



Justice Committee

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

Tuesday 18 November 2014

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 18 November 2014.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Prison Officers' Association [PPP 13](#)
- Dr Geoffrey Penzer, Independent Monitoring Board Chair, HMP Thameside (unable to attend session) [PPP 50](#)

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Members present: Sir Alan Beith (Chair); Nick de Bois; John Howell; Mr Elfyn Llwyd; and Andy McDonald

Questions 166-254

Witnesses: **Simon Cartwright**, Governor, HMP Belmarsh, **John Biggin**, Director HMP Thameside, **Grahame Hawkings**, Governor, HMPYOI Isis, and **Phil Copple**, Director, National Offender Manager Service, gave evidence.

Q166 Chair: This is a very unusual location for a meeting of the Justice Committee. We are very grateful for HMP Belmarsh for extending their facilities to us and to the three prisons at this location for their co-operation in enabling us to visit and have discussions with them today. We appreciate that very much indeed. We are grateful to Mr Biggin, Mr Cartwright, Mr Hawkings and Mr Copple from NOMS before us this morning.

Can I ask you what changes you have made in the regimes in your prisons in the last 12 months and why?

Simon Cartwright: I am more than happy to answer that question on behalf of Belmarsh. We, in the last 12 months, have seen some real change to the regime—more so over the summer months, when we had to put in place a restricted regime due to staffing issues. That we did in conjunction and consultation with the staff in the local trade union. It was restricted because it impacted on our workshop and our workshop capacity. However, since 7 September we have implemented the benchmark regime as a new way of working, and that has seen those staffing issues resolve themselves in the main. We have a more purposeful, engaging regime taking place, and we are now working through the benchmark to steady state. The steady state will be between now and going into early 2015,

when we will get our staffing levels where we want them to be and also our regime where we want it to be.

Q167 Chair: Can I just clarify what actually happened in August, I think you said it was? Was it that you had made greater staff reductions than you had intended to make or had chosen to make, or that your own prison population rose to a greater number than you were staffed for?

Simon Cartwright: We were at the point in the summer months, pre-benchmark, where we did not have the staff to run the old regime in the old core day, therefore with the staffing profiles that we then we had to put in place a restricted and limited regime.

When we went live with the benchmark on 7 September, we then had sufficient staffing to run the regime in line with the benchmark, which was again a split core day and more access to activities.

Q168 Chair: Does anyone from the other prisons want to come in?

John Biggin: Speaking for Thameside, because we operate to a service level contract, the only real material change to our regime over the last 12 months has been the implementation of the IEP scheme back in November 2013. Because we operate to a contract, our provision has been maintained throughout.

Grahame Hawkings: We have had a slightly more challenging set of circumstances. We have run a restricted regime since September last year for 14 months. The reason we did that was that we had insufficient staff to deliver the full regime, so we created an alternative regime that gave equal access within the context of what could be made available. That remains in place to date, and I don't anticipate changing that until spring at the earliest.

Q169 Chair: Why do you have insufficient staff?

Grahame Hawkings: It is a combination of factors. We have had a high number of people that started with us, but in 2013 I had 12 people resign who were prison officers. On top of that we were also affected by the fair and sustainable procedures where, as we introduced the new grade structure, some of my prison officers took the opportunity to seek promotion and leave. I actually think that is a good thing—they had a good experience with us, they learned a lot of things, they used it and they pursued a different career. What is inescapable is that we did not recruit as quickly as we could have done and that position, to a degree, still remains.

Q170 Chair: How much have you used staff on detached duty, and have you had to release staff from detached duty?

Grahame Hawkings: We currently receive between four and six people on detached duty every week. We also use volunteers to on additional payment plus hours. That averages about 12 people a week, and we are wholly dependent on them.

Q171 Chair: I wonder if the Belmarsh and Isis Governors could tell us something about the benchmarking process and how that impacted on issues?

Grahame Hawkings: I am quite happy with the benchmark process.

Chair: I have just been advised that you should speak as closely to the microphone as you possibly can and in the direction of the microphone.

Grahame Hawkings: I am quite happy with the benchmark process. It followed a programme called the specifications benchmarking custody programme, which we had used as a method of determining our staffing position. So the transition to the benchmark did make some reductions, but it was broadly based on what we had already done ourselves.

Simon Cartwright: I agree with Grahame, I think the benchmarking process was well managed, well run, well planned. We had a lot of engagement with our local trade union staffing group to implement that. It saw some real changes in the way we worked moving forward. From the Belmarsh point of view, as the Governor of Belmarsh, I can only see it as a positive experience.

Q172 Chair: Just a couple of further points. How many incidents of concerted indiscipline have you had to record over the last 12 months?

Grahame Hawkings: We have not had acts of concerted indiscipline. The issue that affects us more is large multi-handed fights. The issue of gangs and youth violence is an issue that affects the population within Isis, and sometimes the incidents—

Q173 Chair: Is this your young offender population?

Grahame Hawkings: A mixture of young adults. We have between 18 and 30 year-olds, and it is a mixture of sentence length and age, and sometimes we have some difficult and challenging incidents.

Chair: What about the others, on concerted indiscipline?

Simon Cartwright: No real issues of concerted indiscipline. We have had a number of incidents, which range from fights and assaults to self-harm and so on. Incidents of fights, but no indiscipline.

John Biggin: The same experience. We have the same issue with our young population in terms of gang conflicts. An interesting statistic: at any one time, a third of my population

would be on our gang conflict database as having conflicts with others in the prison. It is a challenge to manage that on a daily basis.

Q174 Nick de Bois: I just want to move on to talk about the physical infrastructure. Can I just follow up with Mr Hawkings? I think you said 12 staff left in one go.

Grahame Hawkings: No, through the year.

Q175 Nick de Bois: Through the year. Do you conduct exit interviews?

Grahame Hawkings: The HR team have been engaging with them. We have had a number of people leave and the HR operations team at headquarters have been doing less exit interviews, but there are surveys of people and why they have left, so that has happened.

Q176 Nick de Bois: Was any pattern clearly emerging?

Grahame Hawkings: No—it is interesting. We had a prison officer leave just recently to go and work at the Metropolitan Police. We had another prison officer leave to take up a management in the Ministry of Justice. We had one prison officer leave to become a teacher.

Nick de Bois: So a mixed bag.

Grahame Hawkings: It is a mixed bag.

Q177 Nick de Bois: I will not spend any more time on that, because I know we are pressed for time.

I would just like to talk about the new role a little bit, and the prisons that have been built for different purposes. Both Thameside and Isis are very new, and I think it was 1991 for Belmarsh. Compared to the rest of the prison estate they are groundbreaking in that sense, being new, but they do vary in size. So I would like to ask you, in your experience, how does the physical infrastructure and the size of the prison impact on day-to-day operations and prison performance? I don't know how closely any of you were involved in the development of the new prisons, but I would certainly welcome your thoughts on that. Perhaps I could just start with Mr Hawkings.

Grahame Hawkings: Before I became the deputy governor at Isis I was part of the headquarters team that was involved in the large prison building programme that we had around about 2007, 2008 and 2009. A small team of operational managers and ourselves were marginally involved in some design issues. But from my own perspective I have been involved in the prison from the point of it being a project to becoming a prison. It is built to a Category B status and it does create, for the people that live there, a feeling that the building is about more than security—it is about the people within it. I think from a

public purse perspective it is entirely right that you build something that is flexible and can change. The bit that I am very interested in is how you act and behave within it. It is about if you get good staff/offender relationships, if you have good education, if you have good healthcare and good wrap-around services that can set aside the constriction that you feel within a residential unit.

Q178 Nick de Bois: You are more concerned with what goes on inside than physically or structurally, and I understand your point, do you feel that nevertheless with the size of the prison it has any inefficiencies or ineffectiveness? I just want to press you on that point because things change—your mix in prisoners changes, as we have been learning today, so would you redesign things differently now that you have been doing the job for last while.

Grahame Hawkings: No, I don't think I would redesign Isis in a different way. For the size of the plot available and what we have delivered I think it is quite good. In terms of the size, I have 628 beds. We have never quite reached that number, and I think that is a good size. I have equally worked in very large prisons at Leeds and at Lindholme with over 1,000 people, and I know at Parc they have a big prison and do good work. So there is always going to be an element of leadership about how the prison acts and behaves that will influence outcomes for offenders and for staff.

Chair: Can I encourage witnesses to speak up as much as they can, especially when another plane arrives in the City?

Q179 Nick de Bois: We will come back to the possible over-securitisation in a minute, but Mr Cartwright, did you want to add to the initial question on physical infrastructure and whether the size of the prison impacts on the day-to-day?

Simon Cartwright: As you have already alluded to—for me this is a personal point—the size of the prison does not have any real impact on what we deliver. It is about the staff you have and how you lead those staff. I am very fortunate that I have governed HMP Manchester. HMP Manchester, 1,301 beds, a large Victorian establishment with lots of open gallery landings and, again, the way the staff dealt with that, the way the managers went about their work and the way it ran operationally was a credit to the whole staff, and a credit to everybody involved. It is large prison with a Category A function, which is the same as Belmarsh. I think as we have developed over the years our designing and planning of prisons has got better, because we are looking at lines of sight, we are looking at safety aspects, we are looking at the decency aspect. I have also worked in establishments that have small narrow spurs that are very difficult to observe from a staffing point of view and from a safety point of view.

Nick de Bois: They are in the older prisons, presumably?

Simon Cartwright: They are in the older prisons, yes. The 1970s build model. Again, for me it really is about having good staff, and we have good managers—that is the key ingredient for me.

Q180 Nick de Bois: So the building does not hold them back. Mr Biggin, I will ask you the second question, but can I perhaps also ask you to touch on whether, in addition to building more residential accommodation, there are any other steps you can take to prepare the future accommodation—I think it is for another 300-plus prisoners, is it not? Perhaps you can touch on that in the context of the question I have asked about structure and size.

