. There is less command and control, and much more empathy, setting a culture of community, and helping people.

Going back to the previous question about autonomy, the job description changed when we became NOMS, the National Offender Management Service. All seven pages were about performance management, and there was one line at the bottom that said, “Governors may experience some emotional turmoil”. That was it—one line. That, for me, epitomises the difference, because, in a female prison, it would be seven pages all about the emotional work and one line about security.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** As I said, a women’s prison was the first prison that I governed, but I spent the rest of my time in men’s prisons. It was a bit of a shock to the system, if I am honest, going into work in a women’s prison, because it was much more personal, and I felt much more exposed in a women’s prison. I did not see that that was particularly problematic for me, because of my values of kindness, empathy and patience with people. I have tried to do that in every prison, regardless of whether it is men or women.

My last prison was HMP Whatton, which had 900 people with sexual convictions, and I found that the values and skills needed to manage that population were very similar to managing a women’s population, because of the overwhelming need, with large numbers of people with learning difficulty, who had had a very poor life experience, who abused themselves and so on. The skills needed and what would happen in women’s prisons were very similar, so I did not see it as massively different.

Similarly, in young offender institutions, there is a whole range of issues, whether the prisoners be male or female, that are very similar and require very similar skills in terms of patience, empathy, kindness and listening. You need different things in

men's prisons when you are dealing with some pretty hardened characters, but you still sometimes need a bit of kindness there too.

**Baroness Meacher:** How can you prevent self-harm? It is very difficult, because people go away into their cells and just do things. How would you approach the issue of self-harm and how to prevent it?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** There is a lot of confusion about self-harm. Sometimes, self-harm is a positive thing for people as an escape from the emotional pain that they are experiencing. It is very distressing for other people to see, it is not something that I have ever done myself, and I would be horrified if my children, for example, did that, but I have seen situations where people find it a release from the emotional pain that they are experiencing.

You want to try to prevent that, if possible, but to give people the space to be able to manage their self-harm issues themselves. Rather than trying to control that in a way that is difficult for them, we should try to understand.

**Julia Killick:** I would agree with that. It is about listening to people, making sure that they are heard, and offering them the support that they dictate.

**Clare Pearson:** I also took up my first post of governor in a female establishment. I spent three years at Foston Hall. In relation to self-harm, the context is that it is such a spectrum, from something that is a scratch or restricting food, for example, all the way to people trying to take ears off or cutting so severely that they could cause significant harm or death. There was a real spectrum, and I agree that there is an appropriate context for that, for some people, in terms of how they regulate their emotion and their feelings, with very little control over anything else in that environment.

**Baroness Meacher:** Thank you very much for that. That was very helpful.

**The Chair:** Before we move on, you said earlier that you felt more exposed in a women's prison, and yet you then said that the way you had to behave and the things that you had to cover were much the same. I was a bit confused as to what you meant by feeling more exposed.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I can give you an example to demonstrate that, if you like. In those days, I would make decisions—and you still can—as to whether people can go into open conditions. A woman had not seen her children for quite a long time. Because of the way in which the women's prisons open estate is so disparate across the country, she did not get visits from these kids. Not that that was the reason for making it, but I made her the equivalent of cat D, because the women's estate is different, so she moved to an open prison.

I saw her walking towards me across the big, grassed area of the prison. She came running towards me, and I was really thinking, "What is going on here?" She was quite a big woman. She came running towards me, picked me up off the floor and twisted me around. If that had happened in a men's prison, they would probably

have got 20 days in the segregation unit for assault or whatever, but this was a genuine display of emotion and thanks from this woman.

That is why I felt more exposed, because, in a men's prison, you have a barrier. There is no physical contact. There is no touching. Touching is, fortunately, completely off bounds. Quite unexpectedly, this quite sizable woman came running towards me and picked me up off the ground. I am not a small person. It was just like, "What is going on here?" That was quite a big shock to me, and I did feel very much more exposed as a result of that.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That is very helpful.

**Q96 Lord McInnes of Kilwinning:** We are very privileged today that you all have experience over a very long period of time, going back to the 1990s. I just want to talk about changes in attitudes over that period of time. I just wondered if you could explain how you view attitudes have changed. Between you, could you just explain how attitudes to women in operational roles have changed from prisoners, if it has changed, from fellow colleagues and male staff, and from the Ministry of Justice? From those three different aspects, do you feel that attitudes have changed and, if they have, how?

**Clare Pearson:** In my experience of prisoners, being a female in a male environment, and particularly the higher-security male environment, at the beginning of my career, there was a very clear respect hierarchy in terms of people working in prisons. That would mean that females were very well respected, and almost looked after in that sense. They were looked out for. It was usually not acceptable in any way to be offensive to females in that environment, let alone assault them.

Towards the end of my career, that had changed entirely, for lots of reasons that are probably very obvious—the fact that people were serving far longer sentences. There was far less hope and optimism about what the future looked like and getting back to a sense of normal interaction with society. That changed incredibly over that time. There were assaults of female staff that were fairly on a par with men. It made no difference around gender.

