



Justice Committee

Oral evidence: [Prisons: planning and policies, HC 309](#)

Tuesday 9 September 2014

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- Paula Harriott, Head of Programme, [PPP 32 User Voice](#)

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Members present: Sir Alan Beith (Chair); Rehman Chishti; Jeremy Corbyn; John Cryer; Nick de Bois; Mr Elfyn Llwyd; and John McDonnell

Questions 1–65

Witnesses: Paula Harriott, Head of Programme, User Voice, Angela Levin, former Chair of HMP Wormwood Scrubs Independent Monitoring Board, Jonathan Robinson, former prisoner, and Deborah Russo, Prisoners' Advice Service, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning and welcome. We are very grateful to you for coming in to help us with the work we are doing on prison planning and policies. We have with us this morning Angela Levin, formerly chair of the Wormwood Scrubs Independent Monitoring Board; Jonathan Robinson, who is a former prisoner and has written extensively; Paula Harriott, head of programme for User Voice; and Deborah Russo, joint managing solicitor for the Prisoners' Advice Service. Could I start by asking you what has been the key impact on prisoners of implementing efficiency savings in public sector prisons?

Angela Levin: Thank you for inviting me. I am very grateful to be able to air thoughts that I have had for a very long time and that have often been ignored. Efficiency savings have affected the prison throughout. They have meant that prisoners have been locked up for up to 23 hours a day on a regular basis and have meant a huge increase in violence—by over 50% from the time that the cuts came into effect in October 2013. Last year, there were five suicides; there has been one so far this year. Officers cannot monitor the people who are very depressed, so there has been a huge increase in self-harm—thousands of prisoners are self-harming.

The savings have also affected the so-called attempt to rehabilitate prisoners, because there are not enough staff to take prisoners to education or workshops. It is a case of five prison officers looking after a wing of perhaps 300, so the only way to keep them safe is to keep them locked up. Prisoners have had to decide whether they would like to take a

shower or to go to education; some of them are reduced to one shower a week. The whole range of activities in the prison have been affected.

Q2 Chair: Have you seen any examples of sensible efficiency savings, given that in any organisation there are normally things you can do more efficiently and economically?

Angela Levin: No, not since October. It has been total and utter chaos, I am afraid. There are sensible ways of saving, but I have not seen them. One of the ways they have been saving is that they have used staff from security, who have never really worked on a wing and have no idea of the difficulties of dealing with prisoners, to come and stand in to give the impression that they have more staff than they in fact have. They have also cut down on safer custody reports. They mark the number of incidents, but they do not go into the detail, so that in a year's time, when the reports are released officially, I suspect they will not look nearly as bad as they have actually been. They have tried to make those sorts of cuts, which they think are sensible but give the wrong impression of what is going on.

Q3 Chair: How far are the problems that were very vividly brought out in the inspection report particular to Wormwood Scrubs and worsened by its physical condition?

Angela Levin: Wormwood Scrubs is a local prison. That means that prisoners go there after they have been sentenced, before a more suitable place can be found somewhere else. They are there for an average of 10 weeks. However, there are also lots of prisoners on remand—45%—who are there for up to two years. There are lots of detainees, either fighting deportation or waiting for the paperwork to be done, who are also there for up to two years. There are also a lot of prisoners who have been imprisoned for life and cannot get on with their project because the prisons are crowded. It is also a London prison, so you get a huge number of immigrants there.

Q4 Chair: Does the reduction in staff numbers make it more difficult to deal with the drugs problems?

Angela Levin: It is hugely difficult to deal with the drugs problems. You can divide those into two—the addicts who come into the prison and the drug dealing within the prison.

As far as the addicts are concerned, my view is that the prison is colluding with the prisoners by keeping them highly dosed up on methadone, which is more addictive than heroin. There was a case in 2006 when prisoners claimed that it was their human right to take drugs, and the Home Office, as it was then, paid them each £11,000 in compensation. They dose them up high so that when they go out and try drugs again they do not overdose and kill themselves. That is a big problem. Since the cutbacks in October, it has taken a lot of time for prison staff to administer this. Because it is dangerous, it has to be administered by a nurse and prison officer, which takes a lot of the time that could be spent doing other things. Some wings have 200 drug addicts.

The other issue is drug dealing. One officer said to me that the only way of handling that was to do daily inspections of cells. They just cannot do that because they do not have the

staff. Drugs come into the prison all the time, by various means. I can go into those at some point, if you would like.

Q5 Rehman Chishti: Coming back to your point about prisoners being in their cells for 23 hours a day, can you clarify whether that is the norm throughout the country or whether it is applied and used only for operational reasons, when those arise?

Angela Levin: I know that it is happening in several other prisons in London. I also know that several open prisons have had to stop their prisoners going to workshops or learning skills because there are just not enough prison officers to take them there. Wormwood Scrubs is a very big prison. One imagines that prisoners just walk to where the workshops are, but they do not—they have to be accompanied. There are just not the people to do that.

I think it is wide ranging. I have read lots of Independent Monitoring Board reports from other prisons and they all complain about the same thing. I have found it particularly terrible in Wormwood Scrubs. If you leave prisoners alone in a cell—not always with a television; they do not all have televisions and Game Boys—and all they have to think about all day long is their crime, you do not rehabilitate them. You make them less able to cope in the world outside when they come out.

Q6 Rehman Chishti: I seek clarification on that very point. Does the evidence that you have seen state that it is a common practice or that it is only an occasional practice for prisoners to be kept in their prison cells for 23 hours a day, for operational reasons?

Angela Levin: It depends on the number of staff on a wing. The priority at the prison—quite rightly so—is to keep prisoners and staff safe. Whenever the number of staff declines, prisoners are locked up. That is the only opportunity they have of exerting control. The prison officers do a great job, but they cannot do it all. Unfortunately, they are so cut down, with immense pressure, that a lot of them go off sick. The MOJ thought that a lot of prison officers would want to do something called payment plus, which means working overtime for up to 52 hours a day, for which they are paid, but they are so exhausted—

Q7 Chair: I think you meant 52 hours a week.

Angela Levin: Yes—I beg your pardon. Very few of them have volunteered to do that because it is too stressful.

Q8 Rehman Chishti: I have a final question on that point, in relation to the number of staff. My understanding was that the reduction in the number of staff related to middle management officials, rather than front-line staff. What would you say about that?

Angela Levin: No, that is not true. They cut 128 staff across the board, out of 580.

Q9 Nick de Bois: Can I get some context to what you said about there being thousands of incidents of self-harm? I think you were suggesting that this was post-implementation of the cuts. Can you quantify that?

