



Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Prisons in Wales and treatment of Welsh offenders](#), HC 113

Tuesday 24 February 2015

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Ministry of Justice](#)

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Members present: David T. C. Davies (Chair); Guto Bebb; Glyn Davies; Jonathan Edwards; Nia Griffith; Mrs Siân C. James; Jessica Morden; Mr Mark Williams

Questions 189-239

Witnesses: **Andrew Selous MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Minister for Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation, Ministry of Justice, and **Sarah Payne**, Director, National Offender Management Service in Wales, gave evidence.

Q189 Chair: Good morning, Minister. Forgive me if I have to duck and weave a bit, but the sun is shining straight into my eyes. I understand that you want to make a short statement to begin with.

Andrew Selous: Yes. That might be helpful to the Committee, because we put down a written parliamentary statement for Parliament only half an hour ago. In case members of the Committee do not know, I am able to confirm this morning that the new prison in north Wales will be operated by Her Majesty's Prison Service; 34% of the service provision, including the running of the large industrial workshop complex, will be outsourced. This new model will bring the public, voluntary and private sectors together, working to provide the very best rehabilitative environment to tackle reoffending rates.

The decision to allow Her Majesty's Prison Service to operate the prison reflects the success of the prison unit cost programme, which will save £300 million a year from prison budgets by 2015-16 and reduces the unit cost by £2,200 per place. Our estate strategy overall will achieve long-term cost reduction in the prison estate, through our policy of new for old. This means replacing uneconomic prison places with modern, fit-for-purpose accommodation at much lower cost. I note that this Committee called for more prison capacity in north Wales back in 2007 and 2010. I am delighted today to be able to confirm how we will provide that for you.

Q190 Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Minister. You said in the statement that there is a reduction in unit cost of £2,200. Do you know, therefore, roughly what the unit cost is going to be? I gather that the average is about £35,000 a year.

Andrew Selous: We have brought it down to £34,000, which is less than it was. This is not just about cost reduction, because it will be a better prison both for the prison officers who work in it and for the prisoners themselves.

Q191 Mrs James: How does that compare with the wider prison population? If it is £34 k per unit in north Wales—

Andrew Selous: No, that is across the whole of the prison estate in England and Wales. That is the average. Obviously it is much higher for cat A and lower for the lower-security categories.

Sarah Payne: The unit cost at Wrexham—the north Wales prison—will be lower than that. It will be similar to that for category C prisons.

Q192 Mrs James: What is that at the moment?

Sarah Payne: It is about £13,000 to £15,000 or £16,000, depending on the prison.

Q193 Guto Bebb: First, thank you for your statement. We will return to some of the issues surrounding the economic benefits to north Wales from the prison in due course. I can assure you that there is a genuine welcome for the economic potential of the prison to contribute to the regeneration of parts of north-east Wales.

Turning to the prisons that we currently have in Wales, back in October the chief inspector of prisons stated that prisons in Wales are performing better than the prison estate in general. Would either of you like to hazard an opinion as to why the performance of prisons in Wales seems to be ahead of that of similar prisons in England?

Andrew Selous: We have excellent prison officers and excellent leadership at governor level and at senior level within NOMS, not least from Sarah Payne on my right. They have had a real focus in recent years. Looking across all of the recent scores from the chief inspector for the five prisons, with four scores per prison, I note that there are only two 2s, which is a fantastic achievement. There has been focus and unity of purpose. We just have a very good working team. I am sure that Sarah will be able to add to that.

Sarah Payne: The focus is very much on rehabilitation and safety. All of the prisons focus heavily on decency and really good relationships between staff and offenders, which of course are important. The other thing that works really well in Wales is relationships with outside partners. There is very good stakeholder engagement around certain things. There is a will to innovate in a number of prisons. That will not have been reflected in the inspections, because those were back in 2013, but in the last year and a half my experience of being the leader in Wales has been that there is a great willingness to innovate and to try new things.

Q194 Guto Bebb: I recognise that the chief inspector's comments are very positive, but the two scores of 2 were in relation to the resettlement issue. That is obviously a concern, because the whole point of prison is that people are resettled in the community and,

hopefully, do not offend again. Do you believe that those resettlement scores will have improved over the past two years, or is there still an issue in terms of helping prisoners to resettlement?

Sarah Payne: As you probably know, after each inspection there is an action log that they take forward and work on. The 2s were in Swansea and Cardiff. Both of those prisons have worked hard to increase the activity that prepares people for release, increasing the work and so on. Recently we appointed to cover Wales someone who is an expert in learning and skills. All of these things are about linking up and helping people to transition.

The other thing that will definitely help is the new through-the-gate service, which will be provided by Working Links. It has just taken over the community rehabilitation company. All of the prisons, with the exception of Usk, are resettlement prisons, so they will have Working Links present in them. We are now moving to ensure that in the last 12 weeks of their sentence Welsh offenders move back to the prison closest to their release address, so that the rehabilitation company can work with them through the gate.