In terms of other staff, at the beginning of my career and as a very young prison officer, as Lynn described herself, joining the fast-track scheme, I would be, for best intentions, held back by my male colleagues. If I got to the scene of an incident, they would keep me out of the way to keep me safe, because they felt they were better able to deal with whatever was going on. That was misplaced, but from good intentions. Over the course of my career, the driver for my career progression was to try to get to a position of influencing that feeling of greater equality and just a more healthy culture within that environment.

In terms of the MoJ, I am not sure what my view would be on that, so I will defer to colleagues.

**Lord Sandhurst:** Clare, you said that there are far longer sentences now than there



used to be, and a loss of optimism and hope. Has that damaged the ability of women's prisons, certainly, given that we are talking about all prisons generally, to change offending behaviour for the better?

**Clare Pearson:** It is very complex and very difficult, but, if you have a starting point of a 40-year tariff or determinate sentence—

**Lord Sandhurst:** Or even 10 years.

**Clare Pearson:** Yes. If you have that, it is really difficult to engender a meaningful and purposeful existence, let alone hope around your future and your normal family life.

**Saj Zafar:** I just wanted to add to what Clare said about culture. Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, the culture was very much overt. I would go as far as saying that it was quite crude and crass. You were quite accustomed to being subjected to or being part of a culture where inappropriate comments, jokes or references were being made.

I had the benefit of going back into a prison two years ago, and I saw a difference in the culture, in that it now tends to be more covert, because people are more conscious of the consequences. That is not necessarily to say that they have dealt with their own bias or attitudes, but, in shared spaces, people are more conscious of how to display themselves more appropriately and more professionally.

Back in the day, you did not make complaints, and you got on with the job in hand, but I would not be able to say if anything such as that happens now. Is there an incline in the number of cases being reported? That would have an impact.

**Julia Killick:** There are training programmes now. When I first joined, I did my own equal opportunities training programme and delivered it to all the staff at Feltham, so that I could put my stamp on how I thought the behaviour should be, and try to influence their behaviour. That has now become more corporate.

I agree that it is probably more covert behaviour now, and I am not sure whether it could be more challenging. When I worked in a male prison, I would never allow female posters to be in cells. If prisoners were disrespectful or sexual to female staff, I would expect other staff to step in and stop it. Again, I am not sure whether it is still the case in terms of officers stepping in and being more proactive in stopping that behaviour. I am not sure that that is the case still.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I worked in prisons as a probation officer in the 1980s. Women officers did not work on the landings in men's prisons at all in those days. I was not a prison officer at the time, but six women prison officers were posted to work at Lincoln prison, where I was working at the time. The hostility that they got was just unbelievable.

**The Chair:** Who was the hostility from?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** It was from all male staff, really. In fact, when I first started working there, not as a prison officer but as a probation officer, I worked on the landings regularly, because of the way that the place was set up. The security principal officer said to me, “I do not believe in women working in men’s prisons. It is only a matter of time before you’ll get raped”. I think that what I said was, “I hope that’s not going to be the case”, because I could not think of anything else to say at the time. That is the sort of hostility that was around then.

It did improve a little bit. As Clare said, it became more of a protective thing and a “being looked after” kind of role for a while. As we have said, that has moved on now to where it is a bit of irrelevant whether you are male or female. Hostility between staff and prisoners is quite difficult currently.

**Q97 Lord McInnes of Kilwinning:** On a very topical point, the governor of Wandsworth mentioned the very recent case of a female prison officer being in a relationship with a prisoner and how that put things back. Has it, or has it been blown up in the press and life will go back to normal again in terms of attitudes?

**Julia Killick:** For those officers who had those thoughts, it just confirms their bias and their prejudice. It is the “I told you so”.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I cannot think of anything positive about social media at the minute, but, in this context, it is really negative stuff. I have to say that I have, unfortunately, come across and dismissed a number of female staff for having sexual relationships with prisoners. This is not news, but social media makes it news. I have also had male staff having sexual relationships with prisoners. What I would say as a caveat is that we need to be careful not to be influenced unduly by what is seen in social media.

**Clare Pearson:** It is really important to contextualise the reasoning. There is never an acceptable reason, clearly, for a member of staff to have any sort of personal, sexual relationship with a prisoner. If you contextualise that in an environment that is quite hostile and difficult, and feels quite risky and violent on a daily basis, it is entirely possible to think through the reason that these individuals get involved with something that makes them feel that they are going to be safer as a result. I would not, for a second, suggest that that makes it acceptable, or that that necessarily is the motivator for everybody who finds themselves in that situation, but it is important to contextualise quite how difficult it feels in those environments on occasion.

**Q98 Baroness Prashar:** Good morning. What is more important in shaping attitudes—the culture in a particular prison, or the culture in the Prison Service as a whole?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** It has changed over time. It felt like I was given my own train set: “You crack on and get on with it”. Nobody really cared very much what I did. It was very much about the power of the governor. Let us face it: the governor’s role was to do what they wanted with it.

With increased centralisation, people have been less able to do that as governors.

There is less autonomy. It has been more problematic. Certainly, during Covid, when I was responsible for a prison, that centralisation made me feel, "I cannot do this any more", and was why I left. It meant that all the good things about doing the job were taken away. That is one of the main reasons that I left and went to do another job.