John Biggin: Absolutely. Can I start by agreeing with what Simon says about leadership and management teams? You could have the best designed prison in the world and leave everybody locked up all day if you do not have the right approach and the right attitude, but it is absolutely right that the design of a prison can significantly impact on how easy it is to organise and run.

Thameside is the newest PFI prison we have, and a lot of work went into the design of that site in order to accommodate the prison population that it was designed to hold, which was significantly a remand population. So initially we expected at Thameside that 75% of the prisoners living there would be going through the courts, so there was not the same focus on the provision of activity, either through education or work, that more stable prisons would have. In reality that population stream did not emerge, and it runs about 40% to 45% remand prisoners and the rest of them are sentenced.

Q181 Nick de Bois: That must pose quite a big challenge.

John Biggin: Yes, it was. At the start of the contract we had to realign all of our services to reflect the fact that we needed to do far more in terms of offender management, but the benefit of that was that of course it meant we needed to focus less on some of the churn services, like the reception services, so we were able to rebalance within the mix.

Q182 Nick de Bois: With the physical infrastructure, when you realised what was happening, did you think, “We do not have the right building for this”?

John Biggin: Yes, and we have adapted where we can internally and made the best use of accommodation within the prison to provide employment spaces. But going on to the second part of your question, in planning for the new accommodation, along with the accommodation block, which includes a significant amount of resource for group work and group rooms, because we anticipate being a resettlement prison under the community resettlement company, we want to engage prisoners while they are still within the environment. But also, we have a granular activities building that provides 10 multi-purpose activity areas that we can configure to reflect the changing needs of the demand, focusing on work skills and location skills in preparation for release as opposed to just routine work.

The plan is that as soon as the community resettlement companies are in contract, we want to engage with them quickly to really start to shape the service that is going to be delivered across the gate.

Q183 Nick de Bois: I just want to touch on the over-securitisation. The picture we are getting—and thank you, Mr Cartwright, for the Belmarsh tour today—is you are clearly getting a different type of category prisoner in here. They are not all Category A in your case; I think you have a mix of B and C when you were originally conceived for a different level. It has been suggested by witnesses that the over-securitisation effectively has the potential to provide, or is providing, a detrimental effect on the prisoners who, perhaps, are in a class A prison but are Category B or C. How real is that? What evidence is there of that? Let's put to the side the cost to the taxpayer—this is the effect on the prisoners.

Grahame Hawkings: In all the conversations I have had with offenders, particularly when we opened, they accused us of being a Category A jail because we had a Category A fence around it and everything was built to Category B. The bit—

Chair: Sorry, you said everything was built to which category?

Grahame Hawkings: I mean the building inside, because we were built in Simon's back garden on the sports pitch. So we were inside the Category A wall but we built the buildings to Category B status, so the perimeter fence remains Simon's responsibility.

So the bit that we concentrated on was the activities, the regime, the qualifications, and since we have opened we have concentrated on the partnerships. We do a lot of work with sector organisations, and the focus is on resettlement and activity to give people skills to go home. For example, we do things like job fairs, where employers come into the prison. So we treat the people who are in prison as people that we want to send home never to come back.

Q184 Nick de Bois: So you do not see it as an issue, in particular?

Grahame Hawkings: I think prisoners will tell you that they feel it is like a Cat B jail and would that be inescapable because they are living in Category B accommodation. What we aim to do is try to make sure that what we do with them helps and works.

Simon Cartwright: As you observed this morning, we have the infrastructure of a high-security establishment, and within that high-security establishment this morning there were 55 Category A prisoners. They are relatively small numbers. Our primary function is as a core local, which serves the courts and serves the resettlements needs of offenders. What we are trying to do with our regime, with our staff in our regime, is to instil that into the offender group. Within that offender group we have a percentage of roughly 20% Cat B prisoners, roughly 34% Cat C prisoners and a percentage that are unsentenced prisoners—remand prisoners. So there is a varied mix within that group, and what we are trying to instil with the regime and the culture that we have in the prison is that while we do have the infrastructure of a high-security prison, we can still serve the courts and the resettlement needs of offenders within the establishment.

John Biggin: I agree with lots of that, particularly in respect of the local prison estate. Within the local estate you never know what is going to come through the door, it could be anything from someone accused of murder to someone accused of shoplifting. So it is right, I think, that the perimeter in local prisons is a secure one. Certainly at Thameside our perimeter is highly secure but, again, we operate within that secure envelope, in so far

as possible, by focusing on making prisoners behave responsibly. So we have free movement to and from activities, for instance, because we recognise that quite a few of the people who live in Thameside will become lower-category prisoners when they receive their sentences. So we try to operate internally in a way that promotes responsibility and promotes prisoners to want to be motivated to make a change while still having a very secure perimeter.

Q185 Andy McDonald: What are the key factors that determine the effectiveness of a prison, in your view? That is a fairly open question.

Simon Cartwright: The point I would like the Committee to take on board is that as an organisation we are going through a lot of change at the moment, and within that change we look to our staff. I want to get the message across that the staff are working very, very hard in some very difficult and challenging circumstances. One of the key factors to a successful prison is staff-prisoner relationships—how we engage, how we interact, and how we look to work with the offender. In my time in the prison service I have seen prison officers grow into being more than just turnkeys you will have to excuse the terminology—and doing more than just locking people up, because they cover lots of different functions now and wear many, many different hats. You can look at all the aspects of a prison—performance measures, your number of incidents and so on—but one of the keys to success for me is that sense of good staff-prisoner relationships and good positive interaction.

Q186 Andy McDonald: That is going to have an impact in areas such as overcrowding, staff vacancies, levels of purposeful activity and levels of violence. How much control as Governors do you have over those areas?

Grahame Hawkings: In terms of violence, our chief inspector said that we had high levels of violence, and some of it was quite serious and used weapons. We have worked exceptionally hard on that particular aspect of our prison, and we have had some success. We have had some partnerships with Operation Trident and the Metropolitan Police. We have been running a pilot for a year having policemen embedded in the jail. While they might do enforcement activity, they also do resettlement activity. So they are working with people going home to work out what is the best way to transition from the prison back into the community. We are looking to extend that into Feltham as well.

We have a partnership we are developing with Pimlico Opera, who are going come in, and we have done some work with the Crown Prosecution Service. We have created prison community impact statements. I like to think that to get a resolution you have to be part of the solution, and so we have been very active in working with partners to bring that into the prison to help us.

Q187 Andy McDonald: Mr Cartwright alluded to some of the pressures and how hard the staff were working, especially over the last period. Have you noticed any concerns about the safety, decency and security of your prison recently? Have you brought these concerns to the

attention of NOMS, and what has been the response? You seem to be suggesting that there have been problems of late?

Simon Cartwright: The implementation of the benchmark—referring to the benchmark we had to work to safe, decent and secure operation levels—and safety and security are paramount. Until we reach those safe, decent and secure operating levels we would not look to open our wings and run a regime. We have that, and we have done that very successfully, supported by risk assessments and safe systems at work. When we were working with the business development group regarding the staffing levels and the ratios for how things would run, the business development group took on board the concerns that we raised to make sure that we were running safe, decent and secure operating levels. We were very open about the fact that through our regional meeting with our DDC, our meetings with directors, the insurance board and so on, all our messages were being fed up, and that information then comes back down to ourselves. I was quite pleased with that aspect of how it worked, and more pleased with the relationships and the work that we did with the local trade union in trying to address and alleviate some of the concerns and anxieties of the staff.

Q188 Andy McDonald: You touched upon the benchmarking programme, which is obviously designed to make changes in the staffing mix in both public and private sector prisons. But with regard to the ones that have been built and run by contractors, there has been a tendency to rely upon newly recruited staff who are trained on the job with the benefit of modern security measures. Could I perhaps ask you this: to what extent does a safe environment depend on sufficient numbers of trained officers to police the wings? Can you give me some thoughts on training in violence reduction as well?

John Biggin: Yes, absolutely. Just to go back to the first part, the private sector has been operating prisons for 20-odd years now, and we have exactly the same exacting standards when it comes to both the recruitment and training of prison officers as colleagues within HM Prison Service. In fact all of our prison custody officers are accredited by the MOJ and given a licence to operate. So we spend an incredible amount of time on that, and possibly one of the key differences is that within Serco's framework I am wholly responsible for the operation, operationally, commercially and contractually, for HMP Thameside. I get the autonomy, therefore, within that to determine staffing models and to recruit within my own authority, which is slightly different. We are operating against a quite intelligently written contract, which requires us to hit a lot of standards, and I report and agree my staffing plan on an annual basis with my Ministry of Justice controller. So we spend a lot of time thinking about how we retain and recruit our staff and maintain our staffing levels. That is a constant focus that is part of my management responsibility.

To answer the second part of your question, absolutely you can have as many security systems as possible, but you will not deliver value and you will not deliver change if you do not have appropriate staffing levels and if you do not have the right people with the right skills. Those skills are all about managing, maintaining and developing those relationships. Simon is absolutely right on that.

Grahame Hawkings: Can I add to that as well? As a new prison we also went through some challenges as we opened. We were fortunate that about 50% of our prison officers

were recruited from other prisons, and we have to spread those prison officers rather thinly through the prison. As the new prison officers came, we were fortunate that we had some people who had some knowledge and skills that could help us through that. With our turnover we are going to go through that change again, but some of the people we recruited who were here three years ago we have since promoted, and they have done exceptionally well. Some of the people that joined have left us to be promoted. So if you get your recruitment right, you can recruit the right people, and if you can support them as they go through they turn into great prison officers.

Q189 Andy McDonald: Finally from me, to what extent have the recommendations of the Mubarek inquiry become standard practice following the implementation of policies relating to prison violence and race relations?