Andrew Selous: If I might pick out one example of outstandingly good practice on resettlement, I would mention The Clink restaurant just outside Cardiff prison. On Sunday, it featured on the “Food Programme” on Radio 4 and it has just been voted the best restaurant in Cardiff by restaurant goers on TripAdvisor. I thoroughly recommend it and have taken my family for a meal there. They start working with prisoners a year or so before the end of their sentence and carry on mentoring them for up to 18 months afterwards. According to their own figures—these are not MOJ-audited figures—I understand that they believe they have a reoffending rate across all of the Clinks in the country of around 12%, which is fantastic. That is the sort of innovation Sarah has been talking about, which is doing really well.

Q195 Mr Williams: We were going to talk specifically about Working Links a bit later, but this may be a good chance to mention it. Working Links will be running the community rehabilitation programme in partnership with Innovation Wessex. Within that structure, will we be able to protect a distinctiveness about rehabilitation in Wales?

Sarah Payne: Yes. Working Links won three community rehabilitation companies. Wales is a single community rehabilitation company. The other two are Avon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset, and then Devon and Cornwall as well. Sorry, it might be Devon, Cornwall and Dorset; I can’t remember. It has the whole of the south-west. I believe that the organisation that you mention is a staff mutual from Cornwall. We do not yet have all of the details of the working model, but the specification for Wales was very clear that the community rehabilitation company needed to understand the delivery landscape in Wales, to work with Welsh partners and to work across the system.

Q196 Mr Williams: How will Working Links work with Welsh prisoners held outside Wales? Again, it is about the need for a distinctive approach.

Andrew Selous: One of the big innovations that we are doing with the transforming rehabilitation programme is that prisoners will spend the last 12 weeks of their sentence back in their home areas. That will mean that Welsh prisoners who have spent time in English jails will be back in Welsh prisons for the last 12 weeks, being looked after by the

community rehabilitation company that will carry on their probation supervision when they are in the community. That is a very positive move for Welsh prisoners. Of course, it goes alongside the training that is already being done in prisons, with the Wales essential skills toolkit and the individual activity plans for prisoners who are kept in Wales anyway.

Q197 Mr Williams: Finally from me, the Prison Reform Trust says that the transforming rehabilitation programme is “likely to result in an increase in breach and recall to custody” and that the changes “will also place a heavy burden on already overstretched budgets”. How do you react to that?

Andrew Selous: I am saddened to hear it say that. I have great respect for the Prison Reform Trust. I was with Juliet Lyon, its director, at a meeting yesterday. I do not believe that that will be the case. Essentially, we are taking the very best of the existing public sector expertise and adding to it the best that the voluntary and private sectors have to offer. We are providing supervision for a whole group of offenders—the under-12-month group—who were never supervised before anyway and for whom reoffending rates are already far too high. We are incentivising the providers with a payment-by-results model. That gives us the best chance to reduce what have been stubbornly high reoffending rates for a decade or more.

Q198 Guto Bebb: Bringing people back to the prison nearest their home for the final 12-week period is a move that I naturally welcome. In view of the fact that currently there is no prison in north Wales, what is the nearest prison for those Welsh prisoners?

Sarah Payne: Large numbers of north Wales offenders are held in Altcourse. Young offenders are held in Stoke Heath. Women are held—not exclusively, but in large numbers—in Styal, so they are just over the border.

Q199 Guto Bebb: I beg your indulgence, but my understanding is that there has been some difficulty placing Welsh prisoners in English prisons on the Work programme in Wales. Indeed, there has been a lack of support. The most important thing when somebody comes out of prison is the opportunity to get into the work force. Is that still the case? Because of the issue of devolution, do we have a problem placing people in a supportive environment if they are north Wales prisoners?

Sarah Payne: There are difficulties because of the way in which the funding has been agreed. Of course, the Work programme is provided by Working Links in Wales, so my hope is that some of that will start to be ironed out.

Q200 Guto Bebb: For example, if there is identification of literacy and numeracy issues, I understand that that sort of support is not available in the same manner as it would be if they were an English prisoner.

Sarah Payne: In prison, they are supported. All offenders are tested for their literacy and numeracy.

Andrew Selous: This is really important, because it is something new that we started in August across England and Wales. We are doing much more robust screening of prisoners’ reading and maths ability, in particular. I looked carefully at this when I was in Cardiff prison recently. We will have the baseline data for all prisoners in a proper format

for the first time. That will give us the ability really to track how we are doing. I am very keen to press officials on that issue and to make sure that we make progress on it.

Q201 Mr Williams: Are you confident that the records will follow the prisoner in a seamless way? I appreciate what you have said, but one of the problems has been that, when people go from prison to prison, the records have not always followed. That is critical in terms of developing literacy and numeracy strategies.

Andrew Selous: I believe that we have sorted that out, but I will allow Sarah to go into detail on it.

Sarah Payne: We do try to sort that out so that they take their information with them. We recognise that it is a waste of resources continually to test people and have the same answers come back.

Q202 Mr Williams: It is demoralising and a waste of time.