**Julia Killick:** Even before then, when it became the National Offender Management Service, you were expected to be outward-facing. It was very much the expectation that the deputy governor was running the prison, because you, as governor, should be outward-facing, talking to commissioners and building relationships with the local authority, the National Health Service and MPs. The culture was expected not to come from you as governor. In fact, one of the performance metrics of a governor was how much time you spent on projects outside of the prison and how many other corporate boards you sat on.

To answer your question, the culture should come from the governor, what they pay attention to and how they interpret what the Prison Service is asking them to do in their prison, but it was not the expectation of that being the case from the NOMS and then MoJ.

**The Chair:** You talked earlier about, when there was a transfer of responsibility, there was also a change in the job description. In answer to Baroness Prashar, you have already pointed out that you were expected to be more outward-facing, with the deputy governor running the prison, et cetera. Was that all written down? Could we get a before and after and do the analysis of that job description?

**Julia Killick:** Yes. I have them here. It was part of the thinking about coming here today.

**The Chair:** I was just going to say that it would be particularly helpful if we could have copies of the before and after, and look at that particular change, together with your thoughts on the rightness or wrongness of that change. I am sorry to interrupt.

**Clare Pearson:** There was a competition between groupings of prisons and regions, which, historically, had their own culture being set by the area lead and then the governors within those particular prisons. Over time, that changed quite significantly. There was an expectation that, in order to demonstrate best value and to do what the organisation needed, you would move to wherever that requirement was. That probably had the effect of diluting some of those more localised, strong cultures.

**Saj Zafar:** Just adding to what my colleagues have said, the Prison Service has gone through a huge change over the last couple of decades. It is obvious that nobody ever says, "When I grow up, I am going to be a prison governor". What we are seeing more of is the diversity of people who are coming into the job, and it tends to be second careers. Diversity encourages inclusive leadership, so that there is a different type of leadership, and cultures are created by the leaders.

Once you have different types of leaders coming in, when they go into their own prisons, while taking care of the operations, security and everything else, the type of leadership is naturally evolving and growing for the better. That is what I would like to think.

**Baroness Prashar:** All of you have served for a pretty long time, and you already made reference to the change in governance. We have seen the move from the Home Office to what was DCAff and the MoJ, then becoming NOMS and so on. Has governance had an impact on the way that the Prison Service has evolved? What have been the downsides and upsides of those changes? What I gather from this hearing is that there has been more centralisation.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I struggle to see the upside, apart from central control and political oversight. Someone at a senior level in the MoJ would say that you could keep control of stuff. Certainly, prison governors were always seen as being a bit uncontrollable. They were mavericks, not real civil servants. Nobody has ever used those words, but that is how it felt quite a lot of the time. You were not a proper civil servant, because you had your own train set and you could do what you like, and there was a lot of resentment towards people.

I can think of an example of that. I did a secondment to headquarters and was involved in a project. I was supposed to be there for two years and I had to come off it after nine months because I found it very boring and wanted to get back into a prison. The chap who I was working for said, "I am sorry that you are going, but I am pleased in a way that you are, because we need clever people in prisons". I thought, "That means that you think that we are all a bit dim and not as good as you". How it felt a lot of the time was that we were just annoying and a bit maverick—people who just were not real, proper civil servants.

**Saj Zafar:** You rarely had people fitting into both camps. You were one or the other. If you were a governor, you were out in the field. That is where you belonged and, as my colleagues said, very maverickish and a very different prototype to the ones who worked at head office. You always had that disconnect or that resentment between the two camps.

**Baroness Prashar:** What sort of relationship would you like with the centre and what level of autonomy? You were saying that, at one level, you had too much autonomy; then you said that there was curtailment. What framework would you like that enables proper autonomy and proper oversight?

**Julia Killick:** One positive thing has come from centralisation. Since I have left, the women's prisons have now gone into a women's estate group, so it is functionally led. That is an example of good centralisation, because you have the expertise of running women's prisons, and support behind you, which I did not have when I was running Holloway. I was part of a geographical split, so I was always in competition with the other London prisons. That is a good example.

The same might go for the Youth Justice Board, with similar expertise and specialism that the governor can call on and that can support you in running your particular prison.

**Clare Pearson:** In terms of Lynn's point around the disconnect between operational prisons and prison governors, and the Civil Service above, that is probably where I got to in terms of my career. I had run prisons. I had absolutely achieved the aspiration that I had set out with of running a male, high-security dispersal prison. That was an incredible experience.

After that, I was really unclear about what else there was that was right for my skill set, because stepping out to become a civil servant and never see the light of a prison again really just did not fit with my skill set and what I enjoyed doing. That was the point at which I realised that I needed to exit that environment.

Q99 **Lord Tope:** It has been clear from all that you have been saying that there have been a lot of changes over the last 20 or 30 years, and even more recently than that. It is also coming across to me that more could be done to support women leaders. Would you like to say how you think that that could be done? Given the progress—if it is progress—that has happened over the years, what more could we be doing now to support women leaders?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I did something called the Leaders Unlimited programme, which was a senior Civil Service development programme, probably about 15 years ago. It was a Cabinet Office-sponsored programme for disadvantaged groups in senior Civil Service roles. I went to this programme and did a portfolio and everything else that was required, but nothing happened with it afterwards. The Prison Service did nothing with it. They supported me to go on this. It was quite a lot of time and effort. I did all this stuff. I spent some time here in terms of secondment, to learn about the goings-on here and so on. It just ended up in somebody's drawer somewhere. I just thought that there was quite a lot of investment in that and nothing happened. There were other people on that too, and nothing happened.