Grahame Hawkings: One of the obvious things is the cell sharing risk assessment, which has gone through various iterations so that it is just routine. People know there is a cell sharing risk assessment we have to check—we have to manage risk.

John Biggin: I completely echo that, and hopefully this morning you will have seen some of that process in action. For me it is not just about managing the risk in terms of race relations, there are a whole plethora of reasons why prisoners will be at high risk if sharing with other people. One of the key tasks right from when a prisoner comes into custody—and it is ongoing—is to make sure we are managing that risk by having good systems in place. I think those systems have been driven from the evidence in the Mubarek inquiry.

Q190 Mr Llwyd: Good morning. What provision does your establishment have purposeful activity and what difficulties, if any, do you have in providing sufficient activities to meet the needs of your prison population?

Grahame Hawkings: We have one issue outstanding from our benchmark report. It is about the provisional activity places, and by the end of December we will be submitting a further notice of change to Mr Copple to make some decisions about extending our activity places. I have a plan. We have also extended some partnerships recently with Greenwich local authority and a local lighting manufacturer, who are going to become active in the prison, and we have a broad range of academic and educational qualifications supported by the Skills Funding Agency money. It is true that there are some challenges at the minute between whether it is going to be A4e or another preferred supplier, and that is having an impact on our daily provision of activities places. In the end I am going to be satisfied that I have what I need.

Q191 Mr Llwyd: How many people within your prison are engaged with this kind of activity, roughly?

Grahame Hawkings: At the minute, with our restricted regime, we are only sending 50% of the population to work on any given day.

Q192 Mr Llwyd: What are the other 50% doing?

Grahame Hawkings: 25% are on open association or having access to the gymnasium, and the other 25% are in their cells. We have an absolute schedule that is delivered religiously every week, so everyone knows what is happening and when it is happening. Consistency.

Mr Llwyd: Can we just go along the line on that very point?

Simon Cartwright: Belmarsh has an occupational profile with 570, 580 men—that is work spaces that prisoners can go into—and that fulfils the needs of Belmarsh, having a 25% to 30% remand population. Some remand prisoners do not want to work—they do not have to work—and some remand prisoners decide that they want to work.

While we are going through transition working to steady state, one of the problems that Belmarsh is encountering at the moment is the change from officers working in workshops to non-unified staff working in workshops. Again, we are in the process of recruiting those to get the non-unified staff in to open up more of the workshops. Also we are now looking to ONE3ONE Solutions to bring in additional work for us to maximise the amount of activity that we can get in the prison. Not just the “putting screws into bags” type of activity—we are trying to look at some of the meaningful, purposeful contract type work to get prisoners engaged.

Chair: We have observed some of that this morning, those of us who went through Belmarsh.

Q193 Mr Llwyd: Are you confident, if your prison officers are not going to be there for a time in these workshops, that the thing is going to work?

Simon Cartwright: Prison officers will be there to supervise, they will be supervising—

Mr Llwyd: They will still be there supervising.

Simon Cartwright: They will still be supervising in workshop areas, but the actual delivery of that activity will be done by non-unified staff.

Grahame Hawkings: That is the position we are in. We have four instruction officers in post delivering activities, with prison officers patrolling the areas where those activities take place.

John Biggin: Broadly similar in terms of profile to Belmarsh, which you would expect, being a similar type of prison. The difference is that we are contractually required to deliver certain targets for purposeful activity as well as for time out of cell, so what I can tell you is that at Thameside we split purposeful activity between that provided by the education provider, which is A4e, and that which falls under the direct responsibility of Serco, which is on employment and employability. The average for that part of it for Thameside is 17 hours per week per prisoner. But when you add in the education provision on top of that, it probably goes into the early to mid-20s. That is a contractual

requirement that I have to report against every month. Also, the average time out of cell at Thameside for a prisoner per day is just short of eight hours—7.97, I think. The contractual requirement is to do the 7.5 hours per prisoner per day of time out of cell. That is one of the key areas that I have to focus on, so we spend a lot of energy maintaining that, because clearly, both from a reputational and a decency perspective, missing those targets is quite significant.

Q194 Mr Llwyd: Have you been able to follow the results of the work that you are doing? In other words, how many of those people are likely to end up in paid employment when they leave?

John Biggin: Last month, which is the latest one that I have figures for, about 55% of those prisoners discharged went into either employment or education, and just over 84% of them went to settled accommodation. Catch22, who are the provider of my offender management services, expend a lot of energy, because we recognise that having somewhere to live and having a job or education to go to when people come out of prison from a short sentence is one of the key things that does make a difference.

Q195 Mr Llwyd: I am sure that is right.

Many witnesses have suggested to us that the working prisons initiative is not succeeding. What is your experience of seeking to fulfil this aspiration? Do you agree that this initiative has run into the ground and, if so, why?

Grahame Hawkings: We were never designed as a working prison. We are a training prison, and most of our activities are based around skills, knowledge, education and training. We are trying to introduce a little bit of that into our prison with our partnership with Greenwich and 8point3, a lighting manufacturer, but it would still be operating within the core day that we have. I have had no personal experience of a working prison.

Simon Cartwright: The principle and the idea of a working prisons model is sound. The idea of that is to get people engaged, get them working, give them some accountability and give them some responsibility. As with the change agenda that is going on at the moment, it has hit a few problems—restricted regimes and so on—but I am sure that the concept of the working prisons model is a good one and a sound one.

Q196 Mr Llwyd: I am sure the concept is right—nobody in this room would disagree with the concept—but would you like to elaborate on some of the problems that you have experienced within the regime?

Simon Cartwright: We are not a working prison at Belmarsh. One of its many functions is as a resettlement prison, and we are trying to deliver the purposeful activity and the work to offenders to give them accountability and responsibility. I have limited knowledge of a working prison model, having worked in a Cat C prison previously. When I was working in a Cat C prison it worked well, that was pre-fair and sustainable, pre-benchmark. So I

have seen a working prison work very, very well. The establishment I worked at was a large Cat C establishment with a huge workshop complex and huge engineering complex, and we moved forward so that the concept of working all day really did work.

Mr Llwyd: Where was this, sorry?

Simon Cartwright: Featherstone. That worked well, but that was pre-fair and sustainable and pre-benchmark. I think we can look forward with some hope to those days coming back, but we have to go through this change agenda before we get there.

John Biggin: Again, I have spent the last five years managing local prisons, and currently I am managing a resettlement prison where the focus is on prisoners serving short sentences or coming back to Thameside at the end of longer ones. I am not really expecting to be caught up in the expectations around working prisons, because obviously we are focused on getting people into skills that give them employability at the end of their sentence.

The experience that I have had around working prisons is that there are some great examples out there of parts of this that work incredibly well. I think the trick going forward is to be able to make that a scalable function.

Q197 Mr Llwyd: I think the understandable answer that you and Mr Cartwright gave us implies, in a way, that a resettlement prison is in some way in conflict with the idea of a working prison. That I would fully understand.

What further preparations are you making in terms of making your prison a full resettlement prison to await the new developments?

Grahame Hawkings: We have had some regular contact with the community rehabilitation company—we met with Nick Smart, the chief executive, last week. As part of my work with MOPAC over the last two years I have been meeting regularly with assistant chief officers who are now within the community rehabilitation company and—

Q198 Chair: So you will be dealing with some of the same people you have dealt with before.

Grahame Hawkings: Yes, and there was a conversation I had with one of them—we had been trying to create a structure for low and medium-risk offenders leaving custody who would not be subject to MAPPA arrangements, and we talked about how we could do something similar. It was a bit of a struggle. After he joined the CRC he said, “I can do what I want now. I have some freedom to innovate”. So we have had regular contact in London.

Mr Llwyd: Mr Biggin, you were going to say something just now.

John Biggin: Very similar. It is about early engagement with the Ministry of Justice people who are working on TTG, and a lot of thinking about how we are going to dovetail our new provision to focus on the requirements of the CRC so that we are not putting the

cart before the horse. We want it to fit seamlessly, so that when we hand our prisoners across the gate the services are sustained, particularly for prisoners with substance misuse issues. We have to be able to hand them across in a far more intelligent way than we currently do.

Q199 Mr Llwyd: You will all be aware that the inspectorate of prison probation has recently found that there has been a bit of a disaster with regard to end-to-end offender management. What model of joint work between prisoners and probation do you support in transforming the rehabilitation agenda?

Grahame Hawkings: We work with the prison probation service and the CRC now. I think end-to-end offender management is a laudable ambition. I think OASys is a slightly overcomplicated risk assessment tool that could be shortened. It gets complicated because sometimes the offender manager in the community changes and they do not have continuity. I quite like the idea that when someone comes into custody they are my responsibility to manage, but in some cases I will need help, because some of them are high-risk people and the probation service, who are skilled at managing high-risk people, are very useful.

Q200 Mr Llwyd: Necessarily, they will still be in the picture, I expect, assessing risk, and especially with medium to high-risk people?

Grahame Hawkings: Yes, and we still have probation staff based in the jail, which will be very beneficial for the management of the high-risk cases.

Q201 Chair: But is there a risk that all the emphasis is going to be on delivery in short-sentence prisoner rehabilitation? Are we going to lose funding for the rehabilitation of longer-sentence prisoners?

Grahame Hawkings: I don't think we are. The estate review gives us the capacity to move people around the estate. I manage offenders on behalf of London. Some of them who are serving long sentences might go to somewhere like The Mount to do their thinking skills programme courses, and then come back to me at the end of their sentence for release into the community, so I will be talking to the community rehabilitation company. It is going to be a bit of challenge to get up and running as we develop new partnerships, I do not doubt that, but I am confident I can contribute to it.

John Biggin: Just to reiterate, getting the sequencing right of when things happen in the prison sentence is the absolute key. So I think the optimism is about getting the case management right. If you have an opportunity to have that bridged again, it gives you so much more ability to do things at the right time.