Sarah Payne: It is demoralising for the offenders as well. What we want to do is to continue. When they come back to the resettlement prison, if they are in the middle of a reading and writing course or whatever, we will continue that, so that they get as far as they can before they are released. Community rehabilitation's role is to help to broker continuation of that once they get into the community.

Q203 Guto Bebb: I have a final question. You have spoken quite positively about the experience or the performance of Welsh prisons, but we do have a significant overcrowding problem in our prisons, ranging from 125% to 186% of capacity. Those figures may be slightly out of date, but there is clearly an overcrowding issue. What steps have been taken to deal with that, with the exception of building a prison in Wrexham?

Andrew Selous: Providing a new prison with a capacity of 2,106 places goes quite a long way towards that. It is worth noting that, even though there is some crowding within prisons in Wales, including Swansea, the crowding is less than it was a number of years ago. We absolutely accept our duty to provide sufficient prison capacity. That is why, besides building the new prison in north Wales, we have built the extra house block at Parc prison in Bridgend. That is a significant increase in prison capacity in Wales, which will help.

Q204 Guto Bebb: Is there an expectation that the figures for Cardiff and Swansea, for example, will see a reduction, or are we still looking at 150% of capacity moving forward?

Sarah Payne: Not at the moment. The way the prison population is worked out is that there is what is called certified normal accommodation and then an operational capacity, which is normally above that. The operational capacity of every prison is signed off by the deputy director of custody for the region. Their role is to ensure that the operational capacity—the maximum, if you like—still enables us to run a safe, decent and secure prison. For example, if there are more offenders requiring single cells, double cells will become single cells, rather than our continuing to crowd. Swansea, for example, often runs quite a long way below operational capacity. This morning we unlocked 411 in Swansea, but the operational capacity is 455. As long as we ensure that everyone is kept safely, decently and securely, the operational capacity remains as it is.

Q205 Chair: We all agree on the importance of education, but could you explain something to me? It is on the issue of books. First, books were banned, which I thought was a bit unfair. Then I got an explanation from the Justice Minister that seemed to make sense—i.e. that people can have access to any book that they want from the libraries and that books were being used to smuggle in weapons. Now, if I read correctly, we seem to have changed our minds again and to have allowed books to come in. What is going on in this area?

Andrew Selous: Unfortunately, we have had the conflation of two issues here. Let me say completely clearly that I am passionate about prisoners being able to read really well. I think that they should have access to the books that they need to improve their literacy and should be able to read generally in prison. Unfortunately, we have a huge issue with contraband and illicit items, many of which are extremely dangerous and can be very injurious to the safety of prisoners, as well as prison officers. Those can come in through parcels. There are two issues. It is very good that they read, but we have to control very carefully what comes in.

We never banned books. What we said was that we did not want packages to be sent in from families, because unfortunately SIM cards, drugs and so on can come in with those. A court case was brought against the Ministry of Justice requiring us to allow families to send books in, as a result of the publicity that the original decision had generated. I am pleased to say that that seems to be working well. We have gone to a number of retailers from which families can order the books, which are sent direct by the retailer into the prison. That gives us some comfort as far as security is concerned, because the family are not handling the book directly themselves. That was the order of the court, with which we have complied.

Chair: Wonderful. That has cleared that up.

Q206 Mrs James: I am going to ask you about women prisoners and young offenders. In 2007 the Corston report recommended that in Wales we had a unique opportunity to look at different forms of sentencing for women. I have become increasingly hard-line on this, if you will pardon the pun. I do not like to say “women offenders” and “women prisoners”; I prefer to say “women who are in conflict with the law”.

In my everyday capacity as a Member of Parliament, when I deal with these women I find that often they are sent to prison for things such as non-payment of fines, drug convictions, alcohol problems and so on. It appears to me that what they need is help, not a custodial sentence.

How far have we got? Why has so little progress been made on these recommendations in the Corston report that we could be really innovative in Wales, because we have such a small number of women who are in conflict with the law, in looking at different forms of custodial sentencing and support?

Andrew Selous: I will start and ask Sarah to add to what I say. What I would say overall is that in this Parliament we have taken huge steps to provide extra capacity in Wales, by providing the new prison in north Wales and significant extra capacity at Bridgend in south Wales. We have also doubled the capacity of the young offenders institution in Bridgend from 32 to 64 places. For adult prisoners and young offenders in north Wales and, partly, in south Wales, we have taken huge steps in this Parliament.

Q207 Mrs James: On male offenders.

Andrew Selous: Correct—absolutely. At a time of fiscal difficulty, it is not a bad record. Quite rightly, you are challenging us and pointing out further things that need to be done. That is absolutely right. I am very well aware of the fact that there is still no women's prison in Wales. We believe that what we have done is sensible and was the priority, looking at the overall number of prisoners and the lack of any capacity in north Wales.