Angela Levin: I do not have the exact figures for Wormwood Scrubs on me—

Q10 Nick de Bois: I think you were making a general comment.

Angela Levin: Over the country, it has gone up by 24,000 in less than a year.

Q11 Nick de Bois: The interesting thing I want to dig into is that I have a report from the university of Oxford that says there were 140,000 self-harm incidents between 2004 and 2009, involving 26,500 prisoners. Is that 24,000 increase in the number of incidents or the number of prisoners?

Angela Levin: It is the number of incidents.

Q12 Nick de Bois: I would like to dig a little deeper into that. I understand that it is predominantly among female prisoners but is apparently rising among male prisoners. Do you have a view on that? Can you give some context?

Angela Levin: I was very shocked when I first went to Wormwood Scrubs because I thought it was a female thing, but many prisoners self-harm. Some of them do it out of frustration and some do it as a form of blackmail, but you see it time and time again. Sometimes they cut themselves really seriously. One prisoner—

Q13 Nick de Bois: I do not mean to interrupt, but the point I am trying to get at is the context. The same report from the university of Oxford says that the large number of incidents up to 2009 affected 5% to 6% of male prisoners and 20% to 24% of female prisoners. Do you have any facts to show where that has moved to now, so I can have context?

Angela Levin: I do not have the details of how many male prisoners are affected, but I know that an extra 24,000 male prisoners self-harmed last year.

Q14 Nick de Bois: So all of that increase of 24,000 incidents concerns male prisoners.

Angela Levin: Yes—between May 2013 and May 2014.

Q15 Nick de Bois: But that would suggest that there are no incidents of female self-harm.

Angela Levin: No—I did not take those details down. I was working in a male prison, so I focused on that.

Q16 Nick de Bois: That is 24,000 incidents over the country.
Angela Levin: Yes.

Q17 Nick de Bois: That is compared with 140,000 incidents in 2009. I do not have the figures for 2012, but you are saying that there has been an increase of 24,000.
Angela Levin: Yes.

Q18 Chair: Some of the other members of the panel may have some thoughts on the earlier questions that Angela Levin has just answered. I do not want to deny them that opportunity. Some of the points will come up in later questions, but does anyone want to add something on the general impact question that I asked at the beginning?

Deborah Russo: There is certainly a lack of education and offending behaviour courses. The latter are particularly relevant in the context of the rehabilitation of indeterminate-sentence prisoners.

Q19 Chair: Is that because the courses are not there or because officers are not available to support or provide security?

Deborah Russo: It is both. There is unavailability of courses and a lack of education, with A4e pulling out of a £17 million contract to deliver training and education in 12 London-based prisons. There is limited access to health care and counselling. Having fewer prison officers has a massive impact across the board. Escorts are unavailable to take prisoners to health care appointments, resulting in delays in prisoners accessing health care outside prison and hospital appointments. As has been pointed out, having fewer prison officers results in more prisoners being locked up for longer.

Q20 Chair: We are going to explore issues relating to prison officers now—
Deborah Russo: We receive a lot of complaints.

Chair: Others may want to respond to a question that Mr Cryer is going to ask.

Q21 John Cryer: This is a question for anybody who wants to answer. Do you think it is possible within current resources to run prisons that are both safe and productive?

Angela Levin: I do, at Wormwood Scrubs, but it needs very clear thinking. I do not believe that seriously mentally ill prisoners should stay in a normal prison. By law, they should be removed within two weeks to an NHS facility, but that is not happening. Prisoners who are very ill are there for nine months or so. Then there is a whole tranche of people who have personality disorders and are very difficult to manage. That takes up a lot of time. I feel that they should all be moved out.

It is not a place for serious addicts. They should be moved to a place where they can be helped to overcome their addiction. There is no need for detainees to be in London prisons. There are other prisons in the country where there are facilities that can help them; they

should all be moved there. You are then left with a nub of criminals, as it were, who could be managed in a much better way.

I also think that some of the paperwork should be cut down, provided that it is secure, and proper details are kept. You get 70-page and 125-page orders from the Prison Service. Prison officers who are very busy find themselves stuck behind a computer for hours, which is not why they went to be prison officers. There are ways, but it needs a bit of what I suppose you would call clear-blue thinking.

Jonathan Robinson: Can I throw my hat into the ring? I want to be totally clear that I fully deserved a too-short prison sentence in 2011. I was sentenced to 15 months for theft. That was before the cuts. I fully deserved a prison sentence.

What I saw going on—or not going on—in prison is part of the problem of the whole mess. When, quite justifiably, I was at the coal face—in the trenches—I found a prison officer asleep on duty on two occasions at HMP Bedford, which later transpired to be the prison with the highest suicide rate in England and Wales at the time. The stuff going on, or not going on—including, as I shall reveal later, in-house sabotage of rehabilitation—is the real root of the problem.

Q22 John Cryer: The original question was about resources. Is it possible to run prisons that are safe—

Paula Harriott: Could I jump in?

John Cryer: Go ahead.

Paula Harriott: From the work that I have seen in prisons, I think it is common sense to recognise that if we try to do the same with fewer people it puts the teams under intense pressure. For me, the critical thing is that it is possible, potentially, to do that work if teams are trained and given adequate support, with charismatic and purposeful leadership. The prisons that I see where things seem to work well are those where there is purposeful, charismatic leadership and motivated teams. The prisons that seem to be struggling are those where the teams are demoralised, there are high levels of sickness and there is a sense of powerlessness over the change. That is prison officers.

The intent around leadership to transform and change the environment also needs the support of the end users—of prisoners. There needs to be an intent to integrate the prisoner experience into that change and transformation so that they also own that, feel part of that community and work with the agenda of the leadership, rather than against it. For me, it is possible, if it is done with purposeful leadership and with the intent to bring prisoners along on that journey, through consultation, integration and using them as assets, rather than focusing on them as deficits.

Some really great work is being done. We have a contract in Pentonville prison, for instance, where I see peer supporters being integrated and a lot more emphasis on peer support, using the skill sets of prisoners, to supplement the staff teams. However, based on the contracts that we have at User Voice and my personal experience, I would say that, if the team members—the prison staff—are demoralised and overwhelmed by the work, it is the end users who will suffer. The outcome will be continued reoffending.

Q23 John Cryer: Can I ask Angela Levin a supplementary? When you answered this question, you seemed to be saying that those suffering from serious mental ill health should not be in prisons and that, if they could be taken out and put in a more appropriate facility, it would make a huge difference. Presumably, those facilities are not available, otherwise people with serious illnesses would be taken out of prison and put in an alternative facility.