Grahame Hawkings: On Thursday we have a meeting at New Hall where we are going to be looking specifically at the population flows of young adult offenders, so we can be very

clear about what happens to you if you are a young adult in custody. So we are actually thinking about it quite clearly.

Q202 John Howell: I would like to ask you what consultation takes place with you in relation to operational policy. What I am trying to get to is, do Governors have much less discretion to run their prisons in the way that would like to run them now than they did before?

Grahame Hawkings: We have had a lot of exposure this year. In terms of prison service instructions that we have been consulted on, there was home detention curfew, transitions to the young adult estate, the violence management policy and the management of foreign national prisoners, and we have also had lots of engagement with both the MOJ and the NOMS security group about the management of young adults in custody, particularly in relation to gangs and youth violence.

Simon Cartwright: When different policies are put together, I have been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to read draft policies, comment on draft policies and be able to feed back into policy. I am fairly satisfied that as Governors, certainly in my case, I get adequately consulted on the imminent implementation of policy and procedure.

John Biggin: That fits very neatly, in our experience, certainly with Serco and within the private sector estate in general. We have a body for dialogue going up through the contracted estate management team, but in the exactly the same way I also get to comment individually on new policies, new PSIs, prior to their introduction. So, again, I feel consulted.

Q203 John Howell: What effect did last year's changes in the incentives and privileges regime have?

Grahame Hawkings: We had some effects. In terms of the managements of prisoners' property, some people have arrived with us and have not had that opportunity. They have arrived with us within the first couple of weeks of their sentence, so we have had to take discretionary decisions to allow some of those people who arrive, who have not had property handed in, that opportunity.

One of our challenges has been the number of prisoners without an OASys assessment. We should link incentives for them to progress on the sentence, but you can still substitute professional judgment. I do not think it is a bad thing that someone's progress on their sentence is linked to the IEP scheme. I am satisfied that we are able to do that.

John Biggin: In terms of the changes, I think it is indicative of the population at Thameside and other Thamesmead local prisons that my population changes about every 10 weeks, so the impact of the changes to the incentives and privileges scheme were quite minimal. We implemented it in full and received very little push-back or complaint from the prison population, and it is just the norm now.

Simon Cartwright: The impact for Belmarsh was minimal. What we did see was a frustration from prisoners who were on remand—one day you be on remand and you will be on the standard IEP level, then you go up to court and are convicted, and you come back and have to spend two weeks on the entry level. So they felt as if they had been punished, for want of a better word, and were taking a backward step. So there is a some conflict there, but it was managed very, very well.

Q204 John Howell: What positive changes can be attributed to the various inspection regimes, the inspectorate and all those things? Have you had any difficulty in implementing any of the recommendations?

Grahame Hawkings: We have had some difficulty in implementing some of the recommendations, because in some cases they are linked to having a full and settled staffing position. But there are other areas where you can make changes. On our first inspection report the inspector was very critical about the way that we had set up visits, both in terms of our security strategy—identifying who the prisoners were—and also the tables, which were pretty awful, if I am honest. But it took someone to come in and say, “That doesn’t look right”, because in the context of opening the prison there were a lot of things to do, so I quite welcome that. We have since changed all the furniture and our security procedures. I know you are going to speak to the independent monitoring board later. I meet with David most weeks and definitely every month, and he holds my feet to the fire if I don’t pay due attention to the recommendations he makes.

Simon Cartwright: We will always welcome HMIP inspections, because they are a true independent test of what is going on in the prison and put a real test against the four tests of a healthy establishment. Where we struggle sometimes to implement some of the recommendations would be based on cost and funding, when an inspector has previously come in and criticised the state of a shower block or the state of a recess, or the gymnasium needs refurbishing. Funding is always difficult and will always provide a challenge for us, but we try to work around that with our maintenance bids and our capital bids.

John Biggin: I do not think you would get any prison Governor or director who would not align with the four healthy prison tests. We attach a great deal of importance to that. Also, interestingly, you mentioned the IMB reports, which are, in my view, equally good, because it is an independent view of the day-to-day operation of the prison. From the director’s or Governor’s perspective, it gives you a sense check of how the systems are recording, so it is a vital part of the inspection and oversight process.

Q205 John Howell: Let me change the subject slightly. We have heard that the internal complaint system does not have good confidence with the prisoners. How effectively does the prisoner complaint system work? What needs to change?

Grahame Hawkings: We are quite lucky in a way that when we were built we were given an electronic biometrics system, which took us a while to get going but which has had a fundamental impact on the level of complaints. So if you go back a few months, we were

getting somewhere in the region of 300 complaints a month, many of which were applications—they were using the complaint system to try to get access. People would write to me because they thought that was the easiest way to get an answer. As we have extended the use of the biometric system we have virtually got rid of paper. So if you are an offender in Isis you can write to any department in the prison, and we get something like 5,000 electronic applications a month. It is personal—it is a person asking the question electronically to someone somewhere else in the prison who then answers within seven days. So I am an absolute advocate of having technology to help you, but it is not an efficiency saving measure, it is something that makes the jail even better.

Simon Cartwright: The complaints system is a sound system, and we recently changed from a three-stage system to a two-stage system. Policing the complaint system is more difficult—making sure that prisoners get answers in a timely manner, making sure prisoners are answered in full, putting in place a number of quality assurance checks and measures for that. If you have a sound ethos of good staff-prisoner relationships, nine times out of 10, issues can be resolved on the wings. They do not tend to resolve themselves into complaints. So again, you look to your staffing group to enhance those staff-prisoner relationships, which in turn will reduce complaints, which makes for a healthier unit.

John Biggin: We also have an electronic system that manages the custodial experience of prisoners, and part of that system is an application system. When a prisoner makes an application I can see when it has been made, I can see who has received it, I can see when they have answered it, when it has been received back and when the prisoner has accepted the answer. So in terms of transparency, the system is a wholly transparent system. The prisoners put a great deal of faith in that system, which means that the volume of official complaints within Thameside is this—last month, I had 900 prisoners and I had 139 complaints. The biggest single chunk of those were about property in transit. So the system, used correctly, reduces significantly the volume of those complaints.

What we do then is that my senior management team, every Monday after my Monday operational meeting, sit down with 10% of those complaints that have been answered and quality-assure the responses to make sure that they are decent, respectful and answer the question. So we do that as a matter course.

Grahame Hawkings: There is another small context to that. One of the things that we spotted in our application system was that someone would write in and say, “I need to see my offender supervisor” without explaining what the issue was, what the problem was and whether in fact the offender supervisor was the right person to help them. So there is also some development activity for those in custody to try to work out how best to communicate with those people that are there to help them.

Q206 Chair: Could I ask if you have reduced your checklist of staffing provision and, if so, what are the consequences?

Grahame Hawkings: We haven’t.

Simon Cartwright: We haven’t.

Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Biggins, Mr Cartwright, Mr Hawkings and Mr Copple, who was a silent minder here. We are very grateful for your help and now we are going to hear from staff representatives.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Steve Gillan**, General Secretary, Prison Officers' Association, **Sukhvinder Buparai**, Branch Secretary, HMP Belmarsh, and **Thomas Bailey**, Branch Chairman, HMPYOI Isis, gave evidence.

Q207 Chair: Mr Gillan, we know you, obviously. Welcome. Mr Bailey, Mr Buparai, welcome. Mr Bailey, you are from?

Thomas Bailey: Isis, Belmarsh.

Chair: From Isis. Very glad to have you here today. You, as prison officers, have been on the front line through the implementation of changes in policy over the last year or so and remain on the front line. How has implementing and enforcing these changes impacted upon you and your colleagues and the prisoners you are working with?

Thomas Bailey: In terms of the staff, it has impacted adversely—

Chair: Could you speak up as much as you can?

Thomas Bailey: Yes, it has adversely affected staff. Ultimately, I suppose, if you want to do more with prisoners with less staff it is always going to cause a problem. Acts of violence, be it prisoner-on-prisoner or prisoner-on-staff, have gone through the roof. The staff feel that they have little support by the CPS, as crimes committed against prisoners or other staff do not seem to lead anywhere. It just seems that the whole system is in a bit of a mess. I have been in the service eight years and this is by far the worst I have experienced in that time.

Steve Gillan: I can only speak on the last three months since we have gone forward on our new benchmark regime. We have seen a significant increase in the number of incidents within the establishment. Everything seems to be a lot more unsettled. Staff sickness is an issue. Work-related stress is part of that. On the whole the impact we seem to be having seems to be deteriorating. We do not seem to be able to provide the same level of service that we historically have. It is clearly about less prison officers—significantly less prison officers—and more and more prisoners being crowded into our prisons.

Q208 Chair: How far do you think this is about problems of a process of change, rather than the changes themselves, compounded by the acknowledged staff shortages and the adverse ratios of staff to prisoners?

Steve Gillan: I think what has compounded the problem is that, if you remember, there was supposed to be a rehabilitation revolution that would see the prison population reduce. Well, the opposite has happened. We now have a population of 86,000 prisoners, with 80 prisons or less because of prison closures, and what we are now seeing is a prison service

that is in crisis due to the staff shortages. You have seen NOMS' own data in relation to the increase in serious assaults on prisoner officers, which is now at an all-time high, with an increase of 37%. There has been an increase of assaults of 12%, an increase in self-harm for prisoners, and an increase in self-inflicted death in custody, running at seven a month. Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults are now running at some 15,500 per year. So it has had a massive impact, the benchmarking and the cost reduction exercise. It is prison officers who are picking up the pieces, under difficult circumstances.

Q209 Chair: Can I ask the two local representatives what their experience was of the benchmarking process, and were you consulted? The Governors who were speaking to us earlier spoke in positive terms of the help they had in going through this process, and that suggested to me that there was some degree of consultation going on. What was your experience?