There seems to be a lot of lip service paid to this, but not a lot of tangible benefits to anybody. Nobody said, "You did really well on that programme. Would you like to apply for this job?" or, "We thought you might be interested in this job". Nothing such as that happened at all. There needs to be more of a proactive approach to really making some difference, rather than just paying lip service to things.

**Lord Tope:** I can see that you are all nodding at this. I am saying that for the written record. Do any of you have a different view to that, or a different experience?

**Julia Killick:** No.

**Lord Tope:** That is what I expected you to say. What about career opportunities, particularly for women? Has that offered an approach to you?

**Julia Killick:** I was the same as Clare. I had run Holloway. Where do you go from there? It was, “Okay. You can go back to running a male prison”—thanks, but no thanks. There really was no career path. Maybe now, it would have been to run a women’s estate directorate. As I say, that is a positive benefit that has come since I have left, but there was certainly no succession planning, career path development or women’s mentoring programme.

**Lord Tope:** And no support and development programme specifically for women?

**Julia Killick:** No.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** The women’s estate did exist previously, and then was disbanded. I was at Morton Hall, which was a women’s prison then, and we were part of the women’s estate. This would have been in 2002. That was quite a good environment to have fellow governors, mostly women, who were governors of women’s prisons. That was a very supportive environment, but it was disbanded for various operational reasons. It was a lost opportunity, and I am very pleased that they brought it back, because, as Julia says, it meant that you got things that were not the same—and, as we know, things are not the same for men as women—where you could specialise and think about how to manage women prisoners differently.

**Saj Zafar:** My experience was that nobody ever discussed life after being a prison governor, and you did not know when that would happen. I am sure that, if you asked, it happened at different stages. Mine was when I became a mother of young children, and I just thought that I could not do the work/life balance. There was no work/life balance—being a prison governor is a way of life.

When I left, I went into headquarters and really struggled there, having transitioned from what I called a heightened state of stress, where I thrive, and then having to play with paper clips all day, not to insult any of the civil servants. I tried my best, and then I came to the realisation that it was not the same, so I then made the decision to resign and leave it altogether.

When I was going through the system, there was no discussion, no development and nothing about what happens to you if you choose to leave the prisons and what is next for you.

**Clare Pearson:** I am sure that this is the same for male colleagues as well, but there is a need for a more personal overview and insight into the individuals who are either in positions of governing establishments or on the way to becoming governing governors. For lots of people, but particularly for women, it just is not an option to get into your car to travel 70 miles each way every day, or to uproot your entire family to move to your next posting every time there is an opportunity.

While I am confident that that is not an overt way of managing, from an MoJ perspective, it is essential that we start looking at people as individuals, what their needs and requirements are, and how to support them in what is such a difficult,

challenging and traumatic role that you are asking them to undertake, alongside all of the other personal and domestic pressures that come with that. Without some change around that, you can have any scheme that you would like to.

**The Chair:** On that very specific point about the need for personalised support, which you have made clear is not necessarily a male/female thing, although that may have a bearing on it, when you are a governor and are feeling that life is getting on top of you, who do you currently turn to for help and advice?

**Julia Killick:** Other governors, I would say.

**Clare Pearson:** Yes, trusted peers.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** You also turn to trusted people in your team. If you have a good, supportive team, you can talk to them about things. I did not find it a particularly lonely job, if I am honest. I found it relatively easy to find people to talk to about stuff and to get support, but I know that that is not true of everybody.

Q100 **Baroness Buscombe:** I have two supplementary questions from some of the things that you have been saying around this particular question. Lynn, you referenced the course that you went on. You said that you went on it as someone from a disadvantaged group.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** Yes—women.

**Baroness Buscombe:** That speaks volumes by itself, does it not? How long ago was that?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** Hang on. I will get the wrong decade. I am at the age where I do not know what decade it is. It would have been 2008.

**Baroness Buscombe:** It was a little while ago, but not that long ago.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** Yes.

**Baroness Buscombe:** Clare, you talked about moving to different posts. Are those above the ones who decide that it is time for you to move posts, or is it you who applies to move posts? I have noticed, if I may, that all of you have a very broad experience across, for me, a surprising number of different units and prisons.

**Clare Pearson:** After my post as deputy governor, I did not apply for any other roles. I was moved. While I would say nothing other than three of those were amazing opportunities for me, they came with their challenges in terms of location, et cetera. I am pretty sure that I could not have said, “I do not want to do that”. It was a rhetorical question, really. It was not really a choice-based posting.

**Saj Zafar:** You were offered it, but the expectation was that you would say yes.

**Baroness Buscombe:** How much time were you given if you were going to switch?

**Clare Pearson:** When I was moved from Foston Hall to Belmarsh, I had four weeks.

**Q101 Lord Dubs:** You have mentioned the MoJ a number of times. When you were governors, how often did an official from the department come and spend time with you? Does it ever happen that officials are asked to spend some months in the Prison Service?

