

Justice Committee

Oral evidence: Prison reform, HC 548

Wednesday 14 December 2016

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Robert Neill (Chair); Alex Chalk; Alberto Costa; Kate Green; John Howell; Victoria Prentis.

Questions 149 - 206

Witnesses

Ian Bickers, Executive Governor, HMP Wandsworth, Nick Pascoe, Executive Governor, HMP High Down and HMP Coldingley, Ian Blakeman, Executive Governor, HMP Holme House and HMP&YOI Kirklevington Grange, Neil Richards, Executive Governor, HMP Ranby, Louise Spencer, Governor, HMP High Down, and Nigel Hirst, Governor, HMP Ranby.

Written evidence from witnesses:

–[Ministry of Justice](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ian Bickers, Nick Pascoe, Ian Blakeman, Neil Richards, Louise Spencer and Nigel Hirst.

Chair: Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for coming to give evidence. We are very grateful for your time. As you know, this is a rescheduled session from the one we were hoping to have when, for understandable reasons, you were not able to join us. Perhaps we will come to some of the issues around those matters later. At all events, do any of my colleagues need to declare interests? This is a standard procedure that we have to do. I am a non-practising barrister and consultant to a law firm.

Victoria Prentis: I am a non-practising barrister, but during my 17 years at the Treasury Solicitor's Department, I did a great deal of law for the Prison Service.

Alex Chalk: I am a practising barrister.

Alberto Costa: I am a practising solicitor and non-practising Scottish solicitor and, like my colleague Victoria, I worked in the Treasury Solicitor's Department representing the Prison Service, as it was then.

Kate Green: I am a life member of the Magistrates Association.

Q149 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We particularly asked to see you because of the role that you are taking as, if you like, the spearhead of change, so we would like to get a sense as to how things are moving from your perspective, lady and gentlemen. The Government White Paper that we have all seen and read talks about four core purposes—to protect the public, to maintain safety and order, reformation of offenders and preparing them for life outside. I suppose perhaps that goes together. Are there not implicit tensions? Can you reconcile those four tensions and, if so, how do you do it?

Ian Blakeman: Shall I go first?

Chair: Yes, and if everybody agrees with what is said, don't feel the need to add anything; but if you have something to add, then do.

Ian Blakeman: We are really clear that in order to do the higher order challenges that we face around protecting the public by reforming offenders and helping people change lives, and have them reduce reoffending, we need a stable base. We talk about the need for safe and decent prisons. We need a stable base we can operate from that allows us to execute the order of the court, which means we can make sure that we hold people safely and achieve what the court expects in terms of executing the sentence.

Then we build on that, and of course the focus is on working with people to change lives, whether through education, work, interventions or



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programmes. That is the focus of their time in prison, but always with a mind to the fact that at some point we are returning people to society and when we return them to society we need to focus on resettlement.

We are clear that the purposes of imprisonment need to be considered in the whole. Of course, at times there are trade-offs and tensions, and we have to be mindful of that. In a sense, our role as senior leaders of prisons is about making those balances, always with the absolute clarity that it starts from running safe and decent prisons. That is the bedrock on which we build if we want to achieve anything to help people turn their lives around.

Q150 Chair: Isn't our challenge at the moment that often prisons are not safe or decent? What is your assessment of the current state of the situation? Can we say in fairness that we are meeting those purposes?

Ian Bickers: That challenge is primary. When you look at the six prisons represented here, all of us face different challenges and have started the journey of reform at different places. What has become hugely imperative, specifically in the prison I look after, which is Wandsworth, is absolutely focusing on safety and decency and getting the basics right. I echo what Ian said. Once we have established that, we can build from there. The starting point absolutely has to be around safety and decency, doing the basics right and making sure we are keeping people safe and then allowing us to build. We would probably all say that we are on different parts of that journey.

Neil Richards: I echo that. The starting point for all of us as the early adopters of reform prisons is probably different. The starting point has to be evaluating where that point in time is and how much emphasis and work needs to be invested in that. At HMP Ranby, we have absolutely focused on safety and decency because, as Ian was saying, that is the bedrock in moving forwards with some of the medium and longer-term strategies around reformation.

Q151 Chair: Drilling down into those issues specifically, starting with you, Mr Richards, at Ranby what have you done to concentrate on safety and decency? There has been some additional money made available. Have you had some of that? What else is there?

Neil Richards: There are probably two approaches. The one that is key to everything we are doing is about giving hope. The key of hope and giving inspiration to the men at Ranby, the staff who work there and all the partner organisations is the bedrock of being able to move things forward.

