

HOUSE OF COMMONS

ORAL EVIDENCE

TAKEN BEFORE THE

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

**CRIME REDUCTION POLICIES: A CO-ORDINATED APPROACH?**

WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2014

JEREMY WRIGHT MP and NORMAN BAKER MP

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 500 - 578

## Oral Evidence

Taken before the Justice Committee

on Wednesday 26 March 2014

Members present:

Sir Alan Beith (Chair)

Steve Brine

Jeremy Corbyn

Nick de Bois

Mr Elfyn Llwyd

Andy McDonald

John McDonnell

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### Examination of Witnesses

*Witnesses:* **Jeremy Wright MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice, Minister for Prisons and Rehabilitation, Ministry of Justice, and **Norman Baker MP**, Minister of State for Crime Prevention, Home Office, gave evidence.

**Q500 Chair:** Mr Wright and Mr Baker, welcome. We are continuing with our inquiry into the wider issues that were initially raised in the Committee's report back in 2010 and the ways in which these have either been implemented or not. Within that context, we also have this continuing discussion about Transforming Rehabilitation, on which the Government have just responded in the last few days. We will be asking you some questions on that later in the session.

It was the National Audit Office that said that the criminal justice system had no single "owner," and I think it is common ground for all of us round this table that cutting crime involves a wide range of Government Departments and areas of policy. Who does own the leadership?

**Norman Baker:** We clearly are in the lead in terms of crime prevention, which is indeed my specific role. But naturally, as you recognise, Sir Alan, these matters do cross over to other Departments and it would be impossible to have one Department controlling everything; indeed it would be very bad government, I think. If we go back far enough, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice were in the same Department many years ago and it was thought at the time that that was unwieldy and had to be split. So the issue is not how many different Departments are involved but the co-ordination between the Departments, which occurs on a regular basis. Obviously Damian Green, as the policing Minister, has a foot in both camps, literally, between the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. There are also inter-ministerial groups that look at aspects—for example, drug policy—which cross over from one Department to another. If you look at the subject of female genital mutilation, which is within my portfolio, we have recently signed an accord between a number of different Departments—the MOJ, ourselves, the Department for Education, the Department of Health and so on—because we recognise that there are different Departments with different levers to pull. So the issue is not, I think, with respect, how many Departments there are but whether or not they are co-ordinated in pushing forward an agreed Government position, which I believe they are.

**Q501 Chair:** What is the practical effect of having a Minister with a foot in both Departments? It is a question we have asked before and to which we have never had a full and satisfactory answer.

**Norman Baker:** It is not unique, of course, because there have been occasions in the past—I think I am right in saying—when the Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have had a common Minister. I think it is very useful that Damian is in that position because, if we have discussions as Home Office Ministers, then he is able sometimes to bring knowledge which we would not necessarily have round the table—and no doubt the same thing happens at the Ministry of Justice.

**Q502 Chair:** Can you both confirm that that has happened in ministerial discussions?

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes, absolutely. Also, it is worth saying that it is not just having a Minister in both Departments that is significant; it is what they do. I would draw the Committee's attention to the Criminal Justice Board, which Damian Green chairs, which is a good way, I think, of drawing together the different strands of the criminal justice system. The direct answer to your question—"Who owns it?"—is that there are a number of different people who own it and there are good reasons sometimes why there need to be. For example, there obviously have to be separations between the judicial system and the rest of the policing and enforcement network—that is for obvious reasons—but everyone should take responsibility for it. One of the challenges is the co-ordinating role that has to be done, in many ways, from the top in Whitehall. That is why I think it is an advantage not just to have a Minister who sits in both places—and certainly they do, as Norman says, give us the opportunity to feed back from the other Departments in our ministerial discussions—but, also, having a Criminal Justice Board represented at the highest levels of the criminal justice system by people who run the system, with Damian chairing it, gives an opportunity to do some of the cross-cutting work which we would all agree in this room is needed to be done.

**Q503 Chair:** But we had witnesses in front of us who hold important positions in the system who had never even heard of the National Criminal Justice Board and seemed to have no idea what it did.

**Jeremy Wright:** That is certainly disappointing. In relation to various bits of the system, as I say, they are represented at the highest levels, either by directors general or indeed the senior presiding judge, who I gather attends as an observer. There is every reason to think, if you draw together the people at that level chaired by the Minister who has responsibility for the criminal justice system overall and does, as Norman says, have a foot in both camps, that we can start to improve things. But none of that improvement will happen overnight. The Criminal Justice Board has already issued its strategy and action plan, and the Committee will have seen that from June last year. It intends to refresh that, as I understand it, this year, and there may be a White Paper that follows too.

**Q504 Chair:** How often does it meet and how much does it impinge on your policy development work?

**Jeremy Wright:** I would have to check exactly how often it meets, but certainly Damian's role in chairing that means that he can draw from it and report back to both of our ministerial teams as to what it is doing. So it does have a significant input to policy development.

**Q505 Steve Brine:** Looking at the big picture here, what have your Departments done to analyse the crime drop and the reasons for different types of crime falling? Would

you dare to say that actually nothing that the Government do has any impact on the crime rate and there are huge numbers of other factors?

**Norman Baker:** If we thought the Government had no impact on the crime rate either way, it would be a rather depressing view of how Government work.

**Q506 Steve Brine:** But is it true?

**Norman Baker:** No. Of course we have an impact. We have an impact through legislation, through the supporting of measures to prevent crime in the first place, through diversionary tactics, for example, in terms of encouraging people to change their behaviours and so on, and through the criminal justice system in terms of the penalties which are handed out. So of course we have an impact. But you asked a very interesting question as to why crime has gone down. Obviously, we would say that the policies of the coalition Government play a part in that, but this has, to be fair, been something which has been the trend over about 20 years. It is also a trend which is noticeable in much of western Europe. So we are not—

**Q507 Steve Brine:** So that is in different Governments with different political outlooks and policies and yet you have had the same answer. I wonder how you attribute that.

**Norman Baker:** It is not entirely the same answer, but there are societal changes. For example, cars are a lot more secure than they were: 20 or 30 years ago it was very easy to break into a car and steal it, and now it is much more difficult. Indeed, the trend now—in so far as there is a trend—is to try to steal car keys rather than cars because that is the way to get into them. On the other hand, it is thought at the moment that mobile phones are not particularly secure in terms of what happens if they are stolen. Therefore, there is a small increase at the moment in theft from the person which is largely related to mobile phones, which is why I have been dealing with the mobile phone industry to deal with that particular point.

We have had a look into why crime has dropped. We think there are those wider societal changes. We also think that young people in particular are more averse to risky behaviour than they were in the past—perhaps in our generation. For example, drug taking is down, the worst alcohol excesses are down and the risky sexual behaviour practices are down. Young people perhaps are stuck in front of their laptops or computers rather than out in the streets. That is one element of it.

We also have, I think, an increased capacity for the police—there is more CCTV and so on—so the chances of being identified are probably increased, and that is also a deterrent. But in order to look at the trends, I have set up two panels in the Home Office, one of which in fact met yesterday and the other one met last week. One is to look at how we might further decrease crime, because that obviously has a beneficial effect on society as well as reducing the bill for the Ministry of Justice in due course, and to see what can be done now to reduce crime. For example, I mentioned the mobile phone industry and the steps they can take to make their products safer. We could look at what happens with the design of buildings and the design of the public spaces we have and so on. I also have another panel looking at where crime might go in 10 years' time. It is very important to try to anticipate that in terms of the money we put in as Government and the direction we set. For example, the geography of crime is changing. You can be subject to fraud now by someone who is living in a totally different part of the world, whereas, up to now—and look at 20 years ago—it would have probably been someone quite close to you. The internet, of course, has changed crime dramatically. So we are heavily involved in identifying crime trends both to understand what happened but also to try and anticipate where crime might go next.

**Q508 Steve Brine:** For a long time, then, with drugs, and especially persistent reoffenders—those in the under 12-month categories—a lot of that has been driven by the addictions.

**Norman Baker:** Yes.

**Q509 Steve Brine:** Can we just talk about drugs? Do you think that Governments—I mean this and the previous Governments—have an enlightened approach to drug policy, or is it still the case that it is a wag of the finger and punishment that is the policy response to an addiction?

**Norman Baker:** You are quite right to say there is a strong correlation between drug use—heroin and crack cocaine use in particular—and acquisitive crime. One of the reasons for the drop in crime, we think, has been a drop in use of heroin and crack cocaine in this country. There is no doubt that that is a direct link across there. We have an international comparator study under way at the present time in the Home Office that is due to report in about June, which I am handling. We also have a review of legal highs—and I think that is a matter of interest to you in particular with your constituency—which will report at about the same time. As far as I am concerned, we need to be evidence based and we need to have a drugs policy based on what works. We have a clear objective, I think, which is shared across the coalition and indeed across Parliament, I imagine, which is to reduce drug use and the harm from drug use. It seems to me we should be adopting policies which are best able to achieve those particular ends. I do not think we are interested in necessarily just waving fingers at people. We are interested in what is helpful in reducing drug use. That would be a combination of legal position, in terms of the legality or otherwise of drugs, and it is also a matter which involves health, education and rehabilitation. If we can get the rehabilitation right, which we are doing—we are seeing increased success rates in rehabilitation—then that obviously prevents re-use and stops people delving into crime in the future.

**Q510 Steve Brine:** As a crime-reduction Minister, are you concerned about the amount that we are hearing that young people, especially, are drinking and that then leads to the addiction of alcohol and the problems that ensue?