**Julia Killick:** The difference is in where your prison is located. Because I was at Holloway and I was five minutes from headquarters, I probably got a lot of visits from officials, but not to spend time. I had lots of visits from MPs and archbishops. It was constant visits, and it was not helpful. I could leverage some favours, if you like, from some visits and maybe get a point across, but it was usually for their benefit. As Ministers changed, they wanted to come. Because it was the only female prison within distance of headquarters, I got lots of visits. When I was running Guys Marsh in rural Dorset, I never got any visits from headquarters or MPs. It was completely different.

**The Chair:** Just as a sidebar to the way that you have reacted, how would you react to a group of parliamentarians coming for a visit?

**Julia Killick:** It depends on the reason for their visit.

**The Chair:** We may have a quiet chat at the end of this session about our planned forthcoming prison visits to get some advice.

**Lord Dubs:** What about the other half of my question? Does it ever happen that officials from the Ministry of Justice spend some time working with you?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** No.

**Julia Killick:** No.

**Clare Pearson:** No.

**Lord Dubs:** Why not?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** People are frightened of it. We are a tick box. I have had people visit and have then seen them at subsequent events, almost dining out on the fact that they once visited a prison. I have had it said to me, "I once went to the segregation unit at..." and you just think, "Right. Okay". It feels very artificial. Quite a lot of the time, to be honest, they do not know anything about what life is like in reality in prisons, at least in my experience.

**Lord Dubs:** Would it be artificial if a civil servant were seconded to work in prison for three or six months? Would that just be tokenism, or would they learn something?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** It depends on what you are asking them to do. If they are just hanging around, I am not sure how useful that would be for anybody. In fact, it would probably be an annoyance, because we would then feel like we would have to look after them rather than being useful.



**Lord McInnes of Kilwinning:** Just very quickly, because it is something that other witnesses have spoken about, has there been a difference in terms of the relationship with headquarters following the change from the Home Office to the Ministry of Justice? Did you notice any change?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** No.

**Julia Killick:** I would say yes, because there were more visits from auditors. You had lots of performance visits, audit visits and learning skills visits, and a lot more official visits checking on what you were delivering.

**Baroness Meacher:** Was that from the Home Office or from MoJ?

**Lord Tope:** When did the difference happen? Was it when you came under the MoJ?

**Julia Killick:** No, it came from NOMS, as it was, and then later from the MoJ. The MoJ was more responsible for policy, and NOMS was more the operational side—the audit and the assurance testing, et cetera.

Q102 **Lord Bach:** You all have absolutely amazing records, but you all left the Prison Service some time ago, and some longer ago than others. Having said that, you all have a really keen interest, hardly surprisingly, in those careers. What you have described is what you knew from when you were prison governors. Do you think that the position has changed since then? If you were a prison governor now, you might answer some of these questions a bit differently.

**Clare Pearson:** My view is that it has changed and become more negative. There is more violence. There are less experienced staff. There is less budget available—that is a matter of fact—and more prisoners.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I am a member of the Parole Board, so I still go into prisons. Admittedly, most of it is remote now, as in via a video platform, but I still go into and see prisons. I am very pleased that I do not work in one now, because of the pressures associated with that, and also the turnover of staff.

Just before Christmas, I went into the prison I most recently managed; I only left in 2021. I hardly knew any of the operational staff, even though I was there for 13 years. I knew everybody at several points, and it was only the administrative staff who I recognised, which is sad. It used to be the place where nobody really left, because it was such a good place to work.

**The Chair:** I am afraid that there are lots of people who want to get in, but we are going to have to move on, because time is beginning to be a bit tight.

Q103 **Baroness Buscombe:** There is something going on. It is a broader debate, but staff retention in every sphere seems to be becoming more and more of a problem. Young people do not want to work full-time. They do not want to work and build a career. The world of the Prison Service is going to be at the really blunt end of all of that, so there is a huge problem.

Within the Prison Service, one or two things that you have all said have really been quite disturbing, in the sense that it is seen that the Civil Service is somehow above you, almost like you are the artisans working at the coalface. Maybe this is something that needs to change.

Certainly, I would suggest that most people's traditional view of you as a governor is that you are top of your tree and someone to be seriously respected, but that is not necessarily the case, and that is quite disturbing. Some of us may still have a very murky picture of what it is that is above you. That even goes to something that was said last week by the Chief Inspector of Prisons—"Who are the line managers? How many layers of line managers are there?" I note that you are nodding.

You have only just raised the word "violence", but it is something that we are reading a lot about. Are there particular challenges associated with the retention of female staff? We have heard from you that there is a problem with career progression, but also just the life of being in prisons sounds as if it has become much tougher and much less, shall we say, enjoyable in terms of having challenges, but within limits that you could cope with.

A lot of the historic stuff, I could say, would compare to other spheres in life. I have 100 questions that I would love to ask you on that, but could you just give us a real feel, as quickly as possible, as I have spoken for rather a long time on this, for the key things that you think could make a difference in terms of retention of female staff?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** Generally speaking, pay is really very poor comparatively. For example, when I left HMP Whatton, the person who succeeded me was paid £20,000 a year less than me. Because of the way in which I was appointed, which was a long time ago, I had different terms and conditions, which were comparatively very favourable. Pay is a big issue, whether you be male or female. Certainly, at prison officer level, that is an issue.