Angela Levin: In theory, that is true. However, a lot of these NHS facilities are very picky about whom they will take. It seems absolutely extraordinary, but time and time again I was told that they will not take somebody with this or that type of illness or that they do not want them if they are behaving in x, y or z ways, so you get very sick people just abandoned and forgotten about. It is appalling in a modern society that that is going on. NHS facilities are full, but money would be much more sensibly spent on building new facilities rather than a Titan prison catering for 3,000 prisoners, which I do not think will be very successful.

John Cryer: I would like to ask about the work in prisons initiative—

Chair: May I allow Mr Chishti to come in on the point you raised before?

Q24 Rehman Chishti: It is on the point about the provision of mental health services at Wormwood Scrubs. Previously, you have been on record as saying that provision in relation to mental health has been inadequate. However, according to a recent report—this information was provided to me by a researcher in my office—the provision of mental health services at Wormwood Scrubs is very good. On what do you base your assertion that they are inadequate when there is an independent report that states that they are very good?

Angela Levin: It is very easy. I was a member of the IMB for 10 years, for the last three of which I was chair. We had over 20 members, so nearly every day there was somebody in the prison looking round. We always went to where the seriously mentally ill were and talked about those who were vulnerable. Each member gave a monthly report. These were read at the board meeting and discussed with the governor.

All I am saying is what I saw as a layperson. I was supposed to be a layperson. We are called the eyes and ears of the Ministry—we go there, look and report. I do not have an axe to grind; I am completely independent of everybody. What I saw is that there is just not enough. Also, they are not there to cure—they are there to monitor and to give medication. Week after week, month after month, I saw prisoners in a foetal position, curled around the toilet all day with nothing to do. There is nothing in their cell because it is feared they will use it to self-harm. There were prisoners eating light bulbs and prisoners pulling up the floor and eating it. These are extreme cases, but that is what I saw. It was truly shocking.

Q25 Rehman Chishti: I am not challenging your perception, but the point I make is this. You made the assertion that something is inadequate, but there is an independent report that says the services are very good. There is therefore a marked difference between what you

assert—the perception—and an independent report that has been carried out on the provision of mental health care, which says that services are very good.

Angela Levin: I have also talked to the psychiatrists in the prison, who cannot bear it. They feel they are bullied and are not given enough support. They are very short; there is hardly anybody there to do an immense job. I do not know what their criteria were, but I am very shocked that they should think that.

Q26 Chair: I think Mr Chishti is referring to HM inspector's report, which in other respects was very critical but which identified where it thought there was good practice.

Angela Levin: I have spoken to Nick Hardwick and other inspectors. They say that it is what they see on the day. They come in, are there for four or five days and go around the prison, so they get intense focuses on different aspects of the prison. We are there day in, day out, over years. I would not dispute what he said—I am just saying that it depends. If you go to the health care unit and everything seems to be running smoothly that day, you write something different from if you go and discover that there are no staff and 50% fewer nurses than there should be.

Q27 John Cryer: I have one more question, which is about the working prisoners initiative. Previous witnesses have suggested that it has now stalled. Do you agree with that assertion? If so, what will it take to get it going again?

Chair: That is a question for anybody.

Paula Harriott: In my experience—from the insight that I have from the contracts that we have in prisons across the country and the consultation that we did with prisoners to respond to this inquiry—I would not say that it has stalled. It is just that there is not a standardised approach across the prison estate. There are some brilliant examples where there have been initiatives that have got going and there have been prisons where it has not got going, but I would not say it has stalled.

Recently, prisoners' perception of what prison is has changed dramatically, in that they now expect that they should be at work and there is an incredible frustration among prisoners when there is not work. There are prisons where there is very high unemployment. That is unfortunate, because we have now set an expectation that prisons should be places of work. I know that at Wormwood Scrubs and Pentonville whole swathes of prisoners would like to work, but there is no work for them. This is a problem to be tackled, because we now have an expectation that prisons are places of work.

Angela Levin: Could I add a specific example from Wormwood Scrubs? In 2011, there was an initiative to expand the laundry so that it could get commercial contracts, bring money to the prison and employ about 50 prisoners. It was a marvellous initiative, and £1.3 million was spent on it. However, the cuts came, there were not enough staff to run it, they could not guarantee to any commercial company when they could deliver, because the delivery depended on the staff and the prisoners going there, and the prisoners were not let out of their cells to work full-time during the day.

Q28 Chair: Was the staff shortage one of instructor staff and laundry staff or one of prison officers?

Angela Levin: Prison officers were running the laundry.

Q29 John Cryer: So the laundry is not being used at all.

Angela Levin: It is used a tiny amount, but sometimes prisoners cannot get to change their clothes because there has not been anybody there to get things washed. An officer said to me that it is a complete shambles. That is a specific example of good intentions that have not worked out in practice.

Q30 John McDonnell: Can I go back to the issue of the role of officers? Reference has been made to the inspector's reports. When we had the chief inspector of prisons in front of us in June, he said that increases in prisoner self-harm, suicide and levels of assault were indicative of an emerging problem in prisons. The reasons for that were unclear, but it was suggested that the implementation of the efficiency savings was likely to be a factor.

Angela, you said in an interview, "a tide of serious violence is rising. It's a near miracle that no one has yet been killed." The Prison Officers Association has said to us that the day-to-day communication between prisoners and officers has been rapidly diminishing, which in turn has had a detrimental impact on security and safety. There is a running theme here. How does the nature of the relationships between prisoners and officers impact upon safety and security?

Angela Levin: It is very interesting. As well as implementing the cuts in October, they started something called new ways of working, which meant that prison officers would no longer be permanently assigned to one wing. Instead, they would become troubleshooters and would go to wherever the difficulty was. That meant that prison officers would sometimes go to three different wings on one day because they were in trouble. The stress of dealing with that is one thing, but it also broke the relationship between prisoner and prison officer, because there was no time to build up any such relationship.

Officers are very important in two ways. There are female prison officers and male prison officers. Some male prisoners have a great deal of difficulty dealing with women in an important role and are very vulnerable because they have had such terrible experiences of women in their own lives, usually their mothers. They are at risk of self-harming. However, some officers have a sort of motherly role. Prison officers now are a cross between social workers and guards. They can have a motherly role and can give a prisoner confidence and a bit of self-esteem; they can really help. Once you have a gold nugget like that, you can move on.

In terms of the men, to my surprise, initially, a lot of the prison officers—though not all of them—were really keen on helping the prisoners rather than maintaining this very strict order. Many of them said to me that they try to give them a different view on life. If you are locked up in a cell and your whole family for three generations are criminals, it is very difficult for you to change. If you are on your own, it is very difficult for you to change. They talk to them and try to give them a new way of thinking—rather than a new way of working.