Thomas Bailey: There was consultation, but it was almost as if we were being asked for tacit approval. I don't think our views were really taken as seriously as they should be, which is one of the main problems. In terms of benchmarking, if it has been a success it always comes back to having prison officers on the ground doing prison officer work. The problems around retention of staff mean it is impossible a year down the line to say if benchmarking has been a success, because we have not been able to move fully to what benchmarking was supposed to be, because we just do not have the staff. As quick as they can be recruited they are leaving for other professions. I know Mr Hawkings earlier gave examples of people leaving to go into respectable jobs and bits and pieces. However, we have the case where some staff are leaving and not going into other positions because they find the work of a prison officer, especially at Isis in the dangerous conditions there, to be quite untenable. They would almost rather not be employed than continue to work at Isis, which is a sad state of affairs.

Sukhvinder Buparai: At Belmarsh, we were consulted very early on in the process. I do not think at that point the service fully understood what the consultation process was about. It was almost as if there was going to be change at pace and it was going to be delivered, and we were just going to be told what was going to happen to us and what the end result was going to be. It was only when we followed the channels within the benchmark process to raise our concerns, and we raised a number of concerns—I think 46 in total—and sent them to the national office for resolution, that the Director, Phil Copple, was absolutely clear on the type of consultation that should take place. He was clear on making sure that all consultation was meaningful, whereas previously we were just being told what was happening. The events changed and we were being listened to, our concerns were taken on board wherever possible and positive negotiations then took place. In the end, we ended up with a negotiated, agreed outcome where our concerns were listened to.

Q210 Chair: As an association, whether or not you agreed with particular changes, your objective was to see that through consultation and negotiation, the best possible outcome for your members was achieved within the system that was going to happen.

Steve Gillan: Absolutely, because the Committee must understand the backdrop to the benchmark cost reduction programme. Initially it was going to be about 30 prisons going out to be market tested, and NOMS had not won any of the competitions. In order to keep jails in the public sector, we took it to our conference to determine whether we would get involved in the benchmark process. Overwhelmingly, our conference directed that we would. We have, and we have managed to make some changes. We still do not like it—I do not think anybody enjoys seeing the cost-cutting that is going on—but the reality is that the savings had to be made, and I can see the attraction for the Government in the benchmarking process as opposed to the marketisation, because they achieve the cost-cutting. It is not that they have fallen out with the privatisation agenda, it is just that they achieve the savings quicker under the benchmarking process. But we want to make sure in this process that it is safe, decent and secure and that our members and prisoners are safe.

Q211 Chair: May I ask the two local representatives what the current position is on staff vacancies at your prison and the reasons for it? You have hinted that one of the reasons is the challenge that it presents with relatively low staff numbers to numbers of prisoners. What is the vacancy situation?

Sukhvinder Buparai: At Belmarsh, it is 17, I believe.

Thomas Bailey: I do not have the exact figure at Isis, but we have never been fully staffed. We think the main issue for us is that Isis is different from a lot of prisons in that it is only four years old, and the staff were recruited on the new terms and conditions, whereby the salary is far less than the closed grade staff, so our staffing issues are compounded by the fact that the wages do not reflect, in my opinion, the challenging work that officers do. As a result, people are quite willing to see the job now, instead of a career, as far more of a stepping stone, unfortunately.

Q212 Chair: How do your pay levels compare with Thameside?

Thomas Bailey: I don't know about the private sector, I am afraid. I don't know if Steve might—

Steve Gillan: If I can assist in that, I do not know the true picture of Thameside and Isis, but if I could give you a flavour, at Woodhill they are 40 officers short and 43 operational support grades short, and they have a private entity next door where they are paying £4,000 more than in the public sector.

Chair: Which is not always the situation in the public and private sector.

Steve Gillan: Not always the situation, no.

Q213 Nick de Bois: Chairman, could I just ask for context on the 17 vacancies? As the percentage of staff, what is that?

Sukhvinder Buparai: That would be 17 of 277.

Nick de Bois: Thanks.

Q214 Chair: I do not need the numbers, but is it generally the case that you have members on detached duty, or you are dealing with an influx of detached duty personnel?

Sukhvinder Buparai: Yes. We are sending members of our staff on detached duty, some of whom have been ordered to go to other establishments such as Woodhill, which Mr Gillan has just touched on. It does not go down well with our members, who are being taken away from their private lives and being put up in hotels in Milton Keynes somewhere, especially as, in the context of the detached duty, they go to these other establishments and they are literally there only as turnkeys. They do not have any knowledge of the prisoners or the demographic of prisoners, and they are there just as a member of staff wearing a uniform as part of the numbers. They are there to turn a key, so they do not have the same level of job satisfaction as they would have locally.

Steve Gillan: Just on that issue of detached duty, the national picture is that there are 250 officers travelling throughout the country to hotspots such as Woodhill, Chelmsford, Aylesbury, Nottingham, Bullingdon, Haverigg and various other establishments, such as the Isle of Sheppey, where they cannot recruit at this moment in time.

Thomas Bailey: We have never sent any staff on detached duty out of Isis, because we have constantly had a staffing problem. We have been in receipt of detached duty from other establishments regularly and I imagine we will continue to be so, for reasons I have outlined. Such a large percentage of our staff are on new terms and conditions, and that is the big barrier to recruitment, in that the wage offered, especially in this part of the country, is not sufficient for people to live. We have staff with wives and children who have to work 10, 15 extra hours on payment plus per week just to meet basic costs of living; this is 2014 and we have staff who spend every hour awake away from their family just to provide a basic means of living. That is the current situation.

Q215 John Howell: I want to ask you a similar question to what we asked the Governors. Thameside and Isis are very new. The prisons also vary in size. In your experience, how much does the physical infrastructure and the size of the prison affect day-to-day operations?

Sukhvinder Buparai: At the moment at Belmarsh, I would say it is having an impact, because the prison is not designed to hold the number of prisoners it is holding. When it was originally scripted, there was a significant number of prison officers to run the establishment. With cost reductions over the past 20 years, the number of prisoners has gone up by a certain amount. I do not have the figure; our certified normal accommodation that we are meant to have is around the 780 mark, and I think we are holding somewhere in the region of 900 prisoners now and we have significantly less staff. The design model that we started off with, with X number of prisoners and X number of staff, is not being adhered to, so there are ultimately going to be physical problems where staff cannot supervise landings or supervise areas as well as we historically did or as we were designed or intended to. That has consequences for the safety of our staff, prisoners and the establishment.

Thomas Bailey: From my experience, I think prisons need to be of a manageable size. I do not think the answer is to build prisons holding 2,000 or 2,500 people. In most industries, people would take advantage of economies of scale in cost-saving. However, what you have to understand is that this is not a factory where you are putting boxes on shelves, this is people, and people react differently to different situations. With the short-staffing issues that we have, I think the bigger the establishment, the more it is a recipe for disaster. If there was discontent, that would spread easily to large numbers of people. Also, in terms of rehabilitation, I think the statistics prove that people are far more likely to not reoffend if they are in small and more focused establishments.

Steve Gillan: Just to back up my colleagues, who have eloquently spoken on that, if you go back to a variety of inquiries and reports, such as the Lord Woolf report after the Strangeways riot, one of the recommendations from that was to make a prison rule that they could not go above the certified normal accommodation. The reality is that no Government has ever implemented that, and we have what I call institutional overcrowding.

Q216 John Howell: Let me ask you some questions on securitisation. The point that I want to know or want to get to is, what is the potential impact of over-securitisation of prisoners? Here we have Thameside and Isis built for category B standards, but taking category C prisoners, and you have Belmarsh with category A prisoners. What impact does over-securitisation have on the prisons?

Thomas Bailey: From our point of view, I would echo what the Governor said, to be perfectly honest. In terms of the public purse, I think you need to have flexibility in establishments, because people change and conditions change, but offenders were saying that they felt like they were being held in conditions that were above the security rating that they required, and I would agree with that. I would agree with what the Governor stated.

Sukhvinder Buparai: Belmarsh has to be fit for the most secure conditions, and ultimately we are fit for the most secure conditions. Unfortunately, that might have an impact in terms of over-securitisation when we are holding category D prisoners. Again, as the Governor has mentioned, there is activity for all within the establishment.

Q217 John Howell: Is this security categorisation fit for purpose?

Sukhvinder Buparai: Are you referring to the systems where prisoners are categorised?

John Howell: Yes, the security categorisation.

Sukhvinder Buparai: Are they fit for purpose?

Thomas Bailey: I personally do not think they are fit for purpose. I think currently what you have is an overcrowding crisis where prisoners are matched to a certain category depending on the vacant spaces available in each category. We have prisoners at Isis who are deemed as C-Cat prisoners, but in my opinion they are not. Given the violence that

they have displayed, they would, in my opinion, be B-Cat prisoners. It is a case of fitting around what the system has available at the time.

Q218 Chair: Do you think that individual security categorisation of prisoners was influenced by the availability of spaces?

Thomas Bailey: Absolutely, absolutely.

Steve Gillan: Without a doubt, because we know as a union, and we have expressed it time and time again, of people being rushed through the system too quickly and then being released from cat D conditions. We have seen, sadly, the results of that happening all too often.

Q219 Nick de Bois: Have you published that information? It is quite a powerful statement if you are saying basically that the numbers have been fiddled, and that the prison base has been fiddled to accommodate numbers. What have you done—have you published that information, that evidence you are alluding to? Is it in the public domain? What have you done with it?

Steve Gillan: I think it is in the public domain. We put press releases out to say that people are being categorised wrongly and should not be in Cat C or D conditions, and we are pretty much on record as saying that to NOMS.

Q220 Nick de Bois: Yes, but that is a statement. What I am saying is that you made a suggestion, and you are arguing that there have been some tragic consequences, you have evidence of it and you are saying it has happened. Is this just a gut feeling or is there real evidence to back it up? Because if there is, it should be out there.