We are talking about a long time ago now, but certainly, when I started, prison officer pay was very good and comparable, and the turnover was very limited as a result. It was a good salary for relatively few qualifications, and people stuck at it because of the pay and the pension. Now, there is no comparison to say that other places are better. For example, I left for a comparatively paid job, where the terms and conditions were far superior, even though I had less experience in this role. Pay has to be the biggest thing, really.

**Julia Killick:** For prison officers, certainly for the female estate, you should be able to go into a prison and see what you are going to be doing, long before you can apply. There is now a website where you can apply to be a prison officer specifically in a female prison. It looks very promising, and you can say, "Yes, I only want to work with women", but, once you click on it, it just takes you to the main platform. I do not know how you can specify, "I will only work with women". It is a different job. It is all online.

**Baroness Buscombe:** What do you feel about that?

**Julia Killick:** Again, that is wrong. You need to have a face-to-face. The job is about dealing with people. You need to go in and see how in your face it is in a female prison. You need to experience that long before you apply. The application process, again, for the female prisons, is that you get as far as having your fitness test. If you want to work in a female prison, you then have to do a dissertation, almost. You have to say why and answer three questions. They make it more difficult for you to work in a female prison, which, in my view, cannot be right.

**Baroness Buscombe:** And if the computer says no, it is no.

**Julia Killick:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Do you have to do the same essay if you are applying for the male estate?

**Julia Killick:** No. It is an extra.

**Lord Sandhurst:** That is if you are a woman applying, not just a man.

**Julia Killick:** Yes. If you want to work in the female estate, there is an extra step.

**Clare Pearson:** I absolutely agree with Lynn's point about pay. Unless you were completely motivated by a life of doing good and making a difference, why would you work in a prison as a prison officer rather than in any other shift-type work where you can probably earn more and not have to deal with the same extreme situations that you are dealing with in a prison?

There is something that is absolutely disconnected with young people and their expectations around the workspace generally. We would have young people who would start as prison officers and say, "I won't be working Christmas, by the way, because I do things with my family at Christmas".

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** Or, "I don't do nights".

**Clare Pearson:** Or, "I cannot bring my mobile phone with me. How am I going to check my Facebook all day?" Some of that is really disconnected and something that you potentially would not consider until you got into that situation.

Similarly, we have talked about prison officers generally being in that environment. Male or female, I am not sure that gender is the issue, but, at the point when women start a family, there are some really significant considerations to make around the length of the shifts that you are expected to undertake, the environment that you are going into, in terms of health and safety, and whether that is something that you can make work for your domestic circumstances.

Q104 **The Chair:** Baroness Buscombe's question focused on the issue of retention. We have heard from many witnesses about the need to look at the pay structure, not least because some prison officers see no point in moving to the next stage with

increased responsibility and very little extra pay for it. I just want to address the issue that you, Clare, raised earlier, when you talked about, as a governor, being told, basically, “You are moving to a different prison”. It is offered as a choice, but you are expected to say yes.

That raised in me the whole issue of career development, career development opportunities and somebody to talk to about it. Where within the Prison Service is there an opportunity for prison officers at whatever level, right through to governing governors, to have an opportunity to express their career progression desires and hopes?

**Clare Pearson:** I had two points during my career that were really exceptional experiences. The first was joining and being part of the accelerated promotion scheme. There was lots of wraparound support, and lots of conversation around career aspiration and development opportunities. That felt really meaningful.

**The Chair:** Where was this?

**Clare Pearson:** It was a central programme. You joined a national scheme, as such, but you were able to elect to be within your home region and make some plans for your next few postings on that scheme. At the end of the scheme, you had to find your own role, which, therefore, often necessitated moving somewhere else in order to get that opportunity.

The other good experience, in terms of my career, was at the point that I undertook my “suitable to be in charge” qualification, as it was termed at the time. That was my qualification to govern. At the time, it also was the qualification to be deputy governor of a larger, more complex establishment. There was some wraparound support there in terms of career aspirations, posting requirements, geography, et cetera.

Those two points were very positive. They served only a very small number of people, and were not available for the majority of the staff.

**The Chair:** While there have been a small number of examples of very good practice in terms of providing support for career development, that is, as a general rule, something that is absent across the prison estate.

**Julia Killick:** It is all centralised. There are centralised programmes, centralised HR support, centralised learning and development programmes, and a lot of online development training. Again, as part of the centralisation, you do not have an HR function any more in a prison. Learning and development all went either regionally or centrally.

**The Chair:** In your view, is this a loss?

**Julia Killick:** Yes, absolutely.

**Baroness Buscombe:** On staff retention, a really interesting thing that Saj touched on earlier was going from overt to covert in terms of respect and handling vis-à-vis

prison officers. For the young coming in today, it is all covert. What is the environment like for them? Surely they must sense that there is something not quite right with that.

**Saj Zafar:** They will, but the plus side of young people today is that they are more likely to call it out. They are more likely to not tolerate it. There is more allyship among young people than when I was going through the system. That is the biggest difference.

**Baroness Buscombe:** Is there anything else that you feel is a problem for retention, such as violence?

**Saj Zafar:** Violence is one. We have got better at recruiting, but we are not very good at retaining, given the lived experience. It depends on who you are, where you are, and what establishment you are at. It comes down to all the characteristics as well, gender and race being the obvious. If we were to compare notes even among ourselves, I would say that it is a huge spectrum from my own experiences to where my three colleagues are sitting, and that is still prevalent today.