They can be fundamental in turning the switch to making them think in a different way. That is vital.

Jonathan Robinson: There are some very good prison officers. In my experience, there are also some awful ones. Prison officers in this country are trained for somewhere between six and eight weeks. In Norway, it is three years. In my experience, the majority of officers saw themselves as key handlers and not rehabilitators. That culture needs to change.

Chair: Mr Corbyn wants to come in on that.

Q31 Jeremy Corbyn: I thank Mr Robinson for what he has just said.

Jonathan Robinson: Jonathan.

Jeremy Corbyn: Welcome—thanks for coming along today.

Jonathan Robinson: It is a pleasure.

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you to all of you. When you were there, were you able to have any serious conversations with prison officers about the nature of their work and how you and other inmates perceived them? Were they receptive to those kinds of discussions?

Jonathan Robinson: Yes. Believe you me, when you are allegedly intelligent and educated and you do something as daft as I did and end up in prison, the shock as to what is not going on is just life changing. I had many conversations with different officers in both of my prisons who were willing to engage. The passionate ones were as frustrated at the chaos and Monty Pythonesque stuff going on as a lot of the prisoners who wanted to engage and crack on. The officers with passion who expressed their issues talked about the frustration of the revolving door and seeing people leave the prison and come back. Throughout my whole prison journey, I saw missed opportunity after missed opportunity of fixing prisoners while they were in custody. It seems to me that a lot of recent reform has been focused on what prisoners call aftersales—the probation journey—rather than on what we could do with prisoners while we have them in custody.

I totally echo Paula's earlier comments that, if you have a good ship's captain and there is good morale in a prison, that filters down to the staff and the prison. I go to a lot of prisons now—as a guest, I hasten to add—to give talks and to try to give encouragement, mostly to prisoners who are coming to the end of their journey. I tend to use a litmus test when I enter any prison, a bit like going into a new restaurant for the first time—I judge the atmosphere and what the interaction between the staff is like. At the beginning of the summer, I was at a prison where the governor knew all the prisoners' Christian names—and they were calling him by his Christian name. There was a buzz in that prison. My goodness, I was impressed. Everyone seems to think I am terribly negative about prisons. I am not—if I see something good, I will sing it from the rooftops. I really do agree with Paula—if you have a good ship's captain, you are halfway there. In my experience, staff with passion were as frustrated as I was about the mess. This was in 2011, so goodness knows how they are now.

Paula Harriott: The staff-prisoner relationship is critical to reframing a prisoner's self-identity. When you are sent to prison and are in receipt of punishment, you are judged and labelled by the community and society. You internalise that label and it can really marginalise you in terms of rehabilitation and reform. You can feel that you are out at the edge and there is no way back. A kind word, a challenging conversation—but one that is done with value and respect—is incredibly critical in reforming your self-identity.

In my personal experience and in the work that I do now, I see that staff-prisoner conversations are incredibly useful and rewarding for both sides. I do not think there are people who go to work in the Prison Service who do not want to be part of a public service and to do something that is about supporting people's reform. They are incredibly demoralised when they do not have the opportunity to do that. Prisoners really feel the loss of those conversations and of personal officer time, which has been severely curtailed recently. In our prison council work, we often have items brought to the agenda about personal officer time being curtailed.

Q32 Jeremy Corbyn: I am sorry to interrupt you, but is there a difference between private prisons and state-run prisons in terms of that interaction?

Paula Harriott: User Voice has contracts in both public sector and private sector prisons. There are some commonalities between the two and some stark differences. For instance, we have a contract in Birmingham prison, which went through a traumatic transfer from the public sector to the private sector—to G4S. The recent inspection report said that its prisoner consultation work was a new-found strength of the prison—

Q33 Chair: Could you speak up a little?

Paula Harriott: In some of the private sector prisons, people pragmatically understand that to manage these transformations and new, starker staffing ratios they will have to put an emphasis on consulting prisoners and bringing prisoners along in the journey. That has been a critical difference in the private sector prisons, which have embraced and gone with that notion. Some of the public sector prisons have lagged behind on that.

As I said right at the beginning, we will not push through any of these changes without embedding and understanding the necessity for continual prisoner consultation and integration and without sharing some of the decision making and building a sense that this is a community—a community where some people live and some people work, but a community that has to work its problems out together.

Jonathan Robinson: The key issue, of course, is that 99% of prisoners will at some point be let out to rejoin society. I have been going on and on about trying to do more with them while we have them in custody. I have seen great stuff both in public sector prisons and in private prisons. In my experience and in the prisons where I have been to talk, neither one nor the other is ahead. It depends on the governor.

Angela Levin: Another reason why the relationship between prison officers and prisoners—and knowledge of your wing—is vital is that they can sense when certain prisoners are prone to violence and can calm them down. They can sense if a prisoner is a

self-harmer, as they know this prisoner, so if the prisoner is very agitated, they can deal with that. In terms of safety of difficult prisoners and of the wing and other prisoners there, their knowledge of the inmates on their wing is crucial. If you go into a wing and do not know any of the prisoners, you have a very different job.

Q34 John McDonnell: You have mentioned self-harm. The prisons inspectorate noted that Wormwood Scrubs had not implemented recommendations concerning suicide and self-harm and that the prevention measures that the prisons ombudsman had recommended repeatedly had not been implemented. What do you attribute that non-implementation to?

Angela Levin: One reason for that is that the paperwork for the assessment—I cannot remember exactly what it is, but it is about looking after prisoners who you feel might be suicidal or might self-harm—is immensely long. It is over 100 pages long and is very detailed. When you lose a lot of staff, it is very difficult to do that in the very specific way that is required.

Speaking on behalf of the prison, which I have criticised a lot, I also think that you can never tell when someone is going to self-harm. There are tests that they do when a prisoner comes in, which may not be enough, but a lot of them will not say that they are going to self-harm or that they are depressed because they do not want to lose face; then they do it quietly. I understand that. A lot of the people who are committing suicide or self-harming seriously are people who come into the prison who do not speak English and feel very ashamed.

Deborah Russo: Having fewer prison officers per prison tips the power balance, leading to more intimidation and violence on wings. Recently, in particular, we have received lots of complaints from prisoners who fear for their safety on wings, resulting in our intervention to request that prisoners be moved either to other wings or to the segregation unit for their safety.

Q35 Mr Llwyd: In the recent IMB reports on Wormwood Scrubs, the difficulties of engaging prisoners in resettlement were highlighted. This is a question first for Ms Levin, but I do not exclude any of the panel, of course. What are the key factors related to prison policies that are currently impeding effective resettlement from prisons?