**Norman Baker:** The problems of alcohol in society are underestimated and are, in some ways—if only because of the prevalence of alcohol—more serious than the problems of drugs. We estimate in the Home Office that the cost to society of alcohol abuse is £21 billion a year—which is about £11 billion from antisocial behaviour, about £3.5 billion to the health service and the rest in lost productivity—whereas the cost from drugs is probably about half that. Obviously, there are fewer people using drugs than there are using alcohol, so I would not want to say it to the individual.

**Q511 Steve Brine:** The difference, of course, is that alcohol is a legal drug. Taking the example of Amy Winehouse, who tragically died a couple of years ago, it has been widely reported that she was a drug addict who died of a drugs overdose, whereas actually she died from alcohol poisoning through the failure of abstinence. She was a recovering alcoholic who drank a bottle of vodka and subsequently died with five times the legal driving limit in her system.

**Norman Baker:** Yes. We are taking steps to try to deal with the worst excesses of alcohol. As I say, the alcohol consumption problems are decreasing, not entirely in all groups. For example, there is a problem with 18 to 24-year-old girls, or women, where that use appears to be increasing, so that is a particular concern. We have taken steps through a whole range of measures, whether it is the introduction of late-night levies, which are now being rolled out, or the ban on below-cost selling, to try to deal with this. I have made it perfectly

plain to the alcohol industry that they need to do far more than they are doing and they have to take responsibility. But society has to change as well in terms of culture because, at the moment, people think, “Drugs, oh, they are a terrible thing,” which indeed they are, “but alcohol is a bit of fun.” Actually, alcohol could be quite damaging. When I went to a clinic in Chelsea to look at people subject to rehabilitation, I expected to find predominantly heroin users, but I found predominantly alcoholics.

**Steve Brine:** I am glad to hear you recognise that. Jeremy, finally from me, do you think that sentences—and when we were in the States and we looked at the “Right on Crime” initiative, which you know I—

**Q512 Chair:** Just before we leave the alcohol issue, this illustrates the ownership problem that we were talking about earlier, because you have one take on the alcohol problem but the Chancellor is looking at what people feel about the price of alcohol and what would help local pubs not to be driven out of business. So in taxation policy, which affects price, he is not part of this framework.

**Norman Baker:** That is not entirely fair, I think, because the alcohol problem is not predominantly one of pubs. Pubs are, by and large, responsible places where people drink alcohol in controlled situations which do not cause problems. The problem largely comes, in my view, with sales in the off-trade, particularly for supermarkets, at very cheap prices to people who are not supervised and then go out and cause problems. That is the element of that, which is why we are banning the below-cost sales and why minimum unit pricing is not being taken forward at the moment but is still very much on the radar.

**Q513 Steve Brine:** How much on the radar is it? I understood it was off the radar, and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that minimum pricing—because it would hit those who binge drink the most—would have a bigger impact.

**Norman Baker:** It is still there as an option. The alcohol industry has been given a time to respond to the alcohol strategy, which the Home Office has set out, and the ask we have of them, for example, is in terms of responsible promotions. It is entirely inappropriate, for example, that you have a supermarket’s cheap vodka being displayed next to children’s clothing, and we expect the alcohol industry to put its house in order. If it does not do so, then we reserve the right to come back to minimum unit pricing and indeed other possible options.

**Q514 Nick de Bois:** Just thinking back to the joined-up area, it is quite evident in a constituency like mine, which has a relatively wealthy area and a less wealthy area, that, per square mile, there are more corner shops with predominantly 80% of alcohol in them. Are you working with planning as well in looking at the impact where alcohol is being sold in abundance in higher-crime areas and actually lower areas of socio-economic value?

**Norman Baker:** We are quite clear as to the nature of alcohol sales which are a problem. It is not particularly pubs. It is sales of high volume or high strength, big bottle—cheap cider, for example, which is the kind of product often sold in those sorts of corner stores. As I say, we have taken steps to ban the worst of those sales and we expect the alcohol industry to take steps itself to try to regulate these products. As to the particular products which cause the most damage, like the ones we have just mentioned, we were asking them to take action themselves on that. As I say, we have reserved the right to take action if they do not do so. There are of course options open to local authorities, local councils, to impose conditions through the licensing regime. Some councils do that, but quite a lot do not as much as they might want to do so.

**Q515 Andy McDonald:** Can I turn our attention to evidence-based policy making? We had a successful trip to the United States where we saw some fascinating projects, including the Nurse Family Partnership introduction, which had shown, I think, a reduction of 57% in the entry into the criminal justice system over a very lengthy period of time. We heard from Professor Laycock, when he came to see us, that every time there is a change of Government there seems to be a change of policy. I think there was some considerable frustration from those professionals. Could you describe to us the approach of your respective Departments towards the development of an evidence base to inform crime reduction policies?

**Jeremy Wright:** I will start with that. First, you are absolutely right to highlight the importance of starting early. Although I think you fairly say that it does seem as though there is a change of policy every time there is a change of Government, I remember Government and Opposition talking about the process described variously as “the conveyor belt to crime” and other things, which starts very early on in a child’s life. If you do not intervene early and catch people who are starting to demonstrate troublesome signs in early life, you cannot be surprised when they go through education, do not succeed and then end up in the clutches of the criminal justice system. That, I think, is where the Troubled Families initiative comes in. It is sensible for us to look at the beginning of that process as much as it is to look at the end.

The difficulty we have in the Ministry of Justice, of course, is that we very much look at the end of the process. Norman’s Department gets involved slightly earlier, but I think we would both agree that there are other Government Departments that also need to be engaged in this process even earlier than that. Talking to colleagues in the Department of Health, and the Departments for Education and Communities and Local Government, about the way in which you engage with the process very early on is extremely valuable. In terms of evidence, it is very clear that, if you do engage early, you get better results. I also think the evidence is very clear that you do need, if you want to deal with reoffending—and that of course is the focus of my Department in particular—to pick up on some of the things Mr Brine was talking about. You need to pick up on addiction to drugs or alcohol, homelessness and worklessness. All of those things have considerable relevance, we know, to reoffending, as does inadequate success in education. All of those things have a very clear evidential link to the likelihood of reoffending, so it comes back, I think, to the point about cross-Government working, not just between the Home Office and the Justice Department but much more broadly than that. If you really want to get to grips particularly with reoffending—and I think to a degree with original crime too—then you have to address it across Government Departments.

**Norman Baker:** That is exactly right, and we do do that. Jeremy is quite right that other Departments have a role to play. The Department for Education obviously has a role to play, as indeed does the Department of Health. A Minister like Jane Ellison is very helpful in her approach to cross-departmental working. If you think, for example, about the issue of gangs, which is something on my mind at the moment, it is quite clear that gang membership begins at an earlier age than it used to, it seems to me, sometimes around nine or 10 years old. The Deputy Children’s Commissioner published a report at the end of last year on girls in gangs which shows an appalling misogynistic approach to girls in gangs. It is necessary to get them out of that situation, and that is something which we are working on in the Home Office. The point is that we have to engage with our colleagues at the Department for Education because they have a wider role through PHSE and other mechanisms that they use to try to ensure there is a wider societal message brought out through the education system, not simply whether or not you can conjugate a verb or use long division.

**Q516 Andy McDonald:** I hear what you say about all of those points, but do you think there is a need for the Government to identify where the gaps are in the evidence base, and, if so, what is happening on that? Are you content that we have all the bases covered?

**Jeremy Wright:** No. There is always a call for more evidence. If I can pick out something in particular, we think it is very important—particularly where you are looking at rehabilitation and the connection to what is done to reduce reoffending—that we set up a mechanism that will enable us to work out what is effective. There are a number of academic studies which will tell you a number of things, although I do think, as I have said before, that there is some consistency in what we are hearing around the factors that are relevant to determining what the likelihood of reoffending is. But in terms of precise applications of those principles and what types of intervention work well, we think it is necessary to draw together the evidence on that and to enable it to be compared with a control group, if you like, so a cohort of offenders that have not had all of those things done for them. That is why we think the Justice Data Lab is a very sensible innovation. That gives the opportunity for people who are engaged in these kinds of interventions designed to reduce offending to come to us and say, “These are the results we are getting. This is what we are finding. Can you please compare that with a control group to give us a clear sense of whether we are doing the right things and getting the outcomes we would hope for?” We have already had, I think, 80 referrals to the Justice Data Lab, produced 57 reports and are getting some very good information on what we can tell works and does not work quite so well. That is absolutely designed to fill the gap you are describing.

**Q517 Andy McDonald:** Some of the academics told us there is a real problem on the funding of this primary research and “blue skies” thinking that the Government used to fund. Do you think there are any gaps there? Is their allegation that they are not sufficiently funded to conduct this research accurate?

**Jeremy Wright:** In terms of academic research, of course we have, I think, very good links with the academic community, but the academic community will not necessarily derive their funding from either of our Departments. So there is a separate question to be asked there. We are going to come on, I am sure, to talk about Transforming Rehabilitation, and what we are doing there, of course, is at least in part constructing a system that will reward people for the results that they achieve and I hope then focuses minds entirely on what works. People will then say to themselves, “How do I know what works?” That will bring me back to the Justice Data Lab and other things which I perceive to give them that information.

**Q518 Andy McDonald:** Our previous Committee recommended that there should be a data-driven approach to identifying the best means of achieving reductions in crime and allocating resources, informed by an independent centre of excellence. To what extent have the Government taken that approach when deciding how best to prioritise resources to reduce crime?