**Lord Sandhurst:** I understand that there is evidence that up to 25% leave after 12 months, and about half after three years. That suggests to me that they just do not know what they are going into. Is that right?

**Saj Zafar:** Yes, absolutely.

**Lord Sandhurst:** What would you say to the Ministry of Justice should be done to improve that?

**Saj Zafar:** As my colleague said, before you even attempt to enter the Prison Service, you need to experience it at first hand. There is a lot of investment in the recruitment process and training. We have all done the accelerated programmes. All that prepares you, but the day you turn up at your first prison at governor grade is very different to what they taught you at the Prison Service College. Everything was textbook-ish. It was a mock environment. When you transferred into a real prison, nobody prepares you for the challenges, and you need to have a certain level of resilience. It is more than just a job; it is a way of life. We are talking about unsociable hours and a lack of work/life balance.

**Baroness Buscombe:** Is the problem that it is the civil servants, who have no experience, telling you and advising young people on what happens, but they do not know themselves, because they are removed?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** It is worse than that. I kept the original hard-copy brochure of the accelerated promotion scheme. This glossy brochure looked absolutely fabulous. I thought, as a young, idealistic graduate, "My goodness. This is going to be fantastic. What a life this is going to be". That is done by marketing people, who, presumably, do not know anything about prisons and what that means. They have this big marketing exercise, which they have still going on now—

it was on LinkedIn yesterday—about, “Make a difference, change the world” stuff, but the reality of dealing with day-to-day life just does not come into it.

**Baroness Buscombe:** I wonder what their pay is.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** It is considerably more than the people they are employing, I am sure.

**Julia Killick:** There is a good scheme, which I think you have heard about, called Unlocked Graduates.

**Baroness Buscombe:** Yes.

**Julia Killick:** They have got it right, in my opinion.

**Lord Filkin:** Could I just ask why Unlocked Graduates have got it right?

**Julia Killick:** Because they recruit effectively, and they support. All the way through, for two years, they support and mentor them. They have a professional qualification to do. They are enabled to innovate. They fund innovation in prison, so you really feel that you are part of that prison and part of a good scheme.

Q105 **Lord Bach:** On this subject, but slightly different from what has just been asked, there is, today, a gender pay gap in the MoJ. I do not know how much that refers to the Prison Service or to the rest of the MoJ. Why? What possible justification can there be for a gender pay gap? What explains it?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** It does not surprise me in the slightest, because men get more opportunities than women to get promoted. Then, of course, you have all the challenges that we have mentioned about women trying to juggle family life with shift work, and their reluctance to apply for roles that are more demanding and further away from home, because of family restrictions. I am not sure that that is particularly different to other walks of life, but the Prison Service certainly does not make things easier for people.

**Julia Killick:** There is also a lack of flexibility, because it is a 24/7 job. I do not know if it has changed, but you could not job-share as a governor, at any level. You may have been able to work part-time, but it would be really difficult. The lack of flexible working arrangements has a lot to do with it.

Q106 **Lord Dubs:** To take a different tack, you have partly touched on this, but what are the challenges for the Prison Service when looking after women prisoners? I wonder if I could first ask Julia and Lynn, but not to exclude the rest of you.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** We have mentioned some of them. The main issues from my perspective are the mental health side of things, substance misuse, contact with families and the distance that people are from home, oftentimes.

**Julia Killick:** It is the separation of women from children. The majority of them are mothers. It is their past psychiatric event. Many women have been in touch with psychiatric services prior to coming to prison. It is their dependence on

inappropriate adults at home, usually men, who have got them into crime in the first place, and the revolving door of them keeping going back to that person. The distance from home is certainly a massive one.

Because there are so few female prisons, there is a therapeutic community, for example, only in Send prison in Surrey. If you are a woman from Manchester and you need to go into a therapeutic community to address your offending behaviour, you have to up sticks and come to Send for two years. There are all those challenges in managing a smaller cohort. They do not get issued prison clothing, so the governor has to find ways around the budget to get clothing for them.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I must admit that underwear was a big thing for me.

**Julia Killick:** Underwear was massive.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** This is vaguely amusing, but we set up a women's prison from a men's prison at Morton Hall. We set up an Avon catalogue, which did not previously exist, and they have a system whereby it is done on commission, so I became Avon lady of the year, which was my claim to fame.

**Julia Killick:** You can use the commission to buy underwear.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** We used the commission to buy stuff for the women.

**Julia Killick:** We used the commission to buy underwear for the women.

**Lord Dubs:** Some of these things could be dealt with. Some of them are more difficult, such as the geographical distances. Some of the other things you said could be dealt with, could they not?

**Julia Killick:** Geographical distances, yes, but you could have programmes that wrap around each prison. If you had the resources to offer a specific programme in Manchester, a third-sector agency could come and offer some offending behaviour work. They are doing a lot of good stuff in Manchester.

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** As I am sure you will be aware, the Corston report recommended that women's prisons were made smaller and dispersed across the country, and it seems to me a shame that that never happened.

**Clare Pearson:** Just building on points that both Julia and Lynn have made, there are things that happen in a female establishment that are probably things that you would not expect young members of staff coming into a prison environment to have had their own experience of and to know how to deal with.