In tandem with that, we have also done some practical things to deal with some of the symptoms of the recent difficulties that the prison has been going through over the last two to three years. We have invested money in creating a safer regime. That has been done by additional CCTV and by reprofiling, by which I mean moving staff around to be available



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at different times, so that we have, for example, a third member of staff available on the wings at key points in time, which builds a sense of security. We have invested money in safer custody, so we have ring-fenced staff who will deal purely with violence-related issues. We have just secured some additional funding and we will be taking an intelligence-based approach to the way we deploy our resources so that we make best use of them. That is additional money—additional investment going in—and we will see what the impact is in the longer term.

There already is an impact. Serious assaults at the prison since the announcement on 1 July have gone down; overall assault rates are also in decline. We have fewer ACCT documents. Where we would have had somewhere between 20 and 30 ACCT documents—people we are keeping an eye on in terms of being a risk to themselves—it is now at 12, 13 or 14 per day compared with high double figures. When someone asked me previously what the impact of reform has been so far, I said that the most remarkable thing is probably that the staff and the men have responded to the fact that we have given them hope that things are going to change. That is not to be underestimated.

Q152 **Chair:** Ms Spencer, what is your assessment of what you have done so far?

Louise Spencer: It is quite a few of the things that Neil mentioned. I am the governor of High Down and one of the issues we faced, similar to Wandsworth, is recruitment, in that we have quite a large number of vacancies at operational grades. We have put a lot of effort into how we recruit differently and we are introducing localised recruitment, which we are starting in January. I am optimistic that by having a more targeted approach, with potential applicants from my local community, we will bring in more new prison officers to the prison.

In terms of what we have already done, similarly we have reprofiled and thought about where we would put our resources so that with the staff we have available we can deliver the best regime possible, and men can get out of their cells, engage with staff and have the positive relationships that are crucial to effective, safe and decent prisons, giving people the opportunity to change and enabling them to get into the activities that we have on offer.

We have also looked at working with Leap, an external organisation that delivers interventions for our prisoners who are either at risk of violence or have already been involved in committing violent acts. They are also going to deliver conflict resolution training to some of our staff so that they will be better equipped to deal with difficult situations. We are rolling out five-minute intervention training as well, which has been proven through the national violence reduction project to support staff in their relationships with prisoners. Shortly, we will be rolling out body-worn video cameras in tandem with FMI.



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Q153 **Chair:** Do you have enough flexibility on the pay rates you can offer to be competitive in an area like Surrey, a reasonably prosperous part of the world?

Louise Spencer: We offer an additional labour market supplement. The starting salary at High Down for a prison officer is £30,465, so it is more than my colleagues in other prisons would be able to offer. We are hopeful that that starting salary will enable us to bring in more recruits with the local recruitment we start in January, but we acknowledge it is a challenging labour market.

Q154 **Chair:** I understand that, yes. Mr Pascoe, you are looking after Coldingley as well as High Down.

Nick Pascoe: I look after Coldingley as well as High Down, yes, as executive governor. We have done a combination, as Louise said: some of the softer things and some of the more pragmatic things. We are in the process, for example, of fitting 494 grilles to windows in High Down as a deterrent to drones and the smuggling of drugs, and to ensure that rubbish is not thrown out of the windows. We want a decent environment. This is the healthy prison bit, and it starts with having a clean environment where staff and prisoners feel better themselves.

We have done a whole range of things, from the technical stuff right through to the relationship issues. I have looked at some of the figures for violence and so on, and we appear to be doing—early days—better. At High Down, we have also closed a house block to cut our cloth accordingly. We have a mothballed house block that we are decorating and refurbishing to a better standard while it is unoccupied. That undoubtedly has helped.

Q155 **Chair:** Have you had any difficulties with the contracting arrangements for maintenance, for example, in this drive of yours?

Nick Pascoe: Yes is the simple answer, and that is not because I am against a private sector organisation doing it. I introduced it in a new prison; I had it at Brixton and it was very successful. Yes, we have had difficulties with our facilities management provider.

Q156 **Chair:** Which is your provider?

Nick Pascoe: It is Carillion.

Q157 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Mr Hirst, what is your take on things at Ranby?

Nigel Hirst: Positive. Things have changed, as Neil alluded to. There is a real buy-in and I do not think you can take that for granted with the staff and the men—the prisoners—we have. One of the key elements going forward, as an early adopter, is that the staff and the men see that we are trying to make a difference. The staff associations are on board with what we are trying to do, positively, to make reform a success locally, which is helpful. It is all personal in that they can see Ranby starting to



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turn a corner. It is a large establishment with difficulties, and they continue, but they can see that everything we are trying to do is for the benefit of the men who live there and the staff who work there.