**Jeremy Wright:** There are two elements to it from my point of view, and then Norman will, I am sure, want to say something about the College of Policing and others. In relation to evidence and being able to have a data-driven approach to this—again, I do not want to repeat everything I have said about the Justice Data Lab—we see that very much as fulfilling that role. We think it is an important part of getting the data in so that we can understand what is effective and what is not.

The other thing which I think will help tremendously in relation to reoffending, rehabilitation and probation services is the setting up of the Probation Institute. I was at the launch of the Institute last Friday. That is very welcome because I think that will enable us to draw together a centre of excellence which is able to look at the academic landscape, pull out



the things that clearly are working well and co-ordinate the learning that I hope then everyone within the field can draw from those results. So I think it is the existence of a Probation Institute that will help, and the Justice Data Lab will help too. There is a subsequent question, which is whether or not we can draw together the work that is being done by Norman's Department and mine to have one single centre of excellence. But I have to say that I think the first step is to make sure that we have a centre of excellence to cope with rehabilitation, which is what we are doing, which previously we did not have, and then we can start to think about how we draw the strands together. I will let Norman talk about that.

**Norman Baker:** Yes. Jeremy mentioned the College of Policing, which is a new innovation, of course, designed to pull together the various activities going on within the police, the research which is taking place and the best practice which can be rolled out and so on. I mentioned the bodies I have set up to look at crime prevention and crime in the future to get ahead of the game. It is not sensible to have a Department which simply fire-fights the whole time. We have to anticipate where crime is going and try to head it off.

One of the issues we are looking at, just as an example, is metal theft. Metal theft is a success story in the sense that we have reduced dramatically the amount of metal being stolen through the various steps we have taken in different Departments to change the law on that. That is, by the way, one of the examples where we do make a difference in Government. But the question I want to ask is, "Could we have got there slightly quicker than we did, or was that the optimum time to get there? Could we actually have got there a year earlier than we did?" It is in some ways an academic point, but it is interesting to examine whether or not we always pick up trends as they emerge quickly enough and then respond to them, or whether there is a better system for doing that. That is just a question I have asked.

**Q519 Andy McDonald:** Can we move on to out-of-court settlements, shifting tack somewhat? The consultation on out-of-court settlements closed in January, I think. Could you give us an update on the likely outcome of the review?

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes. The out-of-court disposals review, as you will appreciate, covers quite a lot of territory and we would expect to respond to that later in the spring—so not far off now. However, you will know that we have already extracted from that broad subject area a number of things on which we think we can take more immediate action. So, as part of the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, which is currently making its way through Committee in the House of Commons, there are three particular changes that we seek to make.

First of all, for indictable-only offences, we do not believe that, other than in exceptional circumstances, cautions should be available. Secondly, for serious "either way" offences, the same should apply: they should not be cautioned unless there are exceptional circumstances. Thirdly, where someone is committing the same type of offence repeatedly, we do not believe that they should be repeatedly cautioned. What the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill will do is make it impossible—save for, as I say, in those exceptional circumstances—for cautions to be applied to either indictable or serious "either way" offences. In relation to repeat offences, if it can be concluded that this offence that you are currently confronted with is sufficiently similar to something that an offender has done within the last two years, then a caution, again, would not be available. We think those are three things that we can already pick out as very evident examples where action is required, but there is a broader context, as you obviously advert to and that we need to give a more holistic response to. We will do that later on in the spring.

**Norman Baker:** It is interesting to reflect on the fact that Home Office policy, in terms of how we regard crime and what we do, obviously has an impact further down the line on the Ministry of Justice. If I am successful in my role of preventing crime, and we have a whole range of steps we are taking to do that—for example, the domestic violence disclosure

orders to prevent someone becoming involved in an abusive relationship, just to pick one at random—then obviously there is less work for Jeremy's Department to do. On the other hand, we have been very keen to ensure that people who have been raped report that to the police and we push up prosecutions and successful convictions. They are at their highest-ever level, in convictions for rape, in terms of the percentage taken to the courts, but that then obviously puts more work on Jeremy's Department. But I think it is a good thing that we are identifying more people in that way. For example, the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that there is a significant decrease in sexual assault but there has been a 70% increase in the number of rapes reported. Both those figures are very useful and helpful.

**Jeremy Wright:** Can I come back quickly on the point around cautioning? It is worth saying that, overall, the number of cautions issued has come down considerably from a peak in about 2007-08, but that does not mean there is not still public concern that cautioning is not being applied to the right cases. That is why we need to have a proper look at it and that is what we are doing. But in relation to certain very specific things, where I think we probably all agree that cautioning is not appropriate, unless there are exceptional circumstances—there are very unusual cases where it would be appropriate to caution for an indictable offence, but they must be extraordinarily rare—if we get the impression, as we have from the figures, that that is happening more than rarely, that is a matter of concern. It needs to be acted upon, and that is what we are doing.

**Q520 Andy McDonald:** You have given a very full answer and I am grateful, but what I did not hear was any assessment as to the views of the victims in this process. I do not know whether you would want to comment on where that fits in with the proportionality about the cost of out-of-court settlements and the views of victims.

**Jeremy Wright:** When I talk about public confidence, I am talking very much about victims and others who look at the disposal that the case they have been involved in has at the end of the process and determine whether they think that is a reasonable disposal or not. I think public opinion, not just among victims but among the broader body of the public, is that really it cannot be right—can it?—that people who have committed very serious indictable offences walk away with a caution, unless there are very exceptional circumstances. It is very much with the interests of victims and, as I say, others in the broader community, in mind that we think public confidence in cautioning is crucial. Cautioning has a part to play, as do other out-of-court disposals. We are not proposing to take away the option for police officers and others to impose this kind of penalty, but it has to be done in the right circumstances. If victims and others think that it is not being done in the right circumstances, then confidence in the cautioning system starts to erode, and that is problematic. We need to take account very much of what victims and other people think about the system and we need to respond accordingly. That is exactly what we are doing.

**Q521 Chair:** We ought not to give victims or anybody else the impression that out-of-court disposals are only cautions. They may involve restorative justice processes, informal return of goods and all this kind of thing, which may be what the victims want in the particular circumstances.

**Jeremy Wright:** That is absolutely right and I think victims need to be engaged in this process. We also have to sound another note of caution, which is that we can never suggest to victims that they have the choice as to what type of disposal will result from the process. There are many other considerations other than the views of the victim. But it is also important that we keep victims fully informed as to what is going on. As I think you rightly say, Sir Alan, if there are restorative justice processes available—which, as the Committee will know I am a big fan and supporter of and we put money into—and both victim and

offender wish to participate in them, we think it is very important that they have the opportunity to do so.

**Q522 Mr Llwyd:** Could I ask a brief question following on this line of questioning? You say that one of the problems is that cautions are issued for indictable-only offences, not being of the peculiar exceptional kind. How often does that happen?

**Jeremy Wright:** Off the top of my head, the cautioning for summary-only offences accounts for a little under half of cautions that are given. That means that the rest are for indictable or “either way” offences. As I have said, there is a distinction to be made between indictable offences and “either way” offences because “either way” offences, as you appreciate, cover a whole range.

**Q523 Mr Llwyd:** My question was on indictable only.

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes. I will have to check exactly what proportion is indictable only. It is a higher proportion than you would expect. Of course, it is important, I think, none the less, to set out clearly in statute what our expectations are in relation to indictable-only offences. If I can get the information to you by the end of the hearing I will do, but there is a higher percentage of indictable-only offences cautioned than I think you or I would expect. So it is sensible to set out our expectations clearly in legislation as to the circumstances in which that is and is not appropriate.

**Q524 Chair:** If necessary, you can let us know later what—

**Jeremy Wright:** I will certainly write to the Committee if I cannot do it by the end of the session.

**Q525 John McDonnell:** How does the Ministry evaluate the effectiveness of prisons on reducing reoffending? What impact have budget cuts had on reduction of reoffending and on the work of prisons?

**Jeremy Wright:** The activity in prison is part of what we should expect, and we will certainly want to make a much wider enterprise. What is done in prison needs to link closely with what is done in the community on release. You will know, Mr McDonnell, as will the Committee, having looked at all this, that a large part of what we intend to do as part of the Transforming Rehabilitation programme is to link activity in prison much more closely to what happens just afterwards. I do not think it would be right to say that what goes on in prison is measurable on its own, nor should it seek to stand on its own, because the big problem we have at the moment is that, however good the activity may be in a custodial environment, if when somebody walks out of the prison gate there is nothing to meet them other than their old associates, and all the temptations to fall back into their old bad habits, all of that good work goes to waste very quickly. We have seen that happen far too many times.

So what goes on in prisons is important, and that is important in the context of rehabilitation in its broadest sense. We want people, for example, to start to deal with the gap in skills that maybe they have—literacy, numeracy, work skills and all of those things—and we want them to start in the process of dealing with their drug or alcohol addictions. But a lot of those things also are much more effectively started in custody, particularly with short sentences, if you are confident about what happens after custody. Taking drug addiction as a very good example, there are many cases that I have heard of where drug courses have not been started in custody because those responsible for administering them cannot be sure what is going to happen afterwards and it might do more harm than good to start something and not be confident about its conclusions. So what goes on after prison is very important and we think, if you put those two together, that is the whole process. In terms of how you measure it,

we measure it, of course, on the basis of reoffending numbers and rates. In relation to Mr Brine's first question, the truth is that, although crime has come down substantially, reoffending rates have not come down anything like as much. That is why we think a new approach is required.