For me, when running a local female prison, as was, we had a local function. We served the courts, but we also had long-term sentenced women there as well. Some of the women coming in through the courts would be pregnant and would need to give birth during their stay, and the babies would be removed at birth. We were asking our prison officers, some of whom were very young, to go out and to sit with a woman giving birth, and then to be with the woman while her baby, who was

detoxing for the four-day period, detoxed and was very uncomfortable, and was then taken away. I am not sure how you would prepare anybody, let alone young people, for witnessing and being part of that level of distress.

**Q107 The Chair:** We are coming to an end. We are enormously grateful and have covered a lot of ground. At the end of our inquiry, including visits to prisons and various other things that we are going to do, we will come up with a set of recommendations for improvements around the theme of the governance of prisons.

Today, you have talked about issues around governor autonomy and career development requirements. You have touched on, and Lord Sandhurst picked up, the impact that longer sentences can have on prisoners, MoJ officials doing work experience, the gender pay gap, pay overall, the separation of women from children and families, the need for smaller women's prisons, and so on. You have touched on some of the points that we have also picked up with David Gauke, who is doing the sentencing reviews, around women who are coerced into crime because of abusive parents, the mental health issues surrounding women prisoners, separation from family, long sentences and so on.

In addition to all of those, what other issues should our report be considering? Perhaps more importantly, what recommendations should we be making in our report? I will give you each an opportunity to quickly give us two or three key things that you think should be in our report.

**Julia Killick:** There have been many inquiries starting with Corston. There have been lots of female offender strategies. There is now a Women's Justice Board. I would just suggest that we go back to that and look at what we have still not delivered. The Government keep talking about what should happen—that fewer women should be in prison, and in smaller prisons. How are you going to monitor that and make this not just another report that sits and nothing happens?

**Professor Lynn Saunders:** For me, just because of some of the work that was really valuable and that we made lots of progress locally on, it is for prisons to have better contact with local communities—those that they operate in, not necessarily those that they serve. Some prisons cover the whole country, so that is not really practical. They should particularly involve the mayors, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations in the areas where the prisons are, and have a more open-door policy to involve them.

**The Chair:** I am going to pause you there, because a number of people have raised with us the issue of the involvement of local communities, people coming out to do reading and to help with literacy, numeracy and all of those sorts of things. The prison estate, as it currently stands, in many cases is not capable of finding space for them. We even know of one voluntary organisation that offered to come in; they were told that they were very welcome to come in, but that they would be charged rent for so doing. Is this unrealistic, given the current circumstances?



**Professor Lynn Saunders:** I can only speak from my own experience, but, if you want to make it happen, you can make it happen. In terms of the voluntary sector, partly because we had no money and partly because of restrictions, at my last prison, we had a range of voluntary sector organisations that were providing social care. The Carers Federation were in. We had Age UK in the prison, because we had quite an old population. We had people from the local university, and the quid pro quo with that was that they got research, but we got students who volunteered. We had to make sure that they were vetted and so on, but, none the less, we went through that process.

It is about prisons looking outward more, rather than always looking inward, and making sure that they utilise the skills and the interest, because people are interested in prisons. People want to do something to make things better, and prisons need to be more open to receiving that interest.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That is enormously helpful.

**Clare Pearson:** If I can just focus on the role of the prison governor, it is beyond essential that that role is examined and reviewed in terms of the levels of not always large trauma but general trauma that go alongside being tasked with that responsibility for those institutions.

You have to start with that figurehead and that leader, and get the right wraparound support available in order to get to a position with the rest of that organisation whereby you have a staff group who probably are less likely to leave, and probably will feel safer and, therefore, more able to stay in that environment.

Historically, that has been and continues to be overlooked. Governors are just expected to get on with things and, at the point that something terrible happens, there is still an expectation that you get back in and carry on with leading that establishment. That probably just needs some real focus.

**Saj Zafar:** For me, it might be stating the obvious, but, over the years, we have seen that the type of prisoner and their needs have changed. When we are looking at leadership, one of the things for me is that we need to address that in terms of what type of leadership is required to manage the prison of today. That is really important.

Also, when it comes to representation, it is really important that we mirror the communities that we serve. Unfortunately, in 2025, we are still a long way from doing so. Again, it is about thinking about who we are recruiting, what support, training and coaching we are providing, and what we are doing to help prepare them to have a good lived experience once they have qualified and gone into a prison.

**The Chair:** Thank you. As I say to all of the witnesses who come, I am sure that there are many things that you will go away and think, "I wish I had said that". Do not worry. Please feel free, if you have further things you want to say, to write to us and

let us have it, as quickly as possible, because that is really helpful. If there are any thoughts and documents, please let us have them. In particular, the before and after role descriptions of a governor and so on would be really helpful.

On behalf of the entire committee, thank you hugely. It has been enormously helpful to us. We hope that we can reflect some of the things that you have said and your suggestions in our report. I have to say that, as a personal thought from the end of this session, Saj, I was really grateful for you giving us a potential title for our report, although I am not saying that it will be—“Nobody ever says when I grow up, ‘I want to be a prison governor’”. It may well feature somewhere in our report, as will many of the comments that you have made. On behalf of the entire committee, thank you very much indeed.