Q158 **Chair:** Do you characterise the situation for staff relationships with management as better than they were or is there still some way to go?

Nigel Hirst: Honestly, they are better than they were—a lot better than they were. I visit the establishment; I walk around twice weekly, and the staff and the men see it. They would love to see more changes more quickly, as we all would, but things take time to change and there are some things that take a little longer.

We have User Voice starting in January to set up prison councils to help us in what we are trying to do. The St Giles Trust is coming in to help develop our peer support workers and PID workers, and we have Resolve coming in to work with the staff and men together; they will go out in teams to work on conflict resolution. Those are things we have not done before, or, if we have tried, it has been a long time since we have been able to do them.

Q159 **Chair:** Why do you think that for a long time you were not able to do that?

Nigel Hirst: It has been difficult. Somebody asked me a long time ago what the main difference is in being an early adopter. Sometimes it is about people's perception of what they might be able to do differently. That has opened some doors and barriers, to which Neil will allude, but when we are working with contractors and people, the door seems to open more because there is an ability for Neil, as the executive governor, and myself, as the chief operating officer and the governor, potentially to do things a little bit differently. It does not mean we will, but the potential is there.

Q160 **Chair:** Mr Bickers, we have been to Wandsworth and seen some of the challenges you have there.

Ian Bickers: The very first challenge we had was around recruitment. As of yesterday evening, I had 52 prison officer vacancies, but we jumped on that bandwagon very quickly, and as of yesterday evening we had offered 78 prison officer jobs since 1 October this year, so working towards reform earlier in the year we were able to negotiate a position with NOMS to be able to crack that.

Those 52 vacancies will be filled; we will be able to use some additional money we have on violence reduction, which, as Neil said, we have used for additional purchase of body-worn cameras and for intervention work to increase the staffing numbers to help in that. That was our first and primary driver because, as Ian said earlier, without being able to get some of those fundamental basics sorted it was difficult to build our reform journey moving forward.



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The other thing we did early in the summer was to change our regime to make it consistent and deliverable, so we moved away from the Prison Service benchmark around delivery of regime. It meant that in theory we were offering less time out of cell, but in reality it meant that more of our men got more time out of cell than they were getting previously. That meant we were able to offer a regime consistently across the prison and we were able to get men engaged with education and work consistently for the first time in a very long time.

The other challenges we had, as Nick alluded to, were with some of the contracting provision around facilities management. There was one point in the summer when more than half of my cell doors did not have observation panels and pretty much a third of the external-facing windows were missing as well. We worked very hard with Carillion to fix those problems, and again the flexibility we have as an early adopter meant that I was able to use some of that money to fix some of the problems quicker, and that has improved our environment and safety.

With the Metropolitan police, we have started to tackle the issue of drones, so we see much less drone attack than ever before. We are now able to keep on top of the facilities management in a way we were not able to do before. The management of the contract has given us more freedom and more control over how we focus that work moving forward.

Q161 **Alex Chalk:** What is it about your present rights and entitlements that is different and gives you that responsibility? What was the roadblock in place in the past?

Ian Bickers: In many ways, it is about perception. As Nigel says, it is about perceptions. It is a centrally managed contract. There is a centrally managed process for it and we were able, as early-adopter governors, to intervene much more quickly to talk to the local provider about it. I was able to escalate through the Carillion line in a way that I would not have been able to do before as the governor of the establishment. Some of it is about perception and some of it is about the convening rights we have—that is the term we use; I think it is Ian's term. It feels like people think that we are more important now than we were, that we have voice now.

Q162 **Alex Chalk:** Is it basically that, when you pick up the phone, they listen more than they did in the past?

Ian Bickers: Absolutely, yes.

Q163 **Alex Chalk:** You can escalate it up to Carillion and say, "We have a real problem. All these windows have been smashed up. Come and fix them," and they will listen to you.

Ian Bickers: I have had meetings with the operations director of Carillion over broken windows and obs panels that I would never have been able to gain access to before.

Q164 **Chair:** You never had that. Do I get a sense that that is general?



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Neil Richards: It is a good example of a more common theme where I think perhaps for non-early adopter reform prisons the contracts and the contract management takes place centrally so there is a disconnect between the practitioner or the governor at the frontline, whereas because the onus is on us to make changes and some difference, we have been very proactive in going to get those contracts, reading them ourselves and, therefore, probably escalating in a more proactive way.