Having looked carefully at the provision in Styal and Eastwood Park, the involvement of Welsh third sector organisations—the fact that women are met at the gate by Changing Lives and brought back—the various fairs and the outreach to women in Eastwood Park, I believe that there is a good level of service and that the important help that you properly mentioned is being provided to women prisoners. I will ask Sarah to talk a little more about the specific economics of the issue.

Sarah Payne: I should declare a personal interest, in that three or four years ago I ran a women's charity for a couple of years. I am particularly interested in exploring what we can do in Wales to help women to keep away from the criminal justice system. We have a very good integrated offender management scheme, which includes all offenders in Wales, working with partners. As part of the reducing reoffending strategy in Wales and that scheme, we have started a women's pathfinder. It is focused on Cardiff to start with, is multi-agency and is working on what we can do to support women as they come into contact with the criminal justice system, to help them not to progress further into the system.

We have got some funding—the Welsh Government have joined us on this—and have just appointed an accommodation officer, who is helping the women to find accommodation when they are released from custody, because that is a big issue. We are also working with local authorities—it is now moving beyond Cardiff—to help women not to go into custody, because if they lose their homes and their children go into care it creates more of a burden on the public purse. In Cardiff itself, there is a women's centre. We have introduced women-only reporting arrangements on the probation side. There is a women's centre for disadvantaged women and women offenders, who go down there to do courses. I have sat in on a couple, where they were challenging women's thinking on what they could and should do, how they might deal with anger and so on.

Finally, the probation service in Wales works very closely with Eastwood Park, where the largest number of Welsh women are held, to help to prepare them for their release. We have the Changing Lives contract, which collects women at the gate and brings them home. The probation service in Wales has helped to develop programmes within the prison around confidence building and so forth.

We are doing as much as we can. We have very good relationships with partners in Wales, looking at what more we could do to support women offenders. The issue is that many of them are quite isolated. You might have only one or two women offenders from Aberystwyth or so on, so it is about how you support them in their community. We have to do that through partners. The Welsh community rehabilitation company will be the lead community rehabilitation company for the women in Eastwood Park and Styal.

Q208 Mrs James: I commend all of that and have seen a lot of those innovative ideas in action, but I come back at all times to the fact that you have to treat women differently from the male prison population, given the sorts of offending women are involved in and the types of sentencing they get. Ms Payne, you touched on the fact that it has a knock-on effect within the wider community, through children going into care. For example, fewer women than men go back to their original arresting addresses. This has a knock-on effect on the wider family and so on.

I would go so far as to say that prison does not work for women. We have a unique opportunity in Wales to establish a new way forward. I would encourage you to think about that, Minister. You touched on the work that the Welsh Assembly is doing. I am aware that there have been meetings with Ministers there. Could you tell us a little about those discussions and what is happening?

Andrew Selous: I want briefly to come back to the diversion point, which you quite properly raised to start with. In addition to the pilot in Cardiff, which Sarah mentioned, I am very pleased to say that there is a £500,000 grant from the Home Office for the diversion scheme. Four further sites in Newport, Haverfordwest, Merthyr Tydfil and St Asaph are being rolled out on the diversion side, so we are making progress in the areas you have talked about. Obviously sentencing is a matter for the courts, rather than for Justice Ministers. Quite rightly, we have an independent judiciary in this country. However, I hope that you will be pleased to see the diversion work being rolled out across Wales.

Q209 Mrs James: What discussions have you had with Ministers down at the Assembly?

Andrew Selous: We have good contact. I have met Welsh Assembly Ministers and we are in frequent correspondence. Sarah is based in Cardiff and has very good relations with the Welsh Government. Everything that I have seen shows really good partnership working between the Welsh Government, NOMS in Wales and the Ministry of Justice. I do not see a problem. Everyone is sighted and there is proper advance consultation. I see a system that is working really well.

Q210 Mrs James: So there has been nothing specifically for women who are in conflict with the law.

Sarah Payne: What we are doing is talking to local partners. As part of the integrated offender management scheme, which is quite broad, we are trying to work with local community safety partnerships and others on how we might resettle people more broadly. We are having very early conversations with officials in the Welsh Government about this.

Andrew Selous: On domestic abuse, a subject that I think you mentioned earlier, the NOMS innovation fund third sector capacity building has just given £150,000 to Llamau for a domestic abuse project in Caerphilly. That is another good example of the sort of work you were quite properly referring to.

Q211 Mrs James: We have a really good story with young people—all the things that have been put in place to support a reducing number of young people who enter the justice system. The number is declining—I would really like to see us achieve that with women as well—

which has reduced the need for secure accommodation. We have been to see lots of the projects and have met a few young people. What is being done to share the experiences and good practices that are happening in Wales on a wider basis?

Andrew Selous: Like you, I am delighted to see that we are locking up far fewer young people than was the case in the past. That is a tribute to all of those who are working very hard within the youth justice sector. It does mean that those we have in custody are often much more challenging to look after. That presents issues in terms of violence and assaults—sometimes serious assaults—on staff.