**Q526 John McDonnell:** On the second question, what has been the impact of the cuts then?

**Jeremy Wright:** There have been rationalisations and savings to be made across the prison estate, as there have been across the rest of the public sector, but it is very unlikely that savings made on anything over the last 12 months would yet have fed through to reoffending anyway, because, of course, we measure reoffending over a 12-month period and then we have to wait for any cases that have been committed in that 12-month period to go through the court system. So you are probably looking at something like an 18-month lag time before you are able to measure the effect of any activity on reoffending.

**Q527 John McDonnell:** Have you measured the impact of the access to reoffending programmes?

**Jeremy Wright:** There are a number of different reoffending programmes and it depends what you mean. Different people require different types of intervention. For example, if you take sex offenders, we are very keen to make sure that we cater for what is an increasing number of sex offenders in our prisons. You do that by a variety of means. There are specialist sex offender treatment programmes, but there are also other programmes that sex offenders can benefit from, and we think that a sensible way of managing that population is increasingly to have specialist prisons for sex offenders. So we want to see more of those, too. There are a number of different programmes. I think it is difficult to generalise as to what is happening across the prison estate. Certainly, as you would expect me to say, I do not believe that anything is being done, in terms of any economic rationalisation, which is putting at risk the rehabilitation of prisoners, much less public safety.

**Q528 John McDonnell:** Safety? On prison officer numbers, as a result of cuts, are you not concerned about the increase in the levels of violence within our prisons?

**Jeremy Wright:** Certainly I am concerned about that. We take very seriously all incidents of violence against prison officers, and that is why we have to continue to work very closely with our colleagues in the CPS, for example, to make sure that, when an offender and a prisoner assaults a prison officer, that offence is prosecuted where it is appropriate to do so. I take all of those very seriously. What I do not think, though, is that we are engaged in a process which is putting people at risk. What we are doing is looking at what every prison needs to provide in terms of staffing to run a proper regime. That is called the benchmarking process. Indeed, in some cases, when we have gone through that process in individual prisons, some prisons have found that they have more prisoner-facing prison officers and more prison-officer prison-facing time than they did before the benchmarking process began.

**Q529 John McDonnell:** I want to finish by making this point. It is very difficult to see how reoffending can be tackled by rehabilitation in a climate of violence. For example, this year, to June 2013, saw a record of over 300 serious assaults on staff. The numbers of assaults overall over the last 10 years have gone up by nearly a third. They are up from 32 a day to 42 a day in the last 10 years. The use of weapons has also gone up by a third. How can rehabilitation take place when we cannot even keep our staff safe?

**Jeremy Wright:** Just to make one statistical point, if you will forgive me, the number of incidents of violence will increase with the population, and the population is a lot higher than it was 10 years ago. So we need to be a little careful on the statistics. But there is no

denying that there is a particular issue around serious assaults on staff. I hope I have given you the clear impression that I take that very seriously.

There is a different question to be asked around what we need to do within the prison estate to rationalise what is provided. The prison estate cannot escape what is going on across the public sector, which is a need to save cost, and we have been very clear that we need to make sure that the prison estate delivers good value for money. I do not believe that the only way to do that is to put prison officers at risk, and that is not what we are doing. We are making every effort to make sure that prisons have the right regime, supported by the right numbers of staff. That is exactly what the benchmarking process is about. May I say the benchmarking process itself is supported by the Prison Officers Association, who obviously have very sensible points to make to us about risks to their staff, not least on the incidence of violence itself? But in terms of the benchmarking process as a whole, that is a process that has the support of the Prison Officers Association.

**Q530 John McDonnell:** I am pleased you referred to literacy. Book reading helps in that, does it not?

**Jeremy Wright:** Of course it does. Contrary to what you may have seen in the press over the last 24 to 48 hours, we are not suggesting for a moment that prisoners do not have access to books. What we are saying is that you need to remember that there are prison libraries that all prisoners have access to, regardless of their status on the incentives and earned privileges—

**Q531 John McDonnell:** Only in some.

**Jeremy Wright:** No, that is not true. There are no prison libraries that have closed and the funding for them has been maintained. So it simply is not true. Secondly, regardless of their status on the incentives and earned privileges scheme, prisoners can all have up to 12 books in their cell at any one time. What we are saying is that there have to be some sensible restrictions on packages brought in from outside. I heard people say in the media yesterday, “Surely you can make an exception for books.” The problem, of course, is that when a package arrives at a prison saying on the outside, “This package contains only books,” we may not be able to take that at face value, and sometimes, I am sorry to report to the Committee, prisoners want to bring into custody things they should not have. These checks have to be made. It simply is not practical or sensible to have unrestricted access from the outside to prisoners for books or anything else. But is this about restricting prisoners’ opportunity to read? Of course it is not.

If I might be allowed one final point, I think we are slightly missing the bigger problem here. The problem we have in prisons is not prisoners who sit around wondering where their next Jane Austen novel is coming from. The problem we have in prisons is that—

**Q532 John McDonnell:** We have a problem with illiteracy.

**Jeremy Wright:** We do—exactly that.

**Q533 John McDonnell:** No one is asking for unrestricted access. We are simply ensuring that people can give books to prisoners who wish to read.

**Jeremy Wright:** Absolutely.

**Q534 Chair:** But there is another aspect to it as well. Since it is common ground that links with families are vital to rehabilitation, if a child cannot send a home-made Christmas card to a father in prison, or a book of photos of how the children are getting on cannot be sent, then one policy is working against another, is it not?

**Jeremy Wright:** It is not the case that you cannot send in birthday cards or similar things. Mail is not what we are talking about here. Post can reach prisoners just as it always—

**Q535 Chair:** Except a home-made Christmas card, which is larger.

**Jeremy Wright:** Of course, that is absolutely fine. What we are talking about is packages which, for very obvious reasons, have to be checked, and if you have no restrictions on those packages then the system becomes wholly impractical. But, absolutely, I agree with Mr McDonnell, the issue is illiteracy. If I believed for a moment that this policy was affecting illiteracy in prisons, then I would not be in favour of it. I do not believe that. I think we have a much wider challenge here and it is to address that challenge that, for example, we are working closely with the Shannon Trust, who will be well known to the Committee for the work they do with reading tutors and mentors in prisons. We have given them logistic support that they have never had before in the prison estate because we support very much what they are doing. But it is not the case that prisoners now or in the future will not have access to reading material. I very much want them to use reading material. I want them to learn to read if they cannot and to continue to read if they can. But that is not what this policy is about.

**Q536 Mr Llwyd:** In its 2010 report, this Committee recommended that sentencers must receive systematic feedback on the outcomes of their sentences—in other words, the efficacy of the sentencing. In response, the Government said that there would be proposals to explore whether oversight throughout the duration of community orders could be made available to all magistrates courts. What are your views on the potential of making greater use of sentencing review powers as a crime reduction approach? What consideration has been given to allowing section 178 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, giving sentencers powers to review cases, to be brought into force? Do you have any current plans to do so?

**Jeremy Wright:** There are no current plans to do so across the board, but there is a particular area where I think we can look further, and I will come back to that in a minute if I may. I will just make a broader point around section 178 and the powers of review. One of the things that we are seeking to achieve through the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, and indeed a change to the law under the Offender Rehabilitation Act, is to break down the wall that currently exists in community orders between the activity and supervision requirements. You will recall this from the Bill Committee's deliberations. That is so that we can give a bit more flexibility to the providers of those rehabilitation orders to react to changes in circumstance and to make sure that the right kind of rehabilitation, the right kind of courses, are being provided. Of course, if the court makes a specific requirement around drug rehabilitation, for example, then those orders must be carried out, but if what it is interested in is rehabilitation, and it wants to make sure that a change in the circumstance can be properly catered for, we believe we can do that by giving a bit more flexibility to the provider in the course of the sentence. That is the first point. Some of the argument for the use of section 178 is dealt with by that means.

The second thing is that I am not interested—and I am sure the Committee is not either—in setting up yet another layer of review that does not serve a proper purpose. I would not want to see a situation in which all sentences need to be reviewed, which would simply add another court hearing even when there is no purpose. I do not think that is what you are suggesting, and we need to be cautious about allowing for the growth of yet another court hearing which does not serve a meaningful purpose. We need to make sure that we are not building in, therefore, additional cost.

Having said all of that, where I do think there is considerable scope for us to look further is in particular with young offenders. One of the things that I think we could look at—and I know that Damian Green is looking at this and, indeed, made a speech on it this week—

is the greater work that we can ask magistrates to do in keeping track of particularly young offenders through the course of their sentence. That may be a sensible place for us to start, because it seems to me that there is considerable merit in keeping a close eye on how young offenders in particular are doing in their rehabilitation. They will not be covered by the Transforming Rehabilitation system, as you know. There is a different system that will apply to them. That may very well be a good place to start. I am certainly open to that and I know that Damian is too. So that may be a place to start and we will then see where we go from there.

**Q537 Mr Llwyd:** With respect, Minister, the point here is surely that sentencers do have, as part of their duty, to consider the crime reduction angle of their sentence. I know many Crown court judges and magistrates who feel—I would not say embittered—very disappointed that they are not able to assess whether what they are handing down will work or not. It is only on the rare occasion when the same person comes up before the judge that he is able to say, “That didn’t work, so we’ll try something else.” In my view, it is crucial that they should be given some feedback and there should be some system in place. I know there is a huge amount of change now—flux—in the system, but this, I think, should be built in, and fairly quickly, if we are serious about crime reduction.