Alex Chalk: They are treating you like the customer.

Victoria Prentis: Like the client.

Ian Blakeman: It has also been about capability. One of the things I did was to bring in a commercial director to work as part of my wider executive team. She was somebody who had worked in business commercially and therefore was able to operate at a different level in those commercial conversations.

Going back to what we have done about safety, and not to repeat things colleagues have said, and to take Ian's point about the fact that we all start in different places, up on Teesside at Holme House and Kirklevington Grange prisons we do not have vacancies in the same way as colleagues do; we have a much more experienced and capable staff with long service; they are very skilled and capable. Of course we have some of the same challenges around violence, a lot of them stemming from issues with drugs, but we have been able to start to build on that already well-run prison and to expand, for example, the amount of work we have in the prison.

We are looking to bring employers in to build the amount of work, because a busy prison is a safer prison, and we are focused on trying to build the regime and make sure that we do that. Also, we are trying to focus on opening out our relationship with our communities, to look outwards more, and focus on that part as well. That is something we might want to come back to in the conversation.

Q165 **Chair:** Does anybody think that legislation makes any great difference to where you are going, putting the purposes of prison on a statutory basis? Are they things you would be doing anyway?

Ian Blakeman: Our position has always been that we will show what we can do from within the civil service as part of public sector prisons. I am confident that we can make a real difference; we already have and you have heard some examples of that this morning. We are confident we can make a difference as we are, and in fact if we were worrying about independence and different legal status, people would be distracted by that from our immediate needs to get our prisons stable and build on that.

Q166 **Chair:** For the record, I see pretty universal nodding. I do not see anybody disagreeing.



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Ian Blakeman: The White Paper is right to say that that is something we need to hold for the future. Others will judge whether we do enough within the service. For now, it is absolutely right, as the Minister said when he gave evidence to you, that it is not part of the immediate legislative plans, but let's see. Our job is to show what we can do from within.

Q167 **Chair:** Is there any caveat on that, Mr Pascoe?

Nick Pascoe: The only caveat would be giving us more control over our procurement systems. A legal entity in itself would not mean anything if it did not mean we could buy differently. If we were still subject to the same procurement rules, the legal entity would have no great value. That would be the only real added advantage, I think.

Chair: Okay. That is very helpful.

Q168 **Kate Green:** Thank you very much for coming in. You have been talking quite a lot over the last 10 or 15 minutes about the opportunities and benefits of the freedoms that being early adopters of the reform prison model have given you. Do you think that the scale of the shake-up, as presented by the Government, is commensurate with the different way that you are working?

You described a moment ago, Mr Blakeman, how making these improvements was something you had always wanted to do inside prisons, as prison leaders and as civil servants. Would you say that the way the Government characterise this as the biggest shake-up since the Victorian era is really how it feels in terms of the way your roles have changed?

Ian Blakeman: There is something fundamental happening in the way we run our prisons that is different from how we have run them in all the time I have been associated with them. You have well over 100 years of prison experience in front of you this morning. How we are operating feels significantly different. The biggest single difference at the moment is not having the sense of a line manager telling us what to do and shaping how we are behaving. That is significantly different.

As to what we are trying to do in our prisons, we are trying to do what we have all been trying to do for all our service. We know what works in prisons and we know what we are trying to achieve. Organisationally, it is a different way to approach that, and it feels fundamentally different. Of course we will see going forward how we deliver it, and that is the challenge. The White Paper gives us an absolutely clear path forward for the organisation that we now need to embrace, and we need to be given the time and space to embrace it. We would welcome a period of stability while we deliver the White Paper, but I think it is significant, absolutely.

Q169 **Kate Green:** Do others share that view?



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Louise Spencer: For me, the opportunity to be able to listen to my staff, my managers and my prisoners, and to respond to what they think will work locally, rather than having always to adhere or comply to a one-size-fits-all model developed on PSIs and instructions designed for the whole of the Prison Service, has been helpful. Having the authority and the ability to listen to staff and respond to what they say, rather than sometimes not being able to do that because it does not comply with national policy, has been beneficial.

Neil Richards: As I alluded to before, in terms of some of my mantra being based on giving people hope, on 1 July, when I stood up and talked to the staff at Ranby to say that we were going to be an early adopter of a reform prison, I promised them that, as much as we possibly could, everything we did would be based on consultation.