I have seen excellent work within young offenders institutions, secure children's homes and secure training centres, with very dedicated staff. The thing I worry about sometimes is the environment that the young people will go back to once they leave our care, because the reoffending rates for young people are the worst in the whole criminal justice system. That is something that should rightly concern us all.

Q212 Nia Griffith: Minister, I turn now to the issue of Wrexham. We have had evidence, including on our visit to Oakwood, that it is not so much size as the newness of a prison that can sometimes cause problems. Would you agree? Could you outline some of the strategies that you would hope to use in Wrexham in order to avoid those types of mistakes?

Andrew Selous: We certainly intend to learn from other new prisons that have been opened, specifically Thameside, Oakwood and HMP Low Moss, up in Scotland. We are determined to learn the lessons from opening those new prisons. One of the things that we will do is make sure that we have a mix of both experienced prison officers and new prison officers. We have the time, with the prison not opening until early 2017, to make sure that our recruitment plans can reflect that.

The design of the prison will really help us in terms of safety, security, trying to keep drugs from being thrown over the wall and keeping out other contraband items that can make life much more dangerous for prisoners, as well as prison officers. As I said earlier, we have a very good mixture, with Her Majesty's Prison Service running the prison, but education and health being provided through the Welsh Assembly Government and the private and voluntary sectors getting heavily involved in the industrial workshops.

I am optimistic about the future of this prison. It is a large prison, but I would point out that it is broken down into three house blocks and, further beneath that, into communities of 88. We know that 90 or so is the optimum number of prisoners in terms of safety, decency, security, good sight lines and so on, which is where our design comes in to help us. I believe that we will be able to provide a prison that is safe and effective at reducing reoffending, while providing good value for money for the taxpayer as well.

Q213 Nia Griffith: I welcome the workshop plan, which sounds marvellous. There will also be opportunities, I assume, for some prisoners to take up placements outside the prison. How are your preparations going for that? Again, that will be on a very large scale for a relatively small town like Wrexham. What particular steps are you taking to ensure that—

Andrew Selous: I will let Sarah Payne give the bulk of the answer, but release on temporary licence is an important part of the preparation for release. I am absolutely passionate about getting as many employers as possible involved in providing work both

within prisons and to ex-offenders. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that I think it is a very important part of the corporate responsibility of business to provide work for ex-offenders. We have an excellent employers' forum for reducing reoffending, chaired by James Timpson. I am always keen to get more companies on board. When all of you visit your local companies, will you please help me try to achieve that? I will let Sarah answer more specifically on Wrexham itself.

Sarah Payne: The prison is predominantly a category C training prison, which means that, typically, the offenders will not go outside regularly. They will be released on temporary licence for resettlement purposes, but they will not be released on a daily basis; that happens from the open prisons. The numbers will not be huge. These offenders, held elsewhere, will be released on temporary licence for resettlement purposes back to the local community. We do not envisage lots of local working out in the way that we have at Prescoed, for example.

Q214 Nia Griffith: Could I ask one final question? You have chosen Her Majesty's Prison Service to run this prison. Were there particular reasons why you did that rather than go to the private sector?

Andrew Selous: We have fantastic expertise within the public sector Prison Service. It has also demonstrated, through the prison unit cost reduction programme, the ability to provide value for money for the taxpayer, while providing an excellent service. That was the reason.

Q215 Jonathan Edwards: Minister, we have no custodial facilities for children in north Wales. There are no custodial facilities at all for women in Wales. Why is it the priority of Ministers here in London to build a super-prison in north Wales, where most of the prisoners will come from outside the country?

Andrew Selous: If you look at projected prisoner numbers over the next few years, where we need the extra capacity is in the adult male estate. Unfortunately, that is where the demand is. It is our responsibility to make sure that we provide that for the future so that we are always able to provide sufficient prison capacity for those people whom the courts send to us. I take your point about women; we discussed that earlier. I also take your point about children. I repeat very briefly what I said earlier. We have taken significant steps to provide extra capacity in Wales and, if not, within the two sectors that, quite rightly, you are raising with me.

Q216 Jonathan Edwards: But you would agree that the super-prison is being built in an England and Wales context, rather than a Welsh context.

Andrew Selous: There are around 900 prisoners from north Wales who are not in prison in north Wales at the moment, obviously, because there is no prison in north Wales. We believe that we will be able to get at least 700 of those back to north Wales. This very significantly increases our ability to place Welsh prisoners within Welsh prisons. I am sure you would agree that that is a good thing, because of rehabilitation and all of the other issues we have been talking about.

Q217 Jonathan Edwards: Building on that point, Welsh prisoners are widely dispersed at the moment, with over 45% over the border in England. Is there a good reason to disperse

Welsh prisoners, when the majority will want to resettle in Wales? We heard earlier in evidence that there will be a 12-week protocol.

Andrew Selous: That is correct.

Q218 Jonathan Edwards: Will 12 weeks be sufficient for that vital work?

Sarah Payne: Yes, it should be. When you are trying to get people housing, they will not promise it weeks and weeks in advance. You need to get people locally so that you can organise interviews, if you need to, as well as job interviews and things like that. You can do that within the 12-week period. It is optimum, really.