**Jeremy Wright:** I certainly have a good deal of sympathy with the argument that it is important that sentencers get as much information as they can be given. You will recognise, of course, that in relation to certain specific aspects, particularly of a community order, judges and magistrates already have that opportunity. For example, in drug treatment requirements, or something of that nature, they do have that opportunity with suspended sentence orders—that kind of order. So some of that already exists within the system. I am certainly not, I hope, giving the impression that we are closing the door on the use of section 178 or other means to do what you are suggesting. I do, however, think there are some practical difficulties, and I think it would be sensible to start in a place where there may be an even stronger argument for doing it, which, for me, would be young offenders, so that we can start to see how the system would work with them.

We also have to be cautious because what we are talking about as a Government is giving magistrates a good deal more to do across a whole range of fields. I am very much in favour of that as I think magistrates can take on more. I think they are capable of doing more than the system currently offers them and I am very interested in the work that Damian is doing to explore those things. But I think we must also be cautious that we do not end up loading on to them a whole load of new responsibilities at once which, cumulatively, they would find difficult to discharge.

With all of those notes of caution, I hope what I am getting across to you is that I think there is merit in considering it further, but probably greater merit in starting with young offenders to do precisely what you are outlining.

**Q538 Mr Llwyd:** On an allied point, the Government seek to ensure that sentencers do have a sufficient range of sentences to deal effectively with all levels of cases that come before them. How do you seek to fulfil this role? How do you monitor whether sentencers have access to a comprehensive range of sentences?

**Jeremy Wright:** We change statute as we think we need to, to give the broadest range of options. I agree with you that it is desirable that sentencers have those choices. We also have to be disciplined, as politicians, frankly, to recognise that, having set the framework, it is for individual sentencers to decide how to use it. There is always a temptation for Ministers to criticise particular sentencing exercises, and I think we must always work hard to resist those

temptations. But I am confident that what we give at the moment is a very wide range of options to sentencers.

As policy makers, we must also think how we give sentencers the confidence to use those options. If I take one example, we have changed the nature of community orders so that there must be an element of punishment within them. That comes back to the points we were discussing earlier on around public confidence. The public would expect that to happen and I think it gives sentencers much greater licence to use those types of orders if they are themselves confident that the public are confident in those orders. One of the things we have to think about all the time is, first of all, whether we are giving them the range of options, and, secondly, the confidence to use those options; and, of course, we must also make sure that all members of the judiciary and the magistracy have the proper training to understand the tools they have available to them. That, of course, is also very important. But I do think we have at the moment a very wide range of tools available to the judiciary to choose from, and I hope very much that they will do as they always do, which is to come to the best judgment they can on the facts of each case.

**Q539 Mr Llwyd:** Adopting your terminology about the tools, magistrates have told us they do not have access to drug, alcohol and mental health treatment and that they fear that the TR programme's emphasis will limit access to rehabilitative provision for the majority of those that come before them. How do you intend to resolve these gaps in provision?

**Jeremy Wright:** I do not think that will happen. The reason is that which we have discussed already, and I think we are all agreed, that if you want to address reoffending you have to address a number of contributory factors. There is no doubt that if, as a Transforming Rehabilitation provider, you are confronted with someone who has a heroin addiction or a serious alcohol problem, and you are going to turn that person's life around and persuade them not to reoffend, you are going to have very little chance of doing so unless you address that very significant problem in that individual's life. We are creating a system that very clearly says to a provider, "If you do succeed in turning around these lives, we will reward you for it," much more clearly than has ever been the case before. I have absolute confidence that a sensible provider—and I hope we will only be picking sensible providers—will look at someone in that condition and say, "I know I have to provide for that and will be working with other agencies to make sure that they do." So I do not think it is likely that Transforming Rehabilitation means less attention to these problems. I think it means the opposite—more attention to those problems.

It is true that we also have to work with others—this goes back to the point around cross-Government co-ordination, and Norman might want to add to it—with colleagues in the Department of Health, for example, to make sure that drug and alcohol treatment is available, to make sure that when a rehabilitation provider says, "Look, this is clearly what I need to do," there is a place they can go to get that. But that is about cross-Government co-ordination, which I think we are all agreed is worth while and improving.

**Norman Baker:** Obviously people self-refer as well to rehabilitation for drug and alcohol problems, and Jeremy is quite right that the successful rehabilitation process does not simply deal with the addiction per se but deals with the circumstances an individual finds themselves in. They are much less likely to take up their habit again if they have a secure family arrangement around them, friends who will help them, a job to go to, somewhere to live and a social structure that works for them. Getting that sorted out is part of the rehabilitation for any person who wants to kick their drug or alcohol habit, whether or not they have been convicted of an offence. It is just what we try to do in the rehabilitation process.



**Q540 Mr Llwyd:** I have argued over many years that actually any community order should be structured in a way first of all to deal with the addiction and then impose other conditions. These people live a completely disjointed life, do they not, mostly under the influence of drugs and alcohol and so on?

I have one final quick question. Penelope Gibbs has told us that there could be a problem with local innovation in courts, given that there is a centralisation of HM Courts and Tribunals Service, and this may limit opportunities for local court innovation. What do you say to that?

**Jeremy Wright:** It depends what you mean by “local court innovation.” We are very keen to see courts addressing what might be quite a localised problem-solving approach; drug courts, for example, some of which you will have seen, I think, are strong in that. We certainly want to encourage that. Any centralisation that inhibits that would concern me. We all appreciate the need to make sure that we rationalise and save costs where we can, so the duplication of administration locally and nationally is not a good idea, but, if there are specific examples that she or the Committee are worried about, then I am happy to look into them. But, certainly, I am in favour of innovation locally to deal with particular local circumstances, where that is appropriate, and I think drug courts are a good example of that.

**Q541 Chair:** What the magistrates are often faced with is the same people coming back with minor offences such as non-payment of fines, with little prospect of access to alcohol or drug rehabilitation services. Is there scope there? Are you putting the scope in place for local courts to develop this problem-solving, sentence-reviewing approach, where people come back to the court and the court looks to see whether they are complying and there is some kind of moral pressure on them from the court to start to turn their lives around? This is clearly an effective process, but we seem to have a lot of processes which do not assist that.

**Jeremy Wright:** Perhaps, first, to state the obvious, if the court is having to do this, then we have got to too late in the system. One of the things that we are keen to do, in relation not just to some of the cross-Government programmes we have already mentioned but many others too, is to make sure that all Government Departments are working together to make sure that people do not get to that position in the first place.

Having said all of that, if people are at court, then it will depend entirely, I think, on what access the courts have to other agencies—I agree with that—but also on what type of disposal they intend to make. If what they have decided to do is to fine, it is very difficult to link other types of support on to that. If, on the other hand, they conclude—and they must do this exercise according to the proper sentencing guidelines, of course, and I am not suggesting otherwise—that some form of community order is necessary, then they will be allocating someone to a rehabilitation provider whose job it will be to address all of these subjects in exactly the way we were just discussing with Mr Llwyd. I think it depends entirely on what disposal the court makes, but I am interested in giving the court as much opportunity as possible to impose the appropriate penalty—of course I am—but, frankly, I do not think we should be expecting our courts to sort out these issues. There are many other ways in which the Government should be looking to do so.

**Q542 Mr Llwyd:** With respect, we are talking about cost cutting here. We saw in Houston, Texas, for example, an excellent problem-solving court regime. It is also happening in Stockport, so we know it works over here as well. You are confident that all the agencies are available, so why do we not draw them together and have more use of a problem-solving approach which is seen to be working?

**Jeremy Wright:** As I say, I am not against a problem-solving approach at all. I am concerned about assuming that the best place to do that is in a court. It seems to me the best place to do it is far before that stage.

**Q543 Mr Llwyd:** I agree with you there, but when it has reached the court stage it could be dealt with.

**Jeremy Wright:** As I say, I am not against the approach, and certainly I will look with interest at what the Committee has concluded about the Houston example—or others.

**Q544 John McDonnell:** I touched on America, which we keep coming back to only because it was such an interesting trip and enlightening in many ways. Texas justice you would not think would be so enlightening, but it was. Just returning to mental health, when we had the Magistrates' Association, in they said: "magistrates often have no option but to deal with [this group] in the same way as other offenders. This helps no one." Norman Lamb announced, back in January, £25 million funding to join up police and mental health services, so having mental health nurses and other mental health professionals working in police stations and the courts. But you have just said that, if it gets to police stations and the courts, then it is too late. Bear that thought in mind.

The basis of what happened in Texas, if I remember it correctly, was that with "Right on Crime" Jerry Madden and his colleagues were going to the governor and saying, "How much have you got in the budget of the prison building? Let us cut that in half and spend the other half on treatment and reduce the number of prison places." We have a £4 billion annual budget for prisoners and probation, yet we have only put £25 million over three years into mental health nurses and mental health professionals in police stations and courts, with an evaluation to come in 2017. Lord Bradley's report said in 2009—which will be eight years old by 2017—that the majority of people in prison have a mental health issue, a substance misuse problem or a learning disability. People accept that. If we believe it works, and we do because we have put £25 million into it, why are we waiting another three years to roll it out further? Hampshire, which I represent part of, is not included in the trial. To quote the Lord Chancellor in another guise, "If we believe it works, why are we hanging around?"

**Jeremy Wright:** First of all, for many of the cases we are talking about, if they have got to court then Government as a whole has not succeeded in the way it would wish to. There is a distinction to be made, in the context of those with a mental health issue, between the police station and the court. What we seek to do with liaison and diversion is that when people first come to the attention of the criminal justice system, which generally speaking is where they show up at a police station having been arrested for something, at that point, wherever we can, we identify those people whose onward path from there should not be through the criminal justice system but through the health system. That is what liaison and diversion is designed to achieve.