We have built our whole business strategy around consultation with both the staff and the men. I would not have said that if I did not believe that I could do something slightly different from the sort of centralised process-driven outcome that I was previously more used to and the staff were more used to. I said that in good faith, in the belief that we would be able to do something different, and I think so far we have.

Nigel Hirst: I reiterate what Louise said. As the governor and the chief operating officer, what is different as an early adopter is the ability to go around my own establishment more. It sounds as if that is something you should do as the norm as governor, but you have so many pressures on you to stretch in so many ways that you tend to dip into things.

In the responsibilities of our executive team at Ranby, there are now certain aspects that fall to other people. Neil, as my line manager, is executive governor, but having other executive team members allows me to concentrate on being in the establishment, walking round, speaking to the men, speaking to the staff and listening to what they want to do and how they want to do it; I can be a conduit to the exec team for that to happen.

Not spending enough time in their establishments doing what they should be doing is a difficult dilemma for governors across the service, and certainly, as part of an early adopter site, working with an executive team as the governor, I find I have a better vehicle to tackle my responsibilities for security, safety, decency and quality throughout the establishment.

Q170 **Kate Green:** You are all very positive about the freedoms that you have. What do you see as the challenges or the things that may be more difficult to manage?

Ian Bickers: Can I come back on that point? This is part of the challenge, to answer your question as well. It is about what the future will be. We can get very excited, because it has only been about four or five months, and it is very easy to make a hit very quickly to change



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some of the things that probably fundamentally we have all wanted to get on and do anyway. It is a radical shake-up, but some of the challenges will be how we then cohesively make it work and embed it in establishments moving forward.

I am sure at some point you will want to talk about education and how that might look. Some of the issues that we face around how we procure education moving forward, for example, could be very innovative, very exciting and hugely rewarding as far as outputs for the men are concerned.

Finding people work would be a fantastic opportunity. Some of the challenges that I faced over the last few months are engaging with the local London community, talking to employers and getting people on board around some of that stuff. While you feel a huge buzz from us, we cannot do this on our own, and if we want to go through the process of giving men, women and children opportunities to change their lives and do better things, we need much wider engagement across society than perhaps we are getting at the moment. That becomes one of the biggest challenges.

Q171 **Kate Green:** What does that mean?

Alex Chalk: What does wider engagement across society mean?

Ian Bickers: We need to get employers to accept that employing somebody who has been in prison is okay.

Alex Chalk: Spot on; that's right.

Ian Bickers: Further education colleges accepting men to complete courses has to be fundamentally embedded, so society has to work on the basis of them being able to change. A simple mantra that we work with at Wandsworth is that the men we work with today are going to be your neighbours tomorrow. They could be my neighbours tomorrow as well, so our job is to provide the best and safest opportunities for them moving forward.

Q172 **Kate Green:** Each of you as reform governors is going to be responsible for and have the opportunity to develop those relationships.

Ian Bickers: Yes.

Q173 **Kate Green:** Is that the best way to do it?

Ian Bickers: We have started to do that at Wandsworth, yes.

Ian Blakeman: Nigel started to hint at the difference around governor and executive governor roles.

Q174 **Kate Green:** I was going to ask about that, so please expand.

Ian Blakeman: One of the things it has allowed us to do as executive governors is to go upwards and outwards, and start to engage more



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strategically with partners in the region, whether that is police and crime commissioners or chief executives of local authorities. Of course, those were things that governors and regional managers tried to do, but in terms of scale it is working for us. We are working with an organisation called Involve, which is helping us think about how to have an open and transparent approach to engaging with local communities or statutory partners and trying to make sure that we have the common goals that Ian is talking about.

Can I also pick up on the point about challenges and about us being positive? We will even be positive about some of the challenges. The most obvious one is that we are accountable now and there are no more excuses; we cannot blame anybody else for what happens in our prisons. We are being held properly to account for what we do. We recognise that that gives us quite a lot of power because it puts us in situations where we will say, "I can't stand for that because I know I'm going to be held to account and we're going to make sure it works." We have embraced that challenge because it gives us the authority to behave differently. We are probably at points in our careers where we are in a position to do that a bit differently than we might have done before, because we recognise that this is our chance to make a difference and do something.

That said, there are all sorts of challenges. There is the obvious challenge about violence, which we have spoken about, and challenges coming from drugs and making sure that we get recruitment right. One of the biggest challenges at the moment is reminding people that being a prisoner officer is a fantastic job and that we want people to come to work with us because it is a great career. I think we all started as prison officers. It is something that we want people to do because it is going to be to a fantastic career. That is a challenge at the moment, because obviously people read stories that put them off joining.