Thomas Bailey: The problem with it, I think, is that the paperwork would match what is happening. However, it is very subjective, so the paperwork would say this person is a Cat C—

Q221 Nick de Bois: But I say you are being subjective.

Thomas Bailey: It is, yes. I am just—

Nick de Bois: If you are right, I think it should be worked on and exposed, but what I am saying is that I think that claim needs the hard evidence behind it to back it up. It is a very serious claim.

Steve Gillan: We stand by that claim, because the reality is that it has gone wrong.

Nick de Bois: But I don't see it if you do not have the evidence.

Steve Gillan: You are never going to have 100% evidence, but it is pretty clear that if someone goes on to reoffend and murder someone then they were not ready for release.

Nick de Bois: That is in the extreme, and I accept that, but I still think that you are saying it is wider than that. You are talking—

Thomas Bailey: I understand what you are asking for, but—

Q222 Chair: I think if you are spelling out the evidential basis for this, we would be prepared to look at it, but of course you would need to demonstrate that those who were making the decisions about the categorisation of prisoners were, either voluntarily or because they were under some pressure to do so, importing issues of available accommodation into that decision about the risk level of the prisoner. We would be happy to look at it if you would like to—

Steve Gillan: We hear what you say, and we will try to get evidence on that, because our members raise it with us time and time again. They say that they are under pressure to clear spaces in certain categories of prison in order to downgrade other prisoners who are not quite ready for that level of trust. It is very difficult to gain that evidence, but we will try to assist the Justice Select Committee in getting that evidence.

Q223 John Howell: This is my last question. Is there an effective national policy to prevent radicalisation in prisons?

Steve Gillan: An effective policy?

John Howell: Yes.

Steve Gillan: I think there is ongoing work that has been very good, quite frankly, from NOMS. Are we on top of it? I do not quite think we are on top of it yet, but then again, in this country I am not sure anybody is ideally on top of it. To say that there is still radicalisation going on in our prisons is absolutely correct, but there is also radicalisation going on in society generally. The Prison Service, from discussions that I have had with Michael Spurr and Phil Copple, I think are doing their best under difficult circumstances, but the people on the ground tell me it is a real problem.

Sukhvinder Buparai: I think the service is doing some work behind the scenes. As to whether it is effective or not on the ground floor, the opinion from our staff—and it is just an opinion—is that it does not appear to be.

Q224 Mr Llwyd: Mr Gillan, what do you think is the main factor for the increase of prisoner-on-prisoner violence, and also the obvious perceived drop in levels of confidence and safety within the prison system?

Steve Gillan: I think we have been pretty consistent on this as a union over the years. You cannot keep overcrowding the system, putting three prisoners in a cell designed for two

and putting two prisoners in a cell designed for one and cutting your staff by 30% by 2010 and making all your experienced staff redundant, because that is what has happened. I was very pleased at the weekend when we saw a very positive statement from the Government and the Ministry of Justice saying that they are going to take more seriously the assaults on staff and that a protocol will be introduced about consecutive sentences. But I need to make this very clear point: that was as a result of my union having to take a judicial review against the Crown Prosecution Service for not charging a particular prisoner when they threw excrement in the face of an officer and the CPS said it was not in the public interest to prosecute. We won that case and that individual will be prosecuted.

But prisoner-on-prisoner violence is at record levels as well: 15,000 assaults a year is putting terrible strain on the Prison Service. I do not use the word “crisis” lightly, but there is a crisis, and until people face up and deal with that crisis, then I am afraid it is going to increase even further. We need to reduce the prison population and divert people with mental illness away from prisons in the first instance, and I am afraid that has not been done over the years.

Q225 Mr Llwyd: This judicial review to which you referred is, in a way, the tip of the iceberg. There has been evidence over the years that the CPS have been tardy in prosecuting prisoner-on-officer violence for some time.

Steve Gillan: That is correct to say. We have raised it with the Attorney-General, and to his credit, he agrees with us. There has now been dialogue between all parties because—

Chair: As the former Prisons Minister, he should know.

Steve Gillan: He was, Chairman. He was the former Prisons Minister and he is now Attorney-General, and indeed, to his credit, he was very sympathetic to our issues, but the proof will be in the pudding. It has now been said that magistrates and so on should be passing consecutive sentences, yet as recently as a couple of weeks ago, an officer was assaulted at Preston and the perpetrator received a concurrent sentence. Not good, and we will be challenging that once again, but you are right to say that the Crown Prosecution Service in recent years have been tardy. More infuriatingly, they have said because a prisoner is serving a particular sentence, perhaps of five years, 10 years or 15 years, it is not in the public interest to prosecute when they assault prison officers. I think anyone who saw the video of CCTV footage at the weekend will start to realise what prison officers are facing in the line of duty in protecting the public.

Q226 Mr Llwyd: What steps can you take in the meantime to limit this violence, given the situation that you are in?

Steve Gillan: I think there has to be a realisation that the cuts to the Prison Service now have gone far enough, and if there are any further cuts to the budgets, then we will be in serious trouble. I also think that by getting rid of experienced staff has not helped the situation; we warned about that. But the reality is I think there needs to be a consolidation now in order to reduce the violence in our prisons by diverting people in the first instance away from prisons, because I will put it in this context: there are 86,000 prisoners in 2014

with 24,000 unified staff, and in 1993 we had 43,000 prisoners with the same amount of staff. I think that puts it in context.

Q227 Mr Llwyd: It certainly does. Could you tell the Committee, in the experience of the Prison Officers' Association, has the integration of younger prisoners into the main prison estate caused any significant impacts within the prison system?

Steve Gillan: Certainly, but when I have gone about and listened to my executive colleagues, for example, at Pentonville, where they have tried to break the gangs up at Feltham and move young offenders into some of the core locals, it has caused problems. It has not settled things down, and the mix of adults and young offenders has not helped the situation.

Q228 Mr Llwyd: Could I ask your two colleagues, what concerns do you have about the safety, decency and security of your prison in the last 12 months, and how does this differ, if at all, from the previous 12 months?

Thomas Bailey: From Isis's perspective, I do not want to sound like a broken record, but because of the staffing issues we have, we do not have the numbers. Because we do not have the correct number of staff available on duty, this ultimately has everything to do with the rehabilitation agenda and everything else that is nice and that people believe in and is correct. None of that can be done unless you have a core consistent group of staff, and because we have never been in that position we have never been able to achieve anything in that respect. For the 12 months previous to this, it has been the same for us, because the staffing issues we have had have been consistent over such a long period of time and have not been addressed for such a long period of time.

Sukhvinder Buparai: The biggest impact we are seeing of recent is the number of prison officers responding to incidents when there are incidents in Belmarsh. What historically used to happen pre-benchmark was that there were prison officers carrying out an administrative role, or an instructional role, or an office role, or whatever the context was. Under the benchmark, all of those prison officer jobs went, and those were inherently the prison officers who would, when there was an incident, leave their departments and go on to the wings and make sure that safety, security and decency were maintained. They would help us maintain order and control. Under the benchmark model, our prison officers have all been taken out of these departments, and we are literally just the turnkeys on the wings. When there are serious incidents of disorder, we do not have all the staff that we historically used to have coming out of these departments to provide us with that assistance. It is becoming increasingly difficult for us to maintain stability and order within our prisons, because prisoners get wind of this very quickly and as soon as they know there is not a big response coming from the establishment, they are more keen on testing safety and security systems to gain their own personal advantages.

Q229 Nick de Bois: What is your view of the adequacy of provision of purposeful activity—I think this is for Mr Bailey and Mr Buparai—at each of your establishments?

Sukhvinder Buparai: We have a number of places for prisoners to attend. Ultimately they have all been identified. We are working towards maximising the number of prisoners who attend all the activities, all the training and all the skills workshops that are in place—all the educational systems. However, the crux of the issue is that we are here to reduce reoffending, and what we are not doing is tackling the moral issue behind what causes reoffending. Let us say we house 800 prisoners. We can put them all into activities on a daily basis, but does that necessarily tackle the moral issues that caused them to lead a life of crime in the first instance?

Q230 Nick de Bois: So you are going through the motions—I do not mean to be pejorative about this, but you are almost ticking the boxes to say that somebody is doing something, and that looks good, but you do not think you are digging deeper. Would you need to dig deep enough with everyone? Is it maybe the case that not everyone requires as much moral examination, to use your words?

Sukhvinder Buparai: Everyone requires moral examination to an extent, because that is why they are in prison, and ultimately it is down to prison officers. We could do that if we were trained and skilled enough, like in Scandinavian countries, where they put a big emphasis on the skills that prison officers have. I am guessing here, but they are trained in rehabilitation to give prisoners moral guidance as well as guidance on issues, which is one thing that we completely lack. All the time we are not giving prisoners any moral guidance, then we are just putting the bum on the seat, showing the Government that prisoners are attending activities as per the required schedule of activity. However, these prisoners then leave prison and it is a case of revolving doors and they are straight back in, because we have not tackled the moral issues.

Nick de Bois: That is very good evidence, thank you. Mr Bailey, do you want to add to that?

Thomas Bailey: I would echo what Mr Buparai said. Specifically for Isis, as a training prison, the expectation is that 100% of the offenders in the prison will be engaged in some sort of work activity during the day. Again, the problem we have is that the restricted regime we have been running for 14 months—and there does not appear to be an end in sight to this restricted regime—means that on any given day, only 40% of the offenders in the establishment have access to these activities, so in terms of delivering what everyone would like to deliver—

Q231 Nick de Bois: So you are slightly different, because Belmarsh was saying that if it came to it they would put everyone on an activity.

Thomas Bailey: Yes. Until we have a full staffing complement, we cannot. As I said, for 14 months we have only been roughly at 40% on activities on a daily basis.

Q232 Nick de Bois: What are the implications, then, for your prison staff and prisoners of the plans for Belmarsh, Thameside and Isis to become resettlement prisons? What does it mean?