Would we like to have more than £25 million to spend and would we like to do it quicker? You betcha! But the first thing I should make clear is that this is not my money and it is not Norman's money either. It is the Department of Health's money. We certainly make a strong argument that we want to see liaison and diversion rolled out as quickly as it can sensibly be done, but these things are inevitably a matter of negotiation and we do the best we can. That £25 million is a significant step in the right direction, and to have half the country covered, as we believe it will be, by 2015-16 and the whole country covered by 2017-18 is also very significant progress in the right direction. I think in this, as in many other things, in an ideal world we would do it faster, but money is not unlimited. I accept absolutely what you say—that early investment is helpful in diverting these people away—but one of the challenges here is that these are people who are only perhaps coming to the attention of any

kind of system when they are arrested, and the point at which they are arrested is when we really need to seize hold of them and make sure they are given the right kind of intervention and support.

It is also worth making the point, so that the wrong impression is not given, that we are not talking about diverting everyone with a mental health problem away from the criminal justice system. Some will still need to go through that process. But there are a large number also who we would all agree simply should not be there and, once they get into the criminal justice system, they end up eventually in custody because the criminal justice system seems to have very few options other than that in the end. It is advisable that we avoid that wherever we can. That is what liaison and diversion is designed to do.

**Q545 Steve Brine:** Yes, so it is about having options, and sentencers having options is where this all comes back to. But to return to the point that Mr McDonnell made earlier about the Nurse Family Partnership, which we saw in Houston, it is always about how far you turn the clock back, is it not, to prevent behaviour as opposed to dealing with behaviour? The Family Nurse Partnership is what we call it here, and, to be fair, the Department of Health have put significant investment into that, but my concern still is that that is something that neither of you is responsible for, and yet we are spending £4 billion on prisons and probation.

**Jeremy Wright:** I think Mr Brine makes a convincing case for Norman and me to be in charge of much more of Government.

**Steve Brine:** Indeed.

**Q546 Chair:** Absolutely. In your evidence to us you, the Ministry of Justice, said: “Our reformed system will support co-commissioning to enable different agencies’ priorities to be aligned and we will also explore opportunities to pool some of the funding allocated to work with offenders so that it can be used more efficiently.” That is exactly what you cannot do when the prison budget is completely ring-fenced and separated.

**Norman Baker:** But I think what has been demonstrated here is the fact that we have got the Department of Health engaging with other Departments for purposes which are related to objectives of the Ministry of Justice or the Home Office, and that is a good example of cross-departmental working. The problem sometimes comes in that, if you identify an early intervention, you have to front-load it with money, and the consequence might be, when successful, that the prison budget will diminish at some point in the future, or the Home Office budget will diminish, but you have to front-load it to start with. In difficult financial circumstances, it is a question of where the front-loading money comes from.

An example from my constituency—a parallel example, if you like, but not quite the same—is within the health service itself, and I hope the Department of Health does not mind me saying this. I have a particular constituent who is regularly taken to accident and emergency by the ambulance service at vast cost to the taxpayer because the mental health budget, in my view, in my area, is insufficient to deal with that person. The savings would be enormous if the mental health budget were able to be increased to deal with those sorts of people. So that is the issue, and it is the same with the new commissioning groups in the health service. Localising health provision is something we all want to do and that will save money for accident and emergency in due course, but it requires front-loading of the money. That is a general issue across Government about finding funds to do what you think is right while continuing the present system, which still needs to be funded in the meantime.

**Q547 Steve Brine:** Are PCCs the route for this? I appreciate that PCCs are new, and obviously the Opposition will have them abolished if they win in a year’s time, but—

**Chair:** I will believe that when I see it.

**Steve Brine:** For the record, the Chair said, “I will believe that when I see it,” and I could probably agree. While some PCCs have said to me that they would like to take responsibility for probation commissioning, others are not so sure that they would like to do that. Do you envisage a greater role for PCCs, should they survive?

**Norman Baker:** PCCs are a collection of individual people who are approaching it in different ways—let us put it that way—across the country.

**Q548 Steve Brine:** That is localism, is it not?

**Norman Baker:** It is localism. Some of the good examples coming out of that I think are quite encouraging. There is an ownership from the PCCs on victims, for example, which there was not before. We are seeing a more rounded approach locally in terms of crime when it was not there before. I do think they have a role in that respect. I also think the changes to public health, in fact, bringing together local council responsibility with the Department of Health responsibility, has been helpful in joining up at local level the sort of cross-departmental working which you have been referring to here at national level. That is now happening more at the local level.

**Jeremy Wright:** Can I go back to the Chair’s point about pooling of resources and perhaps say something quickly about police and crime commissioners as well?

I think it is a challenge always to get Government Departments to pool their resources, but, in connection with early intervention, the Troubled Families initiative is a very good example of doing just that: £25 million of MOJ money has gone into the Troubled Families initiative and that is about pooling our resources in order to intervene at an early stage in the hope that, corporately, we all benefit in the longer term. A number of Government Departments have done that. It might not have been their top choice for spending money if it were solely their Department they were looking at, but we are slowly, I think, moving to a place where Government Departments can see beyond the parameters of their own departmental budgets and activities, and can see that pooling resources is a good idea. The Troubled Families Initiative I hope is a good example of that.

Can I say very quickly on police and crime commissioners that one of the things that we hope can be done under Transforming Rehabilitation is to enable police and crime commissioners, if they choose to do so, to commission activities and services from rehabilitation providers? So there is an opportunity for them to be engaged in this, and I think a number of those police and crime commissioners—I accept Norman is right; they are all individuals and will approach this differently—can see real opportunities to commission different services from rehabilitation providers and enable them to engage properly with that process.

**Q549 Steve Brine:** Why would they do that? Do they have funding to do that? That is what the new CRCs are going to be commissioning, is it not?

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes, they will have opportunity to commission with the funds that they do have. They will have money from the Home Office. They are going to have money from the victim support budgets, which is increasingly being localised. So they will have money to spend. It is up to them to decide whether they think a rehabilitation provider is a good place to invest that money, but we can certainly see situations in which a PCC might decide that is a good use of their money and that they will want to involve themselves in that process. That is a chance for some of these links to be made more effectively.

**Steve Brine:** Thank you.

**Q550 Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you for coming to give evidence today. Could I turn your attention to resettlement prisons? I am sure that is what you want to turn your attention

to. When we had the chief inspector in, he pointed out that the prison estate was working at 10.2% over certified normal capacity. That situation does not appear to be improving. In that sense, are you comfortable with that, and can the rehabilitation reforms actually be conducted in an atmosphere where you have 110% capacity in most prisons?

**Jeremy Wright:** First of all, I should make a technical point. There are various different measurements of the prison population in each prison and there is a measurement which does not include any measure of crowding, crowding being, of course, in this context two prisoners in a cell rather than one. But then there is also an operational capacity and we are not above that. So, although there is certainly crowding in the system, and there has been for some considerable time, the system is not unsafe.

What we seek to do with resettlement prisoners is, as you will appreciate, move them for the later stages of the custodial part of their sentence to a prison in or near the area into which they are going to be released. That is for all the reasons that we understand—and I am sure you do not need me to go through—to enable a rehabilitation provider to make that contact with them early when they are still in custody, the “see-them-through-the-gate” process, and then support them for at least 12 months thereafter. It makes good sense to do that. We will not be able to do that in every single case. Not every prisoner will end up in exactly the right place, and that’s for a variety of reasons, not least because some prisoners require particular courses or interventions that are not provided at every prison. But, for the vast majority, we believe we can do that and we have plans to do that with the prison population at its current level. The current prison population does not preclude the movement of as many prisoners as we can to resettlement prisons, and you are absolutely right that resettlement prisons are a large part of the changes we want to make. Frankly, whether or not we were doing Transforming Rehabilitation, it would be sensible to look again at the way in which we spread the prison population and to move people as close to home as we can, particularly in the later stages of their sentence. That is what we are seeking to do.

**Q551 Jeremy Corbyn:** You seem to be on a bit of a mission of outsourcing everything in the prison service. If a rehabilitation programme, or any other kind of programme affecting prisoners’ time inside, is outsourced, what leverage do the prison governors have in ensuring that that is properly carried out and is of benefit to the prisoner concerned?

**Jeremy Wright:** Prison governors have authority over the prison that they are in charge of, and that applies to all the services that are provided within it. Let me just take you back, in relation to your first comment, to the autumn of 2012 when Chris Grayling and I first took up our posts. At that point, we were confronted with the competition of, I think, eight or nine—depending on how you count them—prisons. We could, at that point, have decided to privatise all of those prisons. We did not do that. Instead, what we did was say, “Let us pursue the benchmarking process,” which I described to Mr McDonnell earlier. The benchmarking keeps core custodial services in the public sector; it does not privatise them. It does look at the outsourcing of ancillary services and through-the-gate services. That approach was taken in response to the public sector bids which were made to run each of those eight or nine prisons, and we decided not to pursue at that stage the privatisation path, but to say instead, “Let us take you at your word. Let us say to all public sector providers, ‘You can achieve the savings you say you can in pursuing the bids to run those eight or nine prisons and let us do that everywhere.’ That is what we are doing.” So, far from being on a mission to outsource and privatise everything, what we have done is to say, in relation to prison management, “We could have taken the privatisation option. We chose not to.”

**Q552 Jeremy Corbyn:** What response have you given to the inspectorate about their doubts that the transforming programme can be carried out within the existing estate in existing facilities?