Q175 Alex Chalk: Can I ask a question quickly because I have to go? On that point, one of the things we picked up when we did a visit is precisely that. The job of prison officer has gone from being something prestigious and professionalised to being almost deskilled and infantilised; I exaggerate to make the point. Do you think that you will be in a position to restore that professional pride so that people can say, "I am going to have a career with professional development. I am going to go places. I am going to become a proper skilled professional in my own right"? Is this going to help you do that?

Ian Blakeman: That is absolutely a fundamental aim of what we are trying to do. In terms of how prison officers have been seen in the past, I am not sure they have ever had the respect they deserve at any point that I can think of in my time; they never get mentioned in the same way, for example, as nurses and police officers.

Alex Chalk: That is true.



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Ian Blakeman: Nobody thinks about the fact that there will be thousands of prison officers working on Christmas day. They talk about nurses and about the police, but they don't talk about prison officers. I am not sure they have ever had the respect they deserve for the work they do, but equally I accept your point, although it is not so much that they have been deskilled; it is more that they have not had engagement, vision and excitement about the role because of the challenges they face.

The announcement that the Secretary of State made in the White Paper about the additional funds to have prison officers case-managing prisoners every week—half an hour with every prisoner to do professional case management—is saying that prison officers are fundamental.

In saying that, there are lots of other people who work in our prisons in incredibly valuable roles, and we would not want to make it sound like it is only about prison officers, but, fundamentally, that is the job—sitting down with the prisoner, motivating them to change and making that journey of progress.

We have to get that back so that it is absolutely what prison officers see as their role, and so that they see opportunities to progress. The work that Unlock are doing, the equivalent to Teach First coming into prisons, will be a fantastic opportunity to get people in and show them that we do not just want people who act as prison officers; we want people who can progress to the sorts of jobs we are doing.

Neil Richards: As an example, to complement what you were saying, we have already planned, and have within our delivery plan, to take every single member of staff—not just prison officers but every single member of staff—out of the prison for a week to complement the additional requirements and the additional pressures that will come from having the direct contract, and to reskill them.

As I think Ian was about to say, we have changed the POELT course, the entry level course, with some additionality that will make it Ranby-specific in our case. We are also working with our in-house psychologists on developing a supervision scheme, like a clinical supervision model, which will help to develop support for certain prison officers as we move forward.

Ian Bickers: I have two brief points. First, we have probably seen in excess of 350 candidates through our attraction process, and we have attracted very differently from the way NOMS has done, to talk very specifically about making a difference to people's lives. Fundamentally and overwhelmingly, we see in the candidates we have interviewed over the last couple of months an absolute desire to do things differently. They do not see it as—I hate the term—a guarding job; they see it as a job that will make a difference to people's lives, and fundamentally there are people out there who want to do that.



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Again, to echo what Neil and Ian said, we are using our money in a different way to skill everybody in the prison to be able fundamentally to do their jobs differently. Whether we have deskilled prison officers or not is a debate that we could probably have for weeks, but the reality is that we are recruiting people now who fundamentally want to make a difference; they are starting to see prison as a career again and they see the opportunity to develop a skill set. Whether they stay with us or move on to do other things, we are investing money in them as people, which again I have not seen happen across the system for a while.

Alex Chalk: That is very encouraging to hear.

Chair: Let us go back to Ms Green.

Q176 **Kate Green:** There are a couple more things I want to ask about. Very specifically, you were describing deploying staff—all the prison staff. When the Minister says each prison officer will be allocated six prisoners for whom they are directly responsible, how does that sit with the flexibility you are describing to move staff and allocate their work as you see fit?

Nick Pascoe: It will probably vary depending on the type of establishment.

Q177 **Kate Green:** When the Minister says it, it may not apply in your prison.

Nick Pascoe: I think the Minister may have looked at an average number. I do not think we are definitely going to do it to a ratio strictly like that. The 2,500 prison officers will make a huge difference. I did a day back on the floor a few months ago and it struck me that the staff did not have time. Interestingly, what Louise did was to put back some admin support to deal with queries to free staff just to deal with prisoners, talk to them and motivate them. That is a freedom we had.

With the 2,500, I do not think the Secretary of State expects us to work it out with a calculator—I have not asked her—but that is the freedom. We will have freedom as to how we organise it, but it will mean more direct contact time and staff will have time to engage with prisoners. They will have a nominated group of prisoners to look after, but it will depend. If you had a high-security, very complex prisoner, you would not expect a prison officer to have six of those types of prisoners, but you might have six, or even more, in a different type of prison.