Angela Levin: I would go back to staff shortages again. I would also go back to the fact that prisoners do not naturally have a work ethic and that rehabilitation, in terms of going to workshops and learning how to operate on the outside, is not delivered in a way that they find appealing. A lot of them were truants—they do not like school or to be in a teaching environment—and it is very difficult. A lot of the voluntary charities that help them before they leave have not been able to do anything with them except speak through a crack in their cell door, because they are locked up.

However, one thing that is very good—and prisoners have felt this—is the mentoring that was set up at Wormwood Scrubs by the chaplaincy. This means that you meet a prisoner over six weeks; you meet them at the gate and then help them afterwards. However, because of various staff shortages this was cut down to four weeks. They found prisoners

did not connect sufficiently in four weeks and did not bother to contact their mentors after they left.

Q36 Mr Llwyd: Of course, that is not very helpful with people on very short sentences.

Angela Levin: It is not—exactly.

Q37 Chair: Mr Robinson?

Jonathan Robinson: Jonathan, please. You have just asked what is impeding resettlements. I would like to give you an example. I will start with a quote from the Prime Minister, who said that in prison “you’ll...meet...people who can’t read...These people need help...It’s common sense.”

I am ashamed to say that before my fully justified prison sentence I had never heard of Toe By Toe or the Shannon Trust, which is a scheme, via phonetics, where literate prisoner A teaches illiterate prisoner B to read. I believe the figures for literacy in our prison population are that something like 75% have the reading level of an 11-year-old. In my closed-conditions prison, I was identified as being intelligent and literate and was trained to be a Toe By Toe mentor. Due to security issues before the cuts, I never got to tutor anyone in my closed-conditions prison, quite simply because there was no one on my wing who needed the help. I was told that there were plenty of prisoners on other wings who could do with help but, due to the then staff shortage, I was unable to tutor.

However, very early in my prison sentence I was moved to an open resettlement prison called HMP Hollesley Bay in Suffolk. On my first full day, I was identified as the only trained Toe By Toe mentor on site and asked whether I would be willing to teach two illiterate adult prisoners to read. Then and now, I was so ashamed of my behaviour and so eager to put something back in and to do something purposeful and constructive that I eagerly consented. I met the two prisoners who wanted me to teach them to read and set up appointments with them. On the afternoon of 1 September 2011, I was summoned to the office of the then head of education, a Mr Kevin Morris from a company called A4e, which was then being paid £7.6 million for its contract to provide prison education in the south-east. His exact words to me were, “Who told you to do Toe By Toe in this prison?” I told him, “The staff.” He said, “Those people have no power in this prison. There will be no Toe By Toe in this prison. Scrub the appointments.”

For the last three years, I have been trying to air the shooting down by in-house vested interests of a scheme championed by the Prime Minister, J. K. Rowling and Nick Hardwick. On my travels, I met the then justice director of A4e, a Miss Jen Byrne. In writing, she indicated that the company was finding it difficult to identify which member of staff I was talking about. A number of e-mails flew backwards and forwards. Eventually, I sent Miss Byrne a link to the A4e website, which names the head of education. I have not heard from the company since.

In meetings with the MOJ, after they asked me lots of questions about why prison does not work, they seemed primarily interested in the porn channels that were available at HMP

Bedford. When I asked them what they were going to do about one of their service providers banning peer mentoring in an open resettlement prison, their response was, “We cannot comment on a specific incident.”

Q38 Chair: Can I make two points to you? First, we have to give someone who is named the opportunity to answer criticisms you make of them.

Jonathan Robinson: Please do.

Q39 Chair: We will do so. Secondly, what do you think the motive of A4e might have been for excluding this form of mentoring and teaching from the prison?

Jonathan Robinson: As I said a moment ago, I have been independently working at prison reform and trying to reveal what is really not going on in prison. I have met an awful lot of important people, some of whom are very scared to admit what is really going on; they have said to me that they do not want to rock boats. Their opinion—and mine—is that the vested interests and all of the different agencies working in prison are wary of them doing the work, so they can show the results and, come renegotiation time, they can say, “Look at all the certificates we have gained for this. Look at all the people we have got off drugs,” for example. They are stepping on one another’s toes. In my experience, the vested interests within the system are part of the reason for the system per se shooting itself in the foot.

Worse, through all the work I have been doing on trying to air what is not going on, the Administration looks the other way or tries to ignore me. On 11 September last year, the MOJ very quietly announced that Toe By Toe was to become mandatory in all prisons. In prison, I met a great many prisoners who had done bad things—who deserved to be in prison and to be punished—but were full of talent. There is an army of enthusiastic prisoners wishing to engage who are shunned. I am just one tiny example. It is on the record that a month or so ago I had a meeting with the shadow Justice Minister. I said to him, “In an open resettlement prison, we had no walls—our boundaries were fields. If you have someone there who used to strip down engines, get him to teach the youngsters how to strip down engines.”

One member of the panel talked about bounce-back engagement with staff. If you start giving young prisoners, in particular, encouragement and some sort of older brother relationship, whether it be with a prisoner who wishes to engage or with a good officer, you see their faces beam. Many of these people have never had a father figure. In my first prison, I had to teach youngsters how to make their beds.

Paula Harriott: Going back to the original question about resettlement: User Voice, as a charity led and primarily delivered by ex-offenders, welcomes the new initiative to introduce peer mentoring to support resettlement activities. Going further than that, I would like to put on the table the thought that we ought to see within the Prison Service work force—and within the criminal justice work force across the board—higher visibility of reformed ex-offenders, as tangible and visible evidence of what reform looks like, for current prisoners.

One of the real barriers to rehabilitation and reform for people who are within the criminal justice system is that generally they do not ever meet anybody who is reformed and has come from their background. Prison officers tend to look like the other, so there is a “them and us” situation. People are coerced. They are sent to prison—they do not go there willingly. You challenge that cultural perception among the prisoner population by having some visible evidence of what you are aiming at. Most criminals will not ever know anybody who is straight because those people who do reform move away from criminal circles. Rehabilitation is a bit like Father Christmas—a notion that we talk about but do not see. The visible, tangible evidence of ex-offenders within the criminal justice work force would challenge the cultural perception of prisoners of the purpose of prison and, inherently, prepare them more for resettlement.

At User Voice, we have members of staff facilitating our prison councils who are ex-offenders; we have actual key holders among that staff group. They act to inspire and motivate, because sometimes when you need to think about change, you need some inspiration and motivation to do that. Seeing them in the work force, as colleagues of the prison staff, can fundamentally change somebody’s perception of what prison is.