**Jeremy Wright:** I speak to Nick Hardwick regularly, as you would expect. What I have tried to say to him, as I have tried to say to you, is that we are confident that we can manage this process and we will only ever do it safely. We are not interested in putting the prison system at risk here, in any sense. But he and I will both agree that it is a good idea to move prisoners in the closing stages of their sentence to a prison nearer home. That is something that I think he fully supports. One must make sure that, where there are exceptional cases where that cannot happen, we are clear and up front about that, and I have said to you already that it may not be possible to do that for 100% of prisoners. But we believe that we can do that with the vast majority of them; we can do so safely and over the next couple of years or so. That is a process that is under way now.

**Q553 Jeremy Corbyn:** This is the last question from me. You say, quite rightly, that rehabilitation begins on day one of the sentence. If all prisoners are not designated as resettlement prisoners, then clearly that is a complication—an added difficulty. How are you addressing that?

**Jeremy Wright:** Certainly, rehabilitation does begin on day one and rehabilitation takes a number of different forms. Prisoners will often move through a number of different phases in the course of their sentence as well, as you will appreciate. Prisoners will always start at the local prison, which is where they are sent from the court. They will then, I think, move, if they are in a long enough sentence, to a training prison. The point is that at the training prison we want them to start to address some of the rehabilitation needs they have more broadly. Whether that is a deficiency in skills, an addiction or whatever it may be, we want them to address those problems. I expect rehabilitation to happen at every stage of the process. I do not think that that final phase of resettlement, where we move someone to a prison in or near their home area, is the only aspect of rehabilitation that takes place in custody. There are processes that are just as important that will take place in that central portion of a sentence. Just as we were talking earlier about sex offenders, but for others too, not every prison will have the availability of the sorts of courses and interventions that someone may particularly need. So it is sometimes—quite often—necessary to move someone around the prison estate in the course of their sentence. That will continue to be the case, but we think that that closing stage of someone's custodial sentence is a very important one in making the links we need to make with a resettlement provider, a rehabilitation provider, who will then continue to support them. It is that personal relationship very often that will persuade someone that they have something to look forward to, that there is a plan in place for them, and that it is worth them making that final effort to ensure that the difficult process of coming out of prison to the outside world is managed safely and effectively.

**Chair:** We will go straight to Mr de Bois.

**Q554 Nick de Bois:** Thank you. The current approach of the Ministry is to focus on reducing the cost base of prisons, as opposed to looking at the use or demand for a prison itself. Our previous Committee believed the Government should put the penal system on a sustainable footing by effectively reducing prison numbers per se. Given that we are reportedly very high at capacity—about 99.6%, I am told—do you still believe that reducing the levels of imprisonment is not in itself a legitimate policy?

**Jeremy Wright:** I will say something first and Norman may want to say something about demand. I do not think it is sensible for politicians to start to set targets as to what the prison population should look like. Our job is to provide a safe, secure and decent prison

estate for all those that the courts decide need to be there. I have never thought it wise for politicians to say, “We want the prison population to go up,” or, “We want the prison population to go down.” I do think it is right for us to say, though, that we want to see fewer people go to prison for the right reasons, and the right reasons are that they are not reoffending and coming back into the system. So we do have a clear aspiration—we could not be clearer about it—to reduce the rate of reoffending. That is partly because it will help reduce demand on prisons. A very large proportion of the prison population has certainly been in trouble before and a very large proportion has been in custody before. There is every incentive for us, for all sorts of reasons, in reducing demand in that way, but that is the way you do it. You do not say, “My objective here is to get the prison population down below a certain level.” My objective is to say, “I want to see reoffending reduced so that people are not coming back into the system and eventually ending up in custody.” Everything we try to do is focused on that objective to reduce reoffending, but Norman might want to say something about the wider demand point.

**Q555 Chair:** Might you not want to put people in prison for whom prison is clearly not working and not likely to reduce reoffending—for example, because their problem is primarily a mental health problem or because their problem is an addiction problem, which prison by itself is not going to be able to solve when they go out into the community?

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes, and we have discussed already the liaison and diversion programme, which is designed to achieve just that, to take people out of the criminal justice system at any stage so that they do not eventually end up in custody, as too many of them do. I entirely accept that. However, I am not of the school that “The courts must sentence people to custody.” They should do so only if they feel they need to do so. If they feel they need to do so because they do not think there is another option, part of our task is to create other options, and we talked about that earlier on around the community orders and other things we can do. But, in the end, it is for the courts to decide who goes to prison, not for politicians, for good and sensible reasons, in my judgment. It is not my job to determine what the size of the prison population should be. It is my job to make sure that places are available for the courts as they choose to use them and to make sure that we do everything we can with the people we have within the system to make sure they do not come back again. That is why the reoffending point matters.

**Q556 Nick de Bois:** Presumably, if I can perhaps lead into your answer, Mr Baker, between the two of you, you will have to consider the impact of the projections of reduced demand if we get Transforming Rehabilitation right. I am curious to examine over what period you expect to see, if you like, the benefit of that, and are you basing that on the evidence of the trials so far?

**Norman Baker:** Jeremy said his objective is to reduce reoffending. Mine is to reduce offending in the first place and we can do that through a whole range of measures, not simply by establishing laws which act as deterrents but also by removing the opportunities for opportunistic crime. A great deal of crime occurs because someone feels, “Hello, this is something I can get away with,” and therefore commits a crime. If that can be reduced either through technology, for example, or from different practice, that will help reduce the numbers of people who are going through the system in the first place. If we can develop health solutions, for example, for people who have drug addictions which then help them but also stop them reoffending and prevent them being involved in acquisitive crime, that is also a good way of preventing offending in the first place. So there is obviously a link between what we are able to do in stopping crime in the first place, which we are very keen to do, and what Jeremy does, which is to stop people reoffending if they have committed a crime.

**Q557 Nick de Bois:** Could I bring you back to the point on trying to anticipate, if you like, the reduced demand?

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes. I think we would not want to take too much for granted here, and the Committee will appreciate that, in terms of the financial and economic case for what we are doing, we have not factored into that the wider savings that society and the system gets from reductions in reoffending. But we would expect to see year-on-year progressive reductions in reoffending, and there are financial benefits to that. There are, of course, much wider societal benefits to that too, which are not financially measurable but are very real. To support what Norman says, I would not want the Committee to think, especially when we discussed joined-up Government, that I am not interested in preventing offending in the first place; I am, of course, but the nature of what we do in the Ministry of Justice is that the people who come to us have, by definition, already offended, and therefore the challenge for us specifically is to deal with reoffending. There is one exception to that, in relation to young people, where youth offending teams have a very real and important deterrence role too, and there is an opportunity for them to engage with young people early and persuade them that following a life of crime is not a good thing. Youth offending teams across the country do very good work in that respect. That is probably the one notable exception, but, other than that, we are, as has been said before, a down-stream Department and we are dealing with those who are already within the system.

**Norman Baker:** The other factor which has an influence on prison population is the length of sentence, of course, for those who are subsequently sentenced in court. That is partly down to legislation which my Department or others will pass, but it is also down to what society wants for particular crimes and what the judiciary themselves conclude is the correct outcome. If you take rape, for example, the average length of custodial sentence has increased by nearly 21 months since 2005. I happen to think that is quite a good thing, but there is an implication for Jeremy's Department from that.

**Q558 Nick de Bois:** I would just like to talk about how the Secretary of State used the example of competing the community payback in London as an indicator of efficiency savings that could be achieved potentially under Transforming Rehabilitation, in which we are all very interested. I understand this contract will now be terminated at the end of the year. Could you explain why it is ceasing, given that it was touted as a way forward?

**Jeremy Wright:** It is not ceasing as any reflection of performance. It is ceasing because, if we want to implement the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, part of that is the provision of community payback. So it would be difficult, I think, to maintain, especially in a contract package area like London, a separate contract for community payback and for the rest of rehabilitation services. It is designed to roll up community payback in the competition for that particular contract package area under the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms. There is no sinister motive here. That is the reason for it and we have done that in agreement with the current provider.

**Q559 Nick de Bois:** You are kind of rolling it up, in effect.

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes, because part of rehabilitation and the provision of those services will be community payback. We want to make sure that whoever ends up with the contract to run London as a contract package is also running that. As you know, that will not be the current provider.

**Chair:** We published an interim report on Transforming Rehabilitation. We are approaching some of the key dates now in the roll-out of the Government's measures. You



have responded to the Committee that that response has not yet been published. We will publish it in the next day or so. It is in the form of a letter, but there are issues and concerns that we would want to raise and I am going to ask Mr McDonnell to raise them.

**Q560 John McDonnell:** The letter dated 16 March from the Secretary of State, if we go to the third paragraph, says: "...we have now reached agreement on core issues, resulting in Probation Trade Unions and the employers' side ratifying the National Agreement on Staff Transfer at a meeting of the probation national collective bargaining machinery on 29 January 2014. Trade Unions have also withdrawn all local trade disputes."

I was quite shocked at that, and I read that paragraph to the union Napo, which I believe is an inadvertent breach of privilege and I apologise for that because I thought this letter was a public letter at the time. Napo's response to me was that actually there has been no agreement reached on staff transfer: "However, the staff transfer scheme is still under negotiation..." The local disputes have not been withdrawn. In fact, for example, there are disputes in the Wales Probation Trust and Warwickshire. There is a two-day national strike next week as a result of the Government's proposals going through. There are 800 appeals that "have been lodged by staff." There are "800 grievances lodged against Trusts." That does lend it an air, to some people considering the letter from the Secretary of State, of maybe being misleading.