Ian Blakeman: We have signed up to the principles of the offender management model and we will get the same resource allocation formula to give us the resource we need to apply those principles, but how we apply the principles will be a matter for us locally to determine.

Q178 **Kate Green:** How would you characterise the authority that NOMS directors have over you as governors in reform prisons?



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Ian Blakeman: Clearly, there are some things that quite properly are a matter of law or a matter of ministerial policy position—a couple of them established in this Committee—that we are bound by, and quite properly so. Within the agreements we have, there are thresholds for where our decision making needs to be referred to the central organisation, and that is to do with whether we might have an impact on the wider organisation.

We are part of a whole system and we have to make sure that we do not do things that disrupt the way that whole system operates. There are some systems where we would have to complete forms to pass men on to a different prison that is not part of our structure. There are some things like that where we clearly have to be bound by those agreements. Otherwise, there is very little where there is central provision and we go through a process of determining for ourselves how we want policies to apply locally, and then we make sure that we consult properly. Some of that needs to be with our trade unions. Then we make changes.

Ian Bickers: Fundamentally, staff would say to you that is exactly what they want to be doing. Prison officers will say they do not want to be locking and unlocking, doing exercise, taking them up to education and coming back again and repeating the same stuff in the afternoon. They will absolutely say to you, I think without fail, that they want to be able to engage effectively to help people.

We all have our little nuances, I am sure. My sense of success for us will be when I see prison officers sitting on the ends of beds helping men read and write letters and then encouraging them to go into education because there is a need that they have identified. My guys simply do not have time to do that work right now. Whether it is six prisoners per prison officer or a fundamental shift in the way people do the job, I do not think it really matters. The sense of the resources is the important part—fundamentally to get prison officers to do the things that prison officers predominantly joined the job for.

Kate Green: May I ask one more question, Chair? I am sorry, I know we are running a little behind.

Chair: Yes.

Q179 **Kate Green:** I want to understand a little more about the different roles that you are each taking. Some of you are executive governors, some of you are governing governors, and in Wandsworth I think you only have an executive governor.

Ian Blakeman: That is not—

Q180 **Kate Green:** Is that not correct? In fact, rather than me getting it right, because I probably won't, it would be very helpful to understand the models that exist in the reform prisons that we have in front of us, what you see as the advantages and disadvantages, and where there are any tensions in the different roles that people are holding now.



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Nick Pascoe: Ian and I—Ian Blakeman—have not been told how to do it. It has not been prescribed. It is for us to work out and it has been a journey upon which we have had to work around stuff. There is an emphasis; it is not an absolute. I spend more time on the outward-facing engagement than Louise would do and Jo Sims at Coldingley. That is right and proper. I have had time to do that. It is important. As was said earlier, we have asked governors to do too much. We have spread them too thinly. We expect them to be everywhere, and the risk is that they take their eye off the central ball—which is running a good prison.

The other bit is that at High Down it has been easier for me because I have been able to take on some of the strategic work around the re-role of the prison, which is a big capital spend and bidding for money. That is something I can do, otherwise it distracts the governor. It also gives the governor enough room. I have said that, if autonomy is to mean anything, it should not just be me having the freedom; I should be rolling it out to the governor. I do not want to make every critical decision. We had a ballpark figure of what sort of money I am interested in and what I am not interested in. It has evolved. It has not been an absolute. We did not sit down and decide it absolutely. That is the way we tried to do it.

I do much more external engagement; I have done some of the strategic projects. At Coldingley, I have a very good governor but she is new to governing. It has enabled me to provide much more of a mentoring approach than line management. I was a DDC and a lot of my job was about assurance. I was marking the homework and now I am helping the governor pass the exam because we are in it together. That is a fundamental shift in how you operate. Louise can speak for herself.

Louise Spencer: I have been a governor before, so I have had experience of governing both a reform prison and a non-reform prison. I am well aware of the pressures that I faced in my previous role around trying to maintain outward-facing relationships and building links with the community, which would be of benefit to the prison, but also making sure that what happened within the prison walls was safe, decent and would reduce reoffending.

For me, the benefit of having Nick on board—that he can focus his attention on that—has enabled me to spend much more time focusing inwards on the prison. I would rather, in all honesty, be spending my time in the prison supporting my staff, in turn, to support prisoners. It has given me the luxury of being able to do that.