Thomas Bailey: Personally, I do not think that there will be too much change at the minute. Again, because of the staffing complement we have, we are unable to deliver these things because we do not have the people to deliver them, and until that changes, this is all very nice, but—

Q233 Nick de Bois: Even with the under-12-month prisoners and the sort of through-the-gate approach?

Thomas Bailey: Yes. I completely understand, but we do not have basic prison grade officers on duty to deliver any of this work. That is the problem. As I said, we are only sending half of the offenders to work on a daily basis, so this will involve more prison officer work in terms of getting people to work and working with them.

Q234 Nick de Bois: This is being contracted out, bringing people in to do this work.

Thomas Bailey: Yes, but you still need staff on duty to have prisoners unlocked.

Nick de Bois: To supervise them?

Thomas Bailey: Yes.

Sukhvinder Buparai: The concept is a very good concept. You need small, unique wings where prisoners are focused or in the company of other prisoners with the same needs. One of the difficulties with a core local like us is that we have such a mixture of prisoners that you could have somebody who is nine months from release mixing with somebody, or sharing a cell with somebody, who has nine years or 30 years, on some occasions, because of the circumstances we find ourselves in.

In terms of the resettlement prisons, as I say, there is a lot of work to be done through the CRCs in making the whole concept work, but whether we achieve it or not I think is too difficult to say. We would argue that the role of the prison officer is vital in the resettlement function, and we only hope that the Prison Service recognises the role that the prison officer has to play in this function for it to succeed.

Q235 Nick de Bois: Just talking in terms of end-to-end offender management, which as you know received a bit of a going-over by the Inspector of Prisons and Probation, I would be interested to know to what you attribute the failures. Also, is there a model of joint working between prisons and probation that would best support the Transforming Rehabilitation programmes? I do not mind who answers that, it is quite a broad question.

Sukhvinder Buparai: I do not have the ability to answer that. Steve?

Steve Gillan: It is a difficult question, and everybody knows end-to-end management is a decent concept. We have always had proper joined-up relationships with the Probation Service and outside agencies, so it is nothing new.

Q236 Nick de Bois: Can you point to the failure?

Steve Gillan: The failure? Probably resources, to be honest with you, and not getting to grips, I would suggest—I have said it before in many forums—with three essential ingredients: mental health issues, alcohol abuse and drug abuse. Until those three key issues are dealt with in society, then I am afraid prisons become a warehouse for those individuals. We have consistently said that a root and branch review and treatment needs to be done in relation to those three key issues. Everybody keeps bringing it up—not just the POA, but you have the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Nick Hardwick, you have the Prison Reform Trust, you have the Howard League, and I am not sure whether the Prison Governors Association mentioned it as well. I am not sure we can all be wrong on the concept of that. I am not sure that is—

Q237 Nick de Bois: You are talking specifically about treating drugs, for example, as a health problem, not a justice problem?

Steve Gillan: Absolutely, and I am not sure that fully answers your question, but I think it goes some way to answering your question.

Q238 Chair: Can the local representatives say whether the personal officer scheme has been affected by staffing changes and staffing practices?

Thomas Bailey: Absolutely. With the spurs that I work on, because the staffing pool we have is so small, you find yourself working in various different places throughout the day, so forming any sort of positive relationship with the prisoners in your care is extremely difficult to do when you are barged from pillar to post throughout the whole day.

Q239 Chair: What about the actual allocation of personal officers to prisoners?

Sukhvinder Buparai: In terms of allocation, it depends on whether you are following the NOMS model. The NOMS model has changed now, I think, and it is no longer a mandatory requirement to have a system in place where you allocate prisoners to prison officers. The new policy talks of prison officers being positive role models towards prisoners, and that is a sort of new way forward for the role of the personal officer. It is difficult for prison officers to be positive role models for prisoners, partly due to the consistency issue caused by the short-staffing in prisons that we have historically faced. Prison officers do not know from day to day where they are going to be posted, so it is very difficult for anything to happen, as such.

Chair: Thanks very much, Mr Bailey, Mr Buparai and Mr Gillan. We are very grateful for your help this morning. We are running a little late, but we are moving on now to hear from the Independent Monitoring Boards.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **David Pinchin**, Independent Monitoring Board Chair, HMYOI Isis, and **Carole Homan**, Independent Monitoring Board Chair, HMP Belmarsh, gave evidence

Q240 Chair: Welcome, Mr Pinchin and Ms Homan. I think we have to congratulate you, Ms Homan, because you have been honoured with an MBE very recently. Congratulations.

Carole Homan: Thank you.

Chair: Mr Penzer from the Thameside IMB would have liked to be with us but was not free to be here today, but he has given us some comprehensive written evidence on some of the questions.

Q241 Andy McDonald: Could you tell me what has been the overall impact on your respective prisons of the benchmarking process, and particularly whether staffing levels and staff training are sufficient to run a decent and safe regime for prisoners?

Carole Homan: In Belmarsh, as you have heard, the new regime was introduced during the summer because of the staff shortages, and the staff shortages these things were basically due to high sickness levels and the summer holidays and a failure to be able to run the regime as it was before. It was a good precursor to September, when benchmarking was introduced, and a split regime is being operated. Two house blocks are on domestics and two house blocks are on purposeful activity. I think it has been introduced smoothly and is running quite well.

David Pinchin: Thank you very much, sir, for asking us to give you some thoughts today. I am very grateful to you for the invitation.

What a question, about benchmarking. It is a big question. Our concerns go back a couple of years at least—we have mentioned this in our annual report—and certainly our main concerns all started around the beginning of last year, in 2013, when Isis was not permitted to do any external recruitment. We made that point to the Secretary of State in our annual report, and it had a big impact from the word go in the early part of 2013, so much so that come the summer of 2013 the Governor had no choice—we completely understood where he was coming from—but to go to a restricted regime. That is in a way an advance of benchmarking itself.

Given all the other things that have been going on, with fair and sustainable prior to that, problems with beds being given, the prison closure programme and somebody somewhere

getting some of those figures wrong, which prevented external recruitment during 2013, it came as no surprise to us that the regime had to be altered. It was, from September last year, supposedly for a temporary period of a few weeks. That is still ongoing today and it is a very serious situation there.

Q242 Chair: This is Isis, as described previously by Mr Bailey?

David Pinchin: Correct, this is at Isis. The result of that restricted regime is that almost immediately it halved the time of purposeful activity available to the offenders. 40% are now locked up in their house blocks each and every working day, and this is still going on. That is what we are most concerned about—that even though that recruitment was not allowed in 2013 and it has now been reinstated, there is external recruitment going on now, but the process is so slow that the prison has still been unable to go back to a whole regime because the prison is still so short. They are currently 24 prison officers short as of today, so it is no surprise that the prison cannot go back to what it set out to do. It is a very good prison, it is well built, it has great facilities, and it is not able to do what it should be doing as a trainer.

Q243 Andy McDonald: Which recent prison policies have had the most beneficial and most detrimental impacts on the operation of your prisons in your view—the good and the bad?

David Pinchin: I think I have done a bit of the bad. Just before I move on, one of the things that my board has been so frustrated about is the reaction to our annual report and bringing these issues to ministerial attention. The responses we have had have been, to say the least, mealy-mouthed about where we stand and the seriousness or the lack of seriousness of it. On that whole business I mentioned to you about not being able to recruit last year, twice our ministerial responses have said, “Yes, indeed, Isis was not permitted to appoint, but can I reassure you that there was no recruitment ban?” By any stretch of the imagination, that has to be a political comment—

Chair: It is a *Yes Minister* comment.

David Pinchin: —that just leaves us speechless.

Chair: That is normal for us.

David Pinchin: Yes. I have heard it before many times, believe me.

Coming back to what you asked about the bad, there is no doubt that the bad is in relation to what that regime has meant for the offenders. They have not been able to experience the education and the work opportunities that they should have had. Even two weeks ago, because of this same situation, we had the prison locked down for two days. There was no education and no employment. I do not blame Grahame Hawking for this at all. He was seriously short of staff, but it happened. Those sorts of bad things are continuing to happen.

On the safety side, which maybe you are alluding to, because the regime is now slightly more consistent, at least people know what they are going to have to tolerate.

Q244 Andy McDonald: What about the incentives and earned privileges scheme and the changes to that? Did that happen?

David Pinchin: I would agree with previous figures about that. In the main, we get offenders who have already been through other prisons, so they are used to the introductory grading. So it has not had as much effect as some people thought it would.

Carole Homan: With regard to the IEP scheme, when initially it was revised in November, the prisoners in Belmarsh had a perception that it was a double jeopardy, in that they were perhaps losing an enhanced status to go down to standard or from standard down to basic, and they were also being adjudicated. A lot of work went into trying to explain to the prisoners that in fact it is not double jeopardy, and that that is allowable and that they can be adjudicated and lose part of their status. We as a board are not getting any prisoner complaints about that now, although we did in the initial stages last November.

David Pinchin: The same for us, really. There were lots of issues about property, but I have to say that the Governor, Grahame Hawkings, took a very pragmatic view about a lot of it and dealt with individual cases on a very sensible basis and we support that.

Q245 Andy McDonald: You have already touched on this to some degree already, but are your views and recommendations taken into account by prison management and by NOMS or do you feel that they do not?

David Pinchin: I have a regular meeting with the Governor, and I would regard that relationship as a challenging one, but it is one that I think he appreciates. We are there on a daily basis, my members—not every day, but we are there weekly, doing our rota visits. We hear applications from the offenders and we bring to his attention things that we think are wrong. I have to say, over the years we have been able to be influential over getting things to change. We do not have any power, but we are quite influential.

Carole Homan: For us at Belmarsh, we have a good working relationship with the senior management team, and latterly, on the arrival of the new Governor, Simon Cartwright, the board has now received monthly bulletins affording a more transparent view of statistics in the prison that we had great difficulty in obtaining before. That has been a huge improvement there.