The second issue is peer support and ex-offenders supporting people through the gate, as they come out. It is obvious that there is a difficulty around integration into the community once you are released. People are challenged by the stigma and discrimination of the criminal conviction as much as by the trauma of imprisonment. Sometimes, you need in the first instance to speak to somebody who has walked in those shoes and has done it already.

We welcome the new policy initiative to support peer mentoring. It has a lot of possibilities but needs to be adequately resourced. If the expectation is that ex-prisoners can do this as volunteers, without adequate training, we are potentially setting up people to fail. We need to invest in peer mentoring training—professionalising, to some degree, that voluntary activity—so that we equip our ex-offenders with the right skills, the right understanding of risk and the right way in which to motivate, engage and broker people into relationships with the wider community.

The ultimate aim is for us to move away from the label of “ex-offenders” so that they become active citizens. We need to build mentoring projects that have ex-offenders, maybe, at the spearhead but then move people into broader relationships with the wider community—and engage the wider community in the endeavour of supporting people when they come out of prison, because we do not want revolving doors. Ultimately, that is a community responsibility as much as an individual responsibility. It is an individual’s responsibility to change—to make the decision and put their foot on the path—but we need to embrace and propagate the notion that the community also has responsibility to support people in resettlement.

Jonathan Robinson: From my experience in my work on prison reform, part of the problem is that the Administration—whichever side of the House it is—is very wary of the prison issue because they see it as potential trouble. When I was still a prisoner on licence, my services were utilised by Guy Opperman MP, who wanted some feedback from me on prisons and who later promised me a reference so that I could return to employment. He made me that promise in writing and it was sent to the Civil Aviation Authority—I used to be a pilot. His exact words to me, referencing the Administration, were that “all politicians are terrified of the *Daily Mail* and the prison issue is an election loser.”

Q40 Chair: This Committee is not terrified of any newspaper.

Jonathan Robinson: Incidentally, Mr Opperman's promised reference was never forthcoming. The Civil Aviation Authority said in writing that that was spurious and grounded me.

Q41 Chair: I am afraid that that is another case where we will have to ask the person named whether they wish to respond.

Jonathan Robinson: I would welcome it.

Q42 Mr Llwyd: I have a final question on resettlement, because I think it is an important issue in connection with rehabilitation and everything else. What are the typical difficulties encountered in the process for prisoners to transfer to establishments closer to home?

Deborah Russo: I am sorry, but I did not have the opportunity to add PAS's thoughts in relation to the previous questions concerning resettlement. Could I do that briefly now?

Q43 Mr Llwyd: Could you do it briefly? We have other questions to ask.

Deborah Russo: Yes. In relation to PAS's experience, what impedes resettlement is, first, the new procedures relating to release on temporary licence that have been imposed. Release on temporary licence is a very effective way for prisoners to resettle in the community. The new procedures affect that considerably.

The second point is the Prisoners' Earnings Act, which signifies that prisoners cannot use their earnings to contribute towards their families, to repay some of their debts and so on. What is the point of paid employment if they cannot do that? The new incentives and earned privileges scheme has had a very detrimental impact on prisoners being able to achieve privileges in prison. The effects are shorter visiting times and reduced association times and time out of the cell. In particular, we are experiencing the effect of the new IEP—incentives and earned privileges—scheme on prisoners' access to education. They are now allowed to have only 12 books in their possession, in their cells. I personally have a case of a prisoner who currently wants to undertake an MA but is unable to do so because of this restriction.

There is a restriction on parcels from friends and families. A lot has been said about books, but nearly nothing about parents being unable to receive drawings, cards and little presents from their children, which are also precious—

Q44 Chair: That is an issue that we as a Committee have raised with Ministers. We are aware of it.

Deborah Russo: More generally, there is a lack of sentence plans for prisoners and a lack of access to offending behaviour courses, as mentioned before, which later impedes eligibility for release on temporary licence or transfer to category D open conditions.

Q45 Mr Llwyd: Thank you very much. Do I need to repeat the question about resettlement and transfer to establishments closer to home?

Angela Levin: It is a problem, partly because there are so many prisoners in different prisons. A lot of the prisons outside London have criteria. If a prisoner has a sentence of less than six months, for example, he will not be considered for a move. A lot of prisoners complain that they do not have visitors because they are out. They do their best, but they go on a long waiting list and it is difficult to move them.

Deborah Russo: PAS has a lot of experience on this, because we receive a lot of complaints from prisoners who are unable to transfer closer to home. One of the issues is prison escorts. Again, the reduction in staff has an effect on that. If a prisoner has to be transferred from one end of the country to another, sometimes that will involve a stop in between overnight. If there are staff shortages, that is often not possible.

There is a lack of centralisation in transfer decisions—these are very prison-based decisions. There is little concern for prisoners' family needs in the decision-making processes. Although the prison rules provide that family concerns should be taken into account, they are not at all; they hardly ever form part of the decision-making process.

Q46 Mr Llwyd: Really?

Deborah Russo: Yes.

Q47 Mr Llwyd: Gosh. Does anybody else wish to say something?

Paula Harriott: I concur with what Deborah has said.

Q48 Mr Llwyd: I am not doubting your words—I am just surprised and shocked.

Paula Harriott: My experience is that generically the transfers seem to go north rather than south. You see the overspill from London going to the midlands. Then, when there is pressure on the midlands prisons, they go further north. On Thursday, I was with a young person—21 years old—who was from Southwark and had been released from Warrington, which is a YOI up by Liverpool.

Q49 Mr Llwyd: In Cheshire.

Paula Harriott: He had been on a circuit throughout his sentence, getting further north. Potentially that young person was being separated from family for the very first time. That is pretty shocking.

Deborah Russo: Chris Grayling removed legal aid specifically because he was concerned about prisoners making applications to transfer to prisons of their choice. That has meant that legal aid is now not available in situations where prisoners wish to transfer closer to home.

Q50 Chair: But you do not have to have legal aid to apply for a transfer.

Deborah Russo: No. Obviously the prisoner does it himself but, along the way, legal assistance can really help when you are seeking a transfer.

Q51 Rehman Chishti: I have some questions on scrutiny bodies and the complaints process. I understand that some of them may already have been touched on, but if you could elaborate on them that would be great. Starting with the first one, which prisons policies do prisoners tend to complain about most frequently?

Paula Harriott: Can I have a moment to think?

Q52 Rehman Chishti: Sure.

Deborah Russo: There is the incentives and earned privileges scheme, as mentioned. There are health care issues. Delays in complaints being answered are a big issue. Another is delays in sentence plan reviews.