**Jeremy Wright:** I do not accept that, as you will perhaps not be surprised to hear. Let me deal with some of those issues specifically. As to the issue of local disputes, it certainly was our impression that the disputes at local level had been withdrawn, and indeed the national negotiating machinery, which you have referred to, issued a statement following ratification of the agreement saying, "Disputes at a local level are now withdrawn." So it is something of a surprise to me that Napo's view is that local disputes have not been withdrawn. I am sure you will appreciate, Mr McDonnell, I have only seen the letter to the Chair from Napo as I was coming into this Committee. I have not had the chance to check all of the details, but that is my clear understanding. Secondly, in relation to appeals, there is a small number of staff for whom the results of their appeals are still outstanding. We think that is in the region of 20 individuals. You should also know that I see that Napo say that 800 appeals have been lodged by staff. To put that in context, that is about 4% of staff who have lodged an appeal. In relation to grievances, I obviously cannot comment on exactly where all of these grievances have reached, but it is the case that grievances can continue beyond the key dates that the Chair has already referred to. All of those do not have to be completed, as I understand it, by 1 June.

The broader point, if I may say so, is that it does not come as a surprise to me that Napo do not support these reforms and do not wish it to be thought that they do. No impression has been sought to be given that they do support these reforms. What we have said, which as I understand it is entirely factually accurate, is that the national negotiating body has reached agreement on specific things connected to the transfer of staff. That includes "continuity of service, pension eligibility and an enhanced voluntary redundancy scheme," as set out in the Napo letter. I do not think there is any dispute about that.

Equally, there is no dispute that Napo do not support these changes. They have made that very clear and I understand that. I do not agree with them, but I understand exactly their point of view and I am sure no one is misled into thinking, or has ever been misled into thinking, that they do.

**Q561 John McDonnell:** You agree that the staff transfer scheme has not been agreed.

**Jeremy Wright:** I do not think we have ever sought to say that anything has been agreed other than what clearly has been agreed, which are the specific details of what protection staff will get when the transfer takes place, which, I may add, are extremely generous, so I am not surprised they have been agreed. But there has never been any attempt, as far as I am concerned, to mislead anybody about that.

**Q562 John McDonnell:** So the expression “Trade Unions have also withdrawn all local trade disputes” is inaccurate.

**Jeremy Wright:** That, as I have said—and I will check and of course come back to the Committee—

**Q563 John McDonnell:** And there is a national dispute next week for two days.

**Jeremy Wright:** Again, we have never sought to dispute the fact that there is a dispute and I do not think that that has ever been said. In so far as particular local disputes are concerned, it was our very clear understanding—and you will understand why that was our understanding, given what I read to you—

**Q564 John McDonnell:** Would it not have been better for the Secretary of State to inform the Committee?

**Jeremy Wright:** There was a very clear understanding—and you will understand that that was our understanding, given what I have read to you—that local disputes had been withdrawn. I will go away and check the position and will of course come back to the Committee, but it is very difficult for me to respond in detail to a letter I saw as I was walking into the meeting.

**Q565 John McDonnell:** You knew there was a dispute next week.

**Jeremy Wright:** Of course.

**Q566 John McDonnell:** Would it not have been better for the Secretary of State to inform the Committee of that?

**Jeremy Wright:** I am not sure that the Committee needed to be told by the Secretary of State that there was a dispute or that there was—

**John McDonnell:** It gives the impression that—

**Chair:** Let the Minister answer.

**Jeremy Wright:** —industrial action intended to be taken by Napo. As far as I am aware, Napo have not sought to make a secret of it.

**Q567 John McDonnell:** It gives the impression that all the local disputes have been withdrawn—to try and imply to the Committee that agreement has been secured.

**Jeremy Wright:** I am conscious that, Mr McDonnell, you are much more expert in these things than I am, but there is a distinction, is there not, between a local and a national dispute? Our view was that local disputes had been withdrawn. That was our clear understanding. If that is a mistaken understanding, we will go back and look again. But in terms of a national dispute, there has never been any doubt that that was the course of action that Napo have taken in the past and clearly wish to take again. That is against a backdrop of a wider disagreement that they have with what we are doing. That, I think, is, and has long been, understood.

**Q568 Jeremy Corbyn:** Can I come in on this? Like Mr McDonnell, I shared the contents of the letter with Napo and if there is a breach of privilege I apologise; it was

inadvertent, like in Mr McDonnell's case. But why was a letter sent to us saying that disputes have been withdrawn when they clearly have not? It would have been very easy to have checked with Napo, or indeed with your own human resources Department.

**Jeremy Wright:** I can only repeat what I have already said, which is that it was our clear understanding that local disputes had been withdrawn.

**Q569 Jeremy Corbyn:** How did this clear understanding come about?

**Jeremy Wright:** Let me read it again. The national negotiating machinery, of which we and Napo are part, issued a statement following ratification of the agreement at the end of January saying the following: "Disputes at a local level are now withdrawn." I am sure the Committee can understand why I got the impression from that that local disputes are now withdrawn.

**Q570 Chair:** You have given us an undertaking that you will come back to the Committee in one form or another clarifying what you understand the position to be.

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes, I will of course do so.

**Q571 Mr Llwyd:** May I associate myself with what my colleagues have said? I am also deeply concerned, but you do mischaracterise Napo in one way in your response. They would have been quite prepared for the pilots to be completed and evaluated properly and then to see whether change is realistic. You say it as if they were not interested in any change at all. That is not quite correct, is it?

**Jeremy Wright:** I did not say that Napo were not interested in any change at all. I said they opposed what we are doing, and that is very clearly the case. It seems to me equally clear that one of the bases on which they oppose us is that they do not wish to see any involvement of anyone other than the public sector in the delivery of rehabilitation services. They certainly do not—

**Mr Llwyd:** That is not what—

**Chair:** Order. We ask questions and Ministers give answers.

**Jeremy Wright:** They certainly do not wish to see the involvement of the private sector. That is a position they are perfectly entitled to hold. Others hold it too. It is not a position I agree with, and therefore there has always been a fundamental disagreement between us and Napo on this point. That does not mean to say that we have not been able to agree certain things with them. We have. That is evidenced by the agreement which was ratified at the end of January. I will look again at the specific points that are made in this letter, and if I need to clarify to the Committee what has happened I will of course do so, but I hope the Committee will accept I have done my best to deal with it today.

**Q572 John McDonnell:** Chair, can I clarify one other matter on the letter which is confusing? In the final paragraph are the corrections—could I say?—to the timetable for implementation, which shifts meeting by meeting. Can we be absolutely explicit now on what the Government are saying? They are now saying that the new working structures have shifted from what we were told, from 1 April and then, we were told originally, June, but now it is 31 May. I suspect it will be June. We are told the deadline tenders will be due in June. "We envisage that contracts will be awarded in Autumn 2014, rather than December 2014." I am not sure what autumn is, but it is probably 30 November. Then it says, "New providers will therefore commence service delivery in late Autumn 2014, not April 2015." But overleaf, on the previous page, it says: "The competition has now entered the Invitation to Negotiate stage (ITN) and the Ministry published ITN documentation to the tier 1 providers on the 31st January 2014. It is our intention to award and mobilise the contracts by 2015." Where are we?

**Chair:** Can you update us on the timetable, please?

**Jeremy Wright:** The only one of those things that has changed is the transfer from probation trusts to community rehabilitation companies and the national probation service, which will now take place on 1 June rather than on 1 April. If there is any confusion about 31 May, I suspect it is because probation trusts will cease to exist on 31 May so that the new system can commence on 1 June. If I might say so, one of—

**Q573 John McDonnell:** Can I just interrupt you on this?

**Jeremy Wright:** Can I finish this point—

**Chair:** Order.

**Jeremy Wright:** —and then of course you can? The question that I am often asked is, “Why are you rushing ahead with this? Surely you have not allowed enough time for things to happen.” I am surprised that I am now being criticised for not sticking to my original timetable.

**Q574 John McDonnell:** That is because you have unrealistic timetables and that is what the Risk Register told you. Can you clarify this? It says, “It is our intention to award and mobilise the contracts by 2015”? Overleaf, it says, “New providers will therefore commence service delivery in late Autumn 2014, not April 2015.” What is it? Is it autumn or is it 2015?

**Jeremy Wright:** The contracts should be awarded towards the end of this year, and then, of course, we will expect mobilisation to take place by 2015.

**Q575 John McDonnell:** That is not what it says. It says: “It is our intention to award and mobilise the contracts by 2015.” Then, “New providers will therefore commence service delivery in late Autumn.”

**Jeremy Wright:** Yes, that is what I think I have said. But let me go away and look at exactly what Napo are saying about the letter we have written. If there is clarification to be made—

**Q576 John McDonnell:** It changes at every meeting.

**Jeremy Wright:** —I will make it. But I am sure the Committee will understand, as I have said, that the first I have seen of this particular letter from Napo was walking into this Committee. So it is very difficult for me to—

**John McDonnell:** No. This was the Secretary of State’s letter.

**Q577 Chair:** We are quoting from the Secretary of State’s letter.

**Jeremy Wright:** I understand that, but the point of difficulty—

**Chair:** Order. I have to say I find some of this timetable detail unclear.

**John McDonnell:** Bizarre.

**Q578 Chair:** Order. I find the timetable is getting unclear and I would like the Committee to have a clear and reliable timetable. It is of some public significance, of course, because these are very important services and they also involve the working lives of a great many people. So we would be grateful if we could have that clarified as soon as possible.

**Jeremy Wright:** I shall certainly do that.

**Chair:** We are grateful to you for the wide-ranging discussion that we have had on the main area of our forthcoming report. Thank you very much to both of you, Mr Baker and Mr Wright.