I would agree with David Pinchin that the impact of the annual report, which is a huge amount of work for volunteers, is minimal. The prison always answer and react in detail to any issues that we raise, but I fear that the impact on NOMS and the MOJ is almost non-existent.

David Pinchin: Yes, I think that is part of our frustration too: we get a lot of good reaction locally from the Governor and his senior management team, but we do tend to fear that reaction on the wider issues—such as the ones I have mentioned already on recruitment and the processes, and also on the other big issue that we mentioned before about OMU and the backlog of OASys sentence planning reports—has not helped us at all, and both issues are as yet unresolved.

Q246 Andy McDonald: Let us extend that a little. What is your view on the relationship between the National Council for IMBs, the IMBs for each prison and NOMS? Does the same sort of tone apply there as well? What is your view?

David Pinchin: I find that a difficult question to answer. My own personal relationship with the president of the National Council is perfectly good. I have been around this business of IMBs for a long time, so I do know the National Council members. The problem is that I do not think the National Council fully understands what its role is. We certainly do not want, as volunteers working in individual prisons, to have such a dictatorial approach from the National Council that we have no flexibility to operate within our prisons at all. That would be quite wrong, because all the prisons are different, they all have their different requirements and needs and different populations, but on the other hand, we do need good advice about good practice and bad practice, and quite regularly we do get good guidance from the National Council. It fulfils a very important role, but I am not absolutely sure that the governance arrangements of IMBs have been properly sorted.

Chair: Do you want to say something about that?

Carole Homan: Yes, if I may. We have had no London representative for the London prisons on the National Council for over a year. The workload is heavy, and experienced members do not seem to be attracted to the post. At Belmarsh we have had the head of the National Council come to one of our board meetings, but other than that, we have very little dealing with the National Council. I think the National Council should have clear guidelines as to purpose, and should be working for IMBs and directed by the needs of IMBs working with prisons. I also think it might be considered appropriate to co-opt members with areas of particular expertise for a short time for a particular piece of work, and even perhaps consider co-opting outside professions that do not have a link with prisons so that their expertise can be used. We seem to be very parochial in the National Council.

Q247 Mr Llwyd: What is your current assessment of the levels of prisoner safety within your prisons, and if there are any recent trends, what are they and what causes them?

Carole Homan: On safety, the statistics that I have for violent incidents show that they have apparently gone down since last year. Assaults on staff in 2013 were 55; up to 30 September, they are now 48 this year. Assaults on prisoners in 2014 to 30 September were 44; in 2013 they were 50. I think it is comparable, really.

Q248 Mr Llwyd: They do not seem to be going down, do they, with respect? There are several months left of this year.

Carole Homan: Yes. There are several months left, yes, but hopefully that will be the case.

The other aspect of safety, which is the self-harm that prisoners do, has definitely reduced, although we have had two deaths in custody this year. I think the safety of prisoners is paramount for prison officers and for the senior management team. ACCTs are taken when prisoners are exhibiting signs of self-harm, so I think it is coped with relatively well in the prison.

David Pinchin: Isis has a difficult population. It is a young population, it is a very volatile population and the incidents of fights and minor incidents occur all the time, but the statistics suggest that on self-harm, for example, there has been very little change recently. It spiked a bit in the summer, and that has happened before, funnily enough, but overall the figures are stable. On ACCTs, we have just had a month in October where there have been more ACCTs opened this year than in the same month last year, but I do not think there is anything particularly significant about that. We did have one attempted suicide last week.

Assaults on staff are still a concern and have continued to occur. The number of instances of assaults on staff has gone up, and it spiked in July, also in the summer of this year. There have been 39 assaults on staff so far this year, and there were 35 in the whole of last year.

Offender on offender assaults have gone down, and quite significantly—136 so far, against 254 last year. That may well have something to do with the more consistent approach to the regime.

Andy McDonald: The more restricted regime.

David Pinchin: The restricted regime, yes, because they are locked in their cells more often, so it is not surprising in a way.

Of course, we mentioned the personal officer scheme earlier on, and there is not much of a personal officer scheme in place in the prison because of the shortage of staff. Officers fear that they do not have enough time and are often in different places. They do not know from one day to the next where they are going to be working, so the opportunities to have access to the personal officer scheme are very limited. That in turn might introduce feelings of a lack of safety on the part of the offenders, and of course it has an impact on staff morale, which I have to say varies quite considerably. At times it is quite low.

Q249 Mr Llwyd: Your 2013 report mentioned the worrying level of violence at Isis.

David Pinchin: Yes.

Mr Llwyd: What changes were made after that report, and could they have fed into the latest statistics?

David Pinchin: Yes, I think they could do, but I think through the very strong efforts of the Governor and his team at Isis in terms of the partnerships that he referred to earlier, a lot has been done to resolve—or not resolve, but certainly reduce—the incidents of violence. The very presence of Trident in the prison has made a big difference. The relationship with MOPAC, the Mayor's office, with the local borough commander, with

the CPS and with people undertaking impact statements after issues of violence, and the fact that the police have now taken to charging more people who offend in prison, has all had a big effect on making a more positive approach to violence generally.

Q250 Mr Llwyd: I have a short final question for you both. It is short, but I think it is an important one. We have heard today that the prisoner complaints regime is good. In your opinion, is it effective, and are there any areas that the board or you yourselves as representatives would seek to see improved?

Carole Homan: Yes. I do think that the complaints system could be. At times some of the answers given by prison officers to complaints, when we look at them as board members, are not what we consider adequate, but then there is provision for us to pass that on to a member of the senior management team to highlight the fact that we do not think that the answer is fit for purpose. Then that is dealt with and the senior management come back to us to let us know what the outcome of that is. I think in Belmarsh we have unfortunately had incidents of prisoners who feel that their complaints are not being listened to, who go on a dirty protest. That is not decent for the prisoner who is perpetrating the protest, it is not decent for the officers who have to handle it, and it is not decent for outside people like ourselves in education and all the rest of the services to cope with. It is also very expensive to manage. So that is the final resort that a prisoner might feel they have to make a protest.

David Pinchin: Yes, I would endorse that. I do think the quality of the responses that the offenders get at times has not been very good, and also that they try to manipulate the system so that they will go up the line quicker. Mr Hawkings was saying that they would sometimes write to him, as opposed to going through the process. We applaud the fact that now there is going to be a greater focus on using the application system first before entering the complaints process. Certainly all the stats suggest that the complaints are answered within a good time. Having said that, the offender will often come to us as a means of circumventing the system too. You might be interested to know that we get a lot of complaints—or we call them applications—every week. They vary between 20 and 35 a week, which is a lot, and we are not investigators, but we certainly have to make sure that we can sort something out quickly or make sure that the prison is doing so properly.

Q251 John Howell: I listened to your earlier comments about purposeful activity. How effective do you think it is for prisoners?

David Pinchin: There are some extremely good examples of good outcomes, both educationally and work-wise; there are some very good outcomes. Through the job fairs, people have gone out into jobs—we know about those and we have seen the good examples of that. That is a great credit to the jails doing that. Having said that, not enough people are going to purposeful activity, for the reasons we have talked about earlier, so the very fact that they are not doing as much as they should be means that the job of the training prison is not as effective as it should be. But what is reassuring is the number of good outcomes. Equally, the education provider, which is A4E, have struggled to provide

staffing themselves. You probably know about this and there is a question mark about their future.

Q252 John Howell: I was going to ask you a supplementary question about A4E and what effect its withdrawal would have.

David Pinchin: I do not think it has had much of an effect yet. It certainly will do, obviously, but I do not know what the arrangements are going to be. I understand they are sub judice at the moment, but the very fact that A4E have not been able to recruit staff themselves, and have often not been able to provide back-up when staff are sick or on leave, obviously means that those opportunities are missed and offenders do not get across to education. Sometimes, because of the shortage of staff on the wings, the offenders cannot get across to education and workshops anyway, so there is a dual problem there. Sometimes it is both, sometimes it is one, sometimes it is the other.

Carole Homan: On purposeful activity, we have, for instance, a breakfast pack workshop. It is not what I would classify purposeful activity, it is just mindless packaging. It does, however, encourage the work ethic for a prisoner to physically go to work.

With regard to staffing by A4E and tutors for the workshops, you have heard previously from other representatives that tutors are now being sought outside of prison officers. For us in Belmarsh, there is an added dimension to recruitment to both the education and workshop providers, in that they have to have a counter-terrorism clearance and the board has to have the same clearance. We find it extremely frustrating, the length of time it takes to get this clearance and whether in fact everybody needs to have the clearance, because not all facets of the staff have contact with the prisoners who need that level of clearance. If there were less going through the process, maybe it would be sped up.

But most of all, our contention as the monitoring board is that it has taken me since the recruitment process in September 2013 until September 2014 to have one appointee take up post. It is so difficult to complete the form online, it is not fit for purpose. You cannot complete it on an Apple Mac. There are various parts of the form that are very difficult, because there is a drop-down menu and if you do not fit into the category, it is extremely difficult to bypass that. I do think that that should be looked at, because it affects IMB, chaplaincy, and obviously officers applying for jobs. I do not think it is fit for purpose.

Q253 Chair: Mr Pinchin, we are running out of time, but I understand you have concerns about the reclassification for resettlement.

David Pinchin: Only in the sense that we have seen recently offenders being transferred back to Isis from other jails, and that has reignited some of the gangland relationships and has caused some additional violent episodes. The through-the-gate policy, which obviously one supports in terms of trying to reduce reoffending and so on, does have that as a potential problem, so I would just sound a note of warning about it.

Q254 Chair: Somebody should be aware that that can take place.

David Pinchin: It is also about the response to our concerns by NOMS and Ministers. It frustrates us more than anything else.

Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Pinchin and Ms Homan. We are very grateful for your evidence today.