Angela Levin: A large part of our monitoring work is on complaints from prisoners. Each year, we add them up and categorise them, so I can say very clearly that for the last five years or so health care issues have always been top of the list. Sometimes those are justifiable, as there were not nurses. At other times, they complain that they had to wait too long for the dentist. However, ironically a lot of them have appointments but do not bother to go because they decide that they would rather have a shower or a visit—recently there were 150 no-shows in one month. They are just not motivated to make these decisions. They got one guy to go round to try to get them to come, but there is no centralised information about which prisoner should go where.

Q53 Rehman Chishti: How do you deal with that? We get that in the NHS, where people make an appointment but do not turn up.

Angela Levin: The difficulty is that, if somebody does not turn up, you cannot then whisk along somebody who is next on the list. They have to be escorted, there are not enough staff to do that and it would take too much admin, so it is absolutely lost. That is the problem.

Q54 Chair: You make an interesting point. A number of prisons do not have total escorting policies. They expect prisoners to get to where they need to get to—

Angela Levin: I think they do that in B category prisons.

The next issue is always property. We have not mentioned that, but it is a huge issue. The most enormous amount of property gets lost. There is a very antiquated system where everything is written down on different-coloured pieces of paper, according to whether they can or cannot have something in their cell and so on. We have asked for the signatures to be written in capital letters, but they are scrawled, so months later, if they ask

to get something, things are missing. Sometimes valuable things go missing, which has been a problem.

No one will own the issue of transferring from courts to prisons and from one prison to another. If a prisoner arrives from one prison and his property has been left there, for whatever reason—it may or may not be his fault—that prison does not want to know. There is also the cost of sending a van to collect it, if they find it. They are not going to do that if it is from north to south, so the prisoner usually loses a vast amount. I can go on, if you want more.

Q55 Rehman Chishti: No, let us move on.

Jonathan Robinson: I stress again that I was in prison for only 17 weeks, which in prison terms is a long weekend. I kept a prison diary, which everyone began to hear about. I remember a prisoner coming to me towards the end of my stay and saying, “Jonathan, will you use your influence to get some changes made?” I said, “I don’t have any influence.” He said, “No, no, no. Tell people what is going on.”

To answer your question, referring to an earlier comment, there is an easy 10% of floatable, immediately rescuable overnight, cream-at-the-top prisoners who want to engage and could be given more encouragement, rehabilitation and education while they are being punished. The most common complaint that I heard was not about the food or anything else—it was about the missed opportunity. When you have prisoners saying, “What’s going on here?”, something is wrong.

Paula Harriott: Having thought what a common complaint for prisoners would be, I would say it is the lack of a voice and a sense of powerlessness within prison. I will draw on my personal experience here. I was in prison myself. While I was in prison, I saw things that, if I had witnessed them as a citizen in the community, would have caused me to stop, make a comment and challenge the individual concerned. In prison, you do not have that power. There are certain things you witness which you have to turn the other cheek to and ignore.

For instance, I saw a young woman who was clearly mentally unwell who was in prison for arson and was over tariff. The other prisoners would look after this woman when she was unwell. We would try to protect her by supporting her to comply with the prison rules. Anyway, she became very unwell. I saw her dragged by four male officers, head down, to the segregation unit screaming, “I don’t want to go there. I don’t want to go there.” That was done with undue force. If somebody had taken time and spoken with her, I am sure they could have supported her with health care.

I bring that up just to bring to light how I felt. I felt incredibly powerless in that moment. That is a common feeling among prisoners. There are established complaints systems and there is the scrutiny of the IMB, but, sad to say, many prisoners have no faith in the IMB.

Q56 Mr Llwyd: I have a question about prison councils. What role do they play? How useful are they?

Paula Harriott: The prison councils give prisoners a voice. Because they are facilitated by ex-offenders, who are clearly visible and disclose their criminal pasts up front, people have an immediate sense of trust that, as prisoners, we do not always develop very quickly with prison staff—although we can, and there is some brilliant evidence that supports that. Prison councils create a vehicle and a space for prisoners to voice their concerns in a way that allows them to be articulated in a responsible manner to the director or the governor of the prison, cutting out the middle management. What happens in the complaints systems is that, before complaints get to the governor or the area manager they are filtered by all the middle managers, who have a vested interest in not escalating concerns about poor practice.

When you have an external body that comes in as a critical friend and supports prisoners to have a voice, but in a solution-focused and positive way—not just highlighting what is wrong but contributing to how we can fix the problem and taking some ownership of it—you can build a sense of community and use the voice of prisoners to do that, to filter out some of the concerns, to highlight them to the management so that they can get fixed in a collaborative and co-productive manner, to de-escalate tensions and concerns that are always bubbling under the surface and to give prisoners a degree of ownership of the process. When we have a degree of ownership of any process, we feel more supportive of that process. That is critical to de-escalating some of the complaints and concerns.

What I see in the prison councils across the country is that some very proactive and positive recommendations come from those councils. Some of the smaller, more minor concerns can be dealt with very quickly, which sorts out the protracted paperwork trails that are sometimes related to reporting incidents in prison, where it takes about 10 people to investigate one thing. By having an external body such as User Voice that works with the prisoners to reassure them—

Chair: We will have to move on. Mr Chishti?

Q57 Rehman Chishti: My next point was about the complaints procedure, but we have covered that—unless someone really wants to comment on how effective it is.

Deborah Russo: I do. Sadly, it is extremely ineffective. The ombudsman has an incredible backlog, which renders the entire system unworkable. The quality of the decisions that are made is very poor. Furthermore, the system is slow and backward looking. It is not suited to deal with many of the complex and important issues that were previously covered by legal aid. For example, the complaints system cannot deal with mentally ill or disabled prisoners seeking to be resettled post-release. It is slow and inadequate. Often, by the time the complaint reaches the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman stage, the prisoner has been released. It is certainly not geared up to resolving important and pressing issues affecting the lives and progress of vulnerable people.

Prisoners have to wait so long for decisions that the PPO complaints system cannot be an effective remedy, particularly in relation to time-sensitive issues. We receive thousands of calls from prisoners complaining that prisons are failing to respond to their complaints and hence their complaints cannot be progressed to the PPO stage—or are delayed even further. There is also no effective oversight of the internal complaints system. Most HMIP reports

underline the inefficiency of the complaints procedure. Most also reveal that a high percentage of prisoners are unaware of the existence of the IMB.

Paula Harriott: Unaware—and probably distrustful. Not only is the prison complaints system cumbersome, but if you have an issue with health care provision in prison NHS England’s complaints system is a very cumbersome process for getting any resolution. Even though those things are available to prisoners, they do not utilise them. Because there is a poor level of literacy in prisons, they are more likely to pick up the phone and ring the Prisoners’ Advice Service. Utilising these written complaints, it is incredibly difficult to get your point across effectively.