Andrew Selous: We have already made very good progress on getting Welsh prisoners back into Welsh prisons for the final 12 weeks of their sentence.

Sarah Payne: The figures are not published, but 45% is not a figure that I recognise. I think that it is lower than that. Certainly at the moment it is.

Q219 Glyn Davies: Thank you, Minister, for what you have said so far. I want to build a little on the conversation that you had with Nia Griffith. We spent a very interesting day at Oakwood; we all went. We learned quite a bit about the difficulties that you are facing. It was fairly open to us about the fact that there had been a lot of teething problems and issues; I do not think that you would disagree with that. To what extent are you able to make public what those teething problems were and what lessons you may be learning from them, so that everybody can share in understanding exactly what changes you are making to avoid those teething problems in Wrexham?

Andrew Selous: I will mention two issues, before handing over to Sarah. One thing that we have learned is to make sure that the build project and the mobilisation project get joined together and are not run separately. It is quite important for the opening of the prison to make sure that those two project teams are working together. We are very committed to doing that at the new north Wales prison.

Secondly, the mix of staff is critical. Obviously there will be a lot of people new to the Prison Service. The extra jobs that we will provide will be good for employment in north Wales—I am sure that you all welcome that—but we want to have experienced officers in there at the start as well, in order to be able to teach the newer prison officers. Those are two of the key things that I would mention. Sarah will add further detail.

Sarah Payne: I do not underestimate the challenge of opening a new prison. I was the governor of a new prison back in the '90s. I was the second governor, but it had not been open very long. There were lots of problems, in the sense that when any new, big organisation comes into being, there is not a degree of familiarity with how things are done around here. You have to establish, "This is how things are going to be done around here."

There will be challenges in managing the new prison. I am the senior responsible owner for the whole project, so the build and the operation will now come together. I am confident that we can overcome the challenges and run a truly rehabilitative environment. Some of what I am about to say reflects lessons learned. It is really important that we get the right, strong leadership from the beginning, so we will carefully select the person who

is going to run the prison and their team. The leaders have to be authentic, visible and values driven—all the things that you would expect. The Minister mentioned the living units of 88. The leadership within those units has to be really strong as well so that it is consistent.

We will think really carefully about the regime and the operation of the day. The public sector Prison Service has a lot of experience of running a lot of prisons. We know what the regime looks like and what the core day should look like. The benchmarking that we mentioned earlier and that has delivered the efficiencies means that there is now a core day in each of the prisons, which is broadly similar, so we know how to do that. We have the wherewithal to test through heat mapping how we are going to run the prison. We will look at that to check that we have everything how it should be.

Q220 Nia Griffith: For clarification, what is heat mapping?

Sarah Payne: I am sorry. It is similar to what the police use. You use a computer for it. I am not IT literate in that, but I know that we can do it and am going to see how it does. You run the regime, work out how many prisoners you have unlocked, where the staff are and what the staff movements are. You can map the day through this computer and check that everything is as it should be—where the doors are unlocked and so on. I am sorry—I have lost my thread now.

Q221 Glyn Davies: Clearly, you are doing quite a lot of work on learning lessons, looking at what happened at Oakwood and other prisons. The Committee was very interested in that—how it had moved forward and the work that it was doing to improve the position at Oakwood. Will this be a formal review that will be published and that we can read, so that we can share in the work that you are doing to review it?

Sarah Payne: The inspection reports for Oakwood paint very clearly, through the recommendations, the things that they wanted to see improved. Indeed, the most recent inspection, which was published a couple of weeks ago, shows that there have been significant improvements. Typically, that is what you would expect with a prison.

We are looking very carefully at those. I have been to speak to G4S myself, because I want to understand what the issues are. We know that sometimes when prisons are built we underestimate the amount of workshop space that is needed. This time we have lots of workshop space, sports areas and so on, to make sure that all of the offenders can be kept purposefully occupied. We have also learned things to do with the design, such as zoning and where you put gates and things, because the core build of the new prison in Wrexham has a lot of similarities with the way in which the buildings, particularly the living units, are constructed in Oakwood. We know that that works reasonably well.

Q222 Glyn Davies: I do not know whether it is anecdotal, but I was speaking with someone at Oakwood and he said quite cheerfully—un-cheerfully, actually—that when a new prison is built the prisoners come to that prison from other prisons, and the prisoners they want to remove from other prisons are the troublesome ones, anybody who is giving trouble. If you are moving a few, then let's get rid of the ones that are causing us problems. That was thought to be part of Oakwood's problem. Is that something that you are aware of? Is it a reality? Is it something that you need to watch for?

Sarah Payne: That is really interesting, because everybody in custody can pose problems. To some extent, if you are on the receiving end of prisoners, you can sometimes believe that these people have been hand selected because they are the people who were not getting on well somewhere else.

Part of one of the work strands within the programme, when we need to start putting people into the prison, is to have a selection process to make sure that we get people in the right order. For example, one of the first lots of people that I would want in there, if I were the governor, would be the cleaners. The prison is going to have to be cleaned; so you want people whom you can let out of the cell and who can work a little bit unsupervised with a mop and bucket cleaning. If you have lots of people who are incredibly troublesome, they are not necessarily going to make good cleaners from the off. So we need to get the mix right. They will be category C offenders, and to some extent not deemed to need the amount of supervision that they would if they were held in more secure conditions. There will be a small remand function. At what point that will open is not yet certain, but it will be there by the end of 2017.

Q223 Glyn Davies: The only other question that I wanted to ask relates to your earlier discussion with Nia Griffith. You talked about the optimum group of 80.

Sarah Payne: Yes, 88.

Q224 Glyn Davies: I think you called it a community. One of the issues for big prisons has always been the size of the units and the inability to give not a personal service but a personal attention to individual prisoners. How real is that? A prison governor told us that he thought that the Government were veering too much towards an economic solution, rather than the right solution, by going for separate blocks of 700.

Sarah Payne: Was that my colleague, Mr Lockyer?

Q225 Glyn Davies: That's right, yes. How real are these units of 90? Is it just something on paper, or is it a way of dealing with prisoners in small groups?

Sarah Payne: We know that that number of offenders is a good size of living unit for the number of staff that you can put in there and the amount of attention that they can give to people.

The prison design is three K-shaped units; there are four spurs on each and each spur has two living units. They are galleried as well. They are not just flat; there are two storeys, so there is good visibility. On the ground floor, we have easy access cells for people who are less mobile. Those units are absolutely optimum. Indeed, when I worked at Pentonville, the wings were more than 400, but they have since been reduced to a smaller size to enable better supervision. The staffing benchmark—the ratio of staff to prisoners—will be the same in this prison as it would be in any other category C prison.

Andrew Selous: Each galleried accommodation module, which is what these communities of 88 prisoners are called, has its own association area and has access to an external exercise yard, which will also help with the smooth running of the prison.

Q226 Guto Bebb: Following on from Glyn's questions and the points made by Jonathan, at the moment Welsh prisoners are spread among English prisons, as things stand. Clearly, once

Wrexham is built, there is no way in which it will be dealing only with Welsh prisoners. What are the bases upon which people will be selected to go to Wrexham? Will it be geography? Will it be the type of prisoner?

Andrew Selous: The English prisoners will predominantly be from the north-west, just over the border. We try as much as possible—

Q227 Guto Bebb: The geographical issue will be fairly important.

Andrew Selous: Correct. We want to keep prisoners as close to their home locations as possible, but within that we have to look at the category of prison that they are sent to, and the type of treatment, help and support that they need. If they are sex offenders, we have entire prisons specialising in providing treatment and help for sex offenders. Obviously, those caveats are there, but, having said that, we try to keep prisoners as local as possible.

Q228 Guto Bebb: By north-west, we also include Liverpool then.

Andrew Selous: Indeed, we would.

Q229 Guto Bebb: That is a case for the electrification of the line from Wrexham to Liverpool, I would argue, but that is another matter entirely.

Your statement this morning was most welcome. You highlighted the value of the prison in bringing £23 million to the local economy on an annual basis, and the creation of 1,000 jobs. Would you give the Committee a feel of where those figures come from and on what basis you make those assumptions?

Andrew Selous: It is on the basis of prisons of similar size that we are running across the UK anyway, and scaling up a bit, because the north Wales prison will be larger than the current establishments. Obviously, within public sector prisons we have considerable experience of knowing how many staff we need for the number of prisoners, and we know the jobs that it will create and the value that it will put into the local community. I am particularly pleased that 100 apprenticeships, 500 days of work placement and half of the labour to build the prison is going to be local, with £50 million going to small and medium-sized businesses and £30 million going to local businesses. We hope that it will be a significant boost for the whole of the north Wales economy.

Q230 Guto Bebb: That set of figures has previously been looked at by somebody like the National Audit Office, I presume.

Andrew Selous: Yes. These are our best estimates.

Sarah Payne: They were done by analysts on the business case for the prison in the first place, and we revisited them for the more recent business case on the running of the prison. It is our best guess.

Q231 Guto Bebb: It is not all about economic development, but clearly that is an important element in the north Wales context. To what extent do you share the concerns that we heard at Oakwood, where it became apparent that a lot of experienced prison officers had to be recruited from outside Wales in order to serve that development? Do you think that will be the same issue in north Wales, or is a specific training programme being developed to ensure that as many of the jobs as possible are available to local people?

Sarah Payne: Both. With regard to prison officers, now that we know that the public sector is going to run it, it will be important to have a degree of experienced staff there. That is important. Jail craft is something that you can't just learn overnight. If you have a lot of inexperienced staff, and a lot of experienced offenders, it is not necessarily a really good mix.

We will look to have a good mix, but we will be looking to recruit prison officers locally, not least because we will want to have some people for whom Welsh is their first language. I do not know how many prison officers there are working across the system at the moment for whom Welsh is their first language, certainly in the north-west. I know how many staff we have in the south whose first language is Welsh, but we want to operate the prisons as bilingually as we possibly can.

Q232 Guto Bebb: Have you any figures in terms of percentages?

Sarah Payne: No, not yet. The other thing is that a few people keep e-mailing me who come from north Wales and who would quite like to go back there, who are already prison officers in the system.

Guto Bebb: I have constituents who want to work in Wrexham.

Q233 Mrs James: I may be the only person who has worked in a brand new prison. You talked about prison craft and jail craft. One of the things that shocked me when I went to Parc was that when they ramped up—obviously, to start off you do not fill the prison immediately; you ramp up gradually—every other prison in Britain that had to provide prisoners for Parc took the advantage and got rid of all their troublemakers. So you ended up with a brand new prison, with fabulous facilities and new prison officers who were dedicated and highly trained, but basically what happened was that the prisoners ended up knowing more about the prison service and the system than some of the staff. How will you mitigate that in the future?

Sarah Payne: I assure the Committee that that is at the forefront of my concerns. We are going to have to develop the wherewithal to understand who is coming and where from, and what their institutional history is so far, so that we are able to put them in the right place at the right time. We have to have a proper, good mix of offenders.

Q234 Mrs James: And not having all the troublemakers, as they did in Parc.

Andrew Selous: As Minister for England and Wales, it is important at a ministerial level that that point is taken on board and that we make sure the prisoners who go are not the ones who will cause significant trouble.

Q235 Jonathan Edwards: The Welsh Language Commissioner told us that the provision of Welsh language services across the estate is weak. What are you doing to improve the situation, with the developments at Wrexham in mind?

Andrew Selous: We run the Welsh language scheme. All Welsh prisons have fluent Welsh prison officers, Welsh language courses are available from learndirect on the virtual campus, and libraries have Welsh language books. We know from our prison information system that some prisoners prefer to use Welsh as a first or second language; there are 84 in total, 56 of whom are in prison in Wales, with 20 at Parc in Bridgend. We have the

television translation service, and we have Welsh TV channels available in Welsh prisons. Eastwood Park for women has a fluent Welsh-speaking member of staff.

We have made considerable efforts to make sure that the Welsh language is fully catered for. Where we have not been quite as good as we should have been is in monitoring how well we are doing with the Welsh language. However, that is something that we are aware of, and we are taking steps to improve it.

Sarah Payne: We are. It is fair to say that we recognise we are on a journey, and we know that we have more to do. We now have arrangements so that everyone who comes into prison is asked on induction what their preferred language is. Members of the Committee have seen that in prisons we now have photographs of the Welsh language-speaking staff so that offenders who want to speak in Welsh are able to link in with them. We are reviewing our scheme. The scheme was launched in May 2013, and it was accepted by the Welsh language commissioner. We are reviewing it at the moment, and we will continue to do what we can to make improvements.

NOMS in Wales is not just about the prisons. It is also about probation and community service. Wales probation had a good Welsh language scheme, and we are taking the learning across that. We are in the process of recruiting somebody to help us develop this too.

Q236 Jonathan Edwards: The consultation on the Ministry of Justice Welsh language scheme closed on 7 January. Do you envisage it being published prior to the dissolution of Parliament?

Andrew Selous: Gosh—I am not sure that I am sighted on that, I'm afraid. Could I ask that we write to you, Chair, if that would be acceptable? It is not information I have at my fingertips, but I shall write to you to provide that. I do apologise.

Q237 Chair: How well do you think the relationship is working between the Ministry of Justice and the Welsh Assembly Government on prison-related issues?

Andrew Selous: Very well, I think. I have had meetings with Welsh Assembly Government Ministers. I know that NOMS in Wales has a good relationship with the Welsh Assembly Government, to the extent that proposed legislation is shared with NOMS in Wales, and that has advanced the ability to comment. I see a system that is managing to work very well to reflect the different environment in Wales, and to work within the Welsh legislative structures.

Sarah Payne: All the work involved in the reducing reoffending pathways is devolved in Wales. We make it our business to work really closely and well with our partners, both locally and nationally in Wales.

Q238 Chair: That leads to an obvious question, which is whether you see any advantages or disadvantages in devolving prisons to the Welsh Assembly.

Sarah Payne: The Secretary of State for Wales is really clear that this is a matter that needs a lot of discussion. I understand that there is going to be a Command Paper shortly, but beyond that I cannot say.

Andrew Selous: The Secretary of State is very keen that there should be consensus across the political parties within Wales. As Sarah said, a Command Paper will be published shortly. I note that, at the moment, there are good relationships. As you have already heard, Welsh prisons overall have extremely high scores, as the chief inspector told you when he gave evidence.

Q239 Chair: I sense that you do not really want to explore this issue.

Andrew Selous: It might be a little above my pay grade, Chair.

Chair: I am prepared to let you off the hook. We have been here for nearly an hour. Minister and Ms Payne, thank you very much indeed. I call the meeting to a close.