The other benefit is that, because of the structure of the executive governor role, there has been an ability to escalate things more quickly. Nick talked about our house block being closed. We got to a point where we were concerned about the staffing we had and we discussed the impact it might be having on our stability, and we were able to escalate that up the NOMS organisation much more quickly than perhaps we



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would have done in the past. It resulted in the decision to close the house block to give us time to use those staff in other parts of the prison.

Q181 **Chair:** I get the sense—rightly or wrongly—that NOMS has always had a bit of a command and control structure, and that has permeated through the whole thing. How do you break away from that?

Neil Richards: Do you mind if I go back? This is really important because we tried something completely different from what has been described.

Chair: Okay.

Neil Richards: Our executive team basically consists of myself as the executive governor—you could call it chief executive or, as with Nigel, the governor or chief operation officer. In addition to that, we have created roles that include an HR and OD director, a finance and commercial director, and a chief strategy officer. The chief strategy officer is probably the fundamental bit.

Our governance structures have been set up almost as a board, so decisions are not just made by myself or by Nigel; ultimately, I am accountable for them but we make board decisions. The fundamental bit, in terms of the way the prison feels and looks, is that Nigel has absolute responsibility for delivering safety and decency in operational issues, and my chief strategy officer, who literally line manages people in the prison—arguably a third of the prison staff—looks after resettlement, interventions and the regime, essentially.

A practitioner who would ordinarily sit there would probably look at that almost as having two governors on site, because they would see Nigel, dealing with safety, decency and the operational issues, and Steve Ruddy—who was the governor at Onley, incidentally—as my chief strategy officer looking at all of the regime and intervention provision. Decisions by all five of us are escalated to board level and we have a governance structure that sits under that, so board decisions are made and they are transparent and accountable.

Ian Blakeman: Can I come in on the command and control point? The first thing is that command and control has its place in an organisation like the Prison Service. For example, at the moment, our boss, Michael Spurr, is attending twice-daily meetings with Ministers in order to get an operational grip on our system. Everybody would say that is exactly the right thing to be happening at the moment; it means that Ministers have absolute sight of what is happening and decisions are being taken on a daily basis in order to grip that. That comes through the system, whether it is to us in reform prisons, colleagues in the private sector or in other public sector prisons. There is a place for command and control.

I also think it is a bit of a characterisation of the organisation to say that is all we have ever done and that we operate in that way all the time.



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Again, there is a danger—you have six very enthusiastic people in reform prisons in front of you—that what you will not hear is that much of what we are talking about people would have been trying to do anyway in our system.

It is also true, and there are those of us who have been around long enough to remember, that when we had some catastrophic failures in our system—going back to the 1990s when we had the escapes—we quite properly imposed a very strong operational grip on our prisons to rectify some of those failings. We have been an organisation that is very good at responding to challenge and doing it, when needed, through command and control.

The difficulty has always been that most of what we do does not need that; it is about how we engage locally with partners and how we operate. One thing we have been doing is developing a sense of place. The community I want to be part of is on Teesside, not national, because that is where the people coming through my prison will go home. It has always been a challenge, as an organisation, to get the balance right between national and local, and we are now able to have much more local focus, but, importantly, at times to remember that we are part of a national system and that we still want that.

When we have challenges, we will want mutual support from other prisons to come to our aid, because that is how a national prison system has to operate, but we are trying to give much more sense of place and much more sense of engagement with our communities as part of the journey to successful outcomes.

Q182 John Howell: I fully understand what you are trying to do with getting that sense of place, but surely, to go back to the command and control point, what you are after is essentially freedom to make mistakes, to run your operations, to be innovative and to realise that some of them are not going to work. That happens to all of us. Surely that is the freedom you want.

Ian Blakeman: Yes. We operate in a high-risk system that needs to be mindful of which mistakes we have the freedom to make, because we are doing important work protecting the public and we need to make sure that we do it within a framework that allows for some things to be very closely controlled in order that the Secretary of State discharges her duty to keep the public safe. But absolutely, and that is where we come back to accountability and innovation, we want to experiment and do different things. Neil has a very different set-up in the way he is running his prison to the way I am running mine, and we will learn from the different experiences.

Ian Bickers: To pick up on command and control, there is a balance. The command and control is there when we need it, and the day when the POA members were on strike was a really good example of how we can simply slot back into a command and control system that works, is



safe and keeps everybody in the place they need to be. Without wanting to speak for my colleagues, you get a sense of what you need command and control for and what you don't, and that is where your space comes to create, potentially, mistakes. I do not mind if people make mistakes as long as no one escapes or nobody dies. That is a fundamental tenet that probably all