When I was in prison, I worked as a peer supporter, supporting people to write complaints to get their voice heard. Sometimes, that can be counter-productive, because in prison you do not want to be seen as a troublemaker. People who put in complaints about their treatment are potentially very vulnerable to being marginalised even further, so there is a lot of distrust among prisoners about using the official complaints mechanisms.

Q58 Rehman Chishti: I move on to a question to Ms Levin. You have spoken about the chasm between what the Government claim is happening in jails and the truth. What did you mean by that? What do you attribute it to?

Angela Levin: When I wrote the IMB report that ended in June 2013 on behalf of the board, the key point we all wanted to make very strongly then—which was before the cuts—was that the prison was on a knife edge. I used that phrase and wrote about the violence, the self-harming and all the things we have already discussed. It was four months before I had any sort of reply. I then heard from the Prisons Minister, who in his letter explained to me how the prison worked, totally ignoring the point. I then sent another letter and was asked to go and see Michael Spurr, who is the head of the National Offender Management Service. I was treated like a naughty schoolgirl going to see the headmaster and was told, “You are completely wrong. You didn’t see that. No, no that is not happening.” I was not talking with my own voice—I was representing a board of people who were there a lot.

Secondly, if you listened to the “Today” programme you will have heard the Secretary of State for Justice saying that rehabilitation is going on, that prisoners are being given a strong work ethic and that, as near as possible, they are doing a very full working week. I heard that, knowing that prisoners were being locked up for up to 23 hours a day and that, if they did go out, they managed about an hour and a half a day in either a workshop or education. That often begins with a long tea break—

Q59 Chair: This is at Wormwood Scrubs.

Angela Levin: Yes.

Jonathan Robinson: I saw this in my prison, too.

Angela Levin: Later, one month before the severe cuts came in September and October last year, when many of the staff and governors were really worried about what would happen—they thought it would be catastrophic—Michael Spurr said that, if prison officers

did not have enough time to talk to prisoners, they had to make every conversation very important and that they must find the time to do that, so that the relationship stayed as strong as ever. Actually, that was not the case. It is claimed that prisoners are now being rehabilitated, but they are not. I know that that applies not just at Wormwood Scrubs but right across the board. They are not being given a work ethic, which is very difficult, or doing a full-time week. I do not think an hour and a half for a couple of days a week of is what any of us would call a full-time working week.

Jonathan Robinson: When you sing this from the rooftops and see what really is not going on in prison, it is frustrating when the Administration just say, “Oh no, we are making prisons places of hard work and rehabilitation.” It is about the inability of the system to say, “We have got one big problem.” An Administration needs to say, “We all agree it is not working. Let’s all hold our hands up and fix it.” The Administration needs to lose its veil of saying, “No, it’s fine, it’s fine,” which, I believe, is ultimately to keep certain newspapers happy because of this fear of elections.

What they say is going on ain’t going on. When you are there, you see the madness and the waste. If you then get to meet Mr Grayling to say, “This is what happens,” you are told, as Angela just said, “Oh, everyone is working hard.” What is going on—or not going on—and what they say is going on are two different things.

Q60 Rehman Chishti: You have covered all of that. I have a final point on the current situation in which we find ourselves in prisons. What do you attribute that to—the management in prisons or the overall Government policy on that?

Angela Levin: It is both, actually. As we said right at the beginning, the Government decisions to slice the staff and the budget have obviously had all the effects that we have discussed—of keeping people locked up so they cannot do things—but there are poor management decisions as well. They spend a lot of time changing the names of things that are not working, rather than dealing with the thing itself. There was something called the LEO—the local employment office—which was responsible for allocating jobs to prisoners. That was chaotic; it lost a lot of the applications and took months to do things. They have now changed its name to CAT. I cannot remember exactly what that is, but they spent months working out how to change it, to no effective purpose whatsoever. The bureaucracy is shocking. The computer system is antiquated, ineffective and laborious. It is a mixture of things. The combination is obviously appalling, but it is a mixture.

Mr Llwyd: So the lion became a cat.

Chair: We are running short of time, but we will take a quick final point from Mr Corbyn.

Q61 Jeremy Corbyn: You have all expressed concerns about the way prisons are run. Jonathan, you also made a point about the lack of training of prison officers; indeed, the POA has made similar points to us. In a nutshell, could each of you give me your priorities for retraining or offering training to current prison officers and, of course, training of new prison officers?

Angela Levin: First, I would not have got rid of prison officers who had 20 or 25 years' experience. I would do anything to get them back. They are doing that. They spent £5 million on redundancy; they are now trying to get some of them back, which is a good sign. I would give them mental health training. They have about an hour to be taught how to deal with mental ill health.

Q62 Jeremy Corbyn: An hour?

Angela Levin: Yes. Incidentally, I would give the IMB mental health training, too, because it is very difficult to deal with prisoners who are very volatile and suddenly explode in your face. That is not done.

Deborah Russo: You cannot train someone in between six and eight weeks to become a prison officer. Maybe we should consider how it is done abroad.

Q63 Jeremy Corbyn: Which countries would you look at?

Deborah Russo: Scandinavia.

Q64 Jeremy Corbyn: We visited Norwegian prisons. I was impressed with them.

Jonathan Robinson: And compare the reoffending.

Q65 Jeremy Corbyn: It is very low.

Paula Harriott: I would concur. The issues in prison are mental ill health and the breakdown in staff-prisoner relationships. People need much better communication skills, training in mental ill health and training in drug addiction and how addiction impacts on people. They need training in what prompts people to change and an understanding of desistance theory—how we transform people's lives and what are the key triggers for that—so that they can move in and out of those conversations appropriately.

For me, it is the criminological understanding that seems to be failing. Potentially, there is not enough time around communication skills, drug addiction and mental ill health. In terms of drug addiction, something we did not touch on but that I will quickly mention is that legal highs are incredibly problematic in prison. There is a whole swathe of process around understanding and treating illegal drugs, but legal highs such as mamba and spice, which are street terms for synthetic cannabis, are incredibly problematic in the prisons in which User Voice works.

Angela Levin: Young or newly trained prison officers also need to know how not to be manipulated and bullied by prisoners. A lot of them are scared witless by some of the more aggressive ones.

Jonathan Robinson: To answer your question, yesterday I was outside HMP Bedford for an interview. They have a notice on the wall advertising prison officer vacancies. One of the strap-lines was "No academic qualifications required."

Chair: This Committee has in the past lamented the shortness of prison officer training here by comparison with almost every other developed country. I thank the four of you for the help you have given this morning. We appreciate it very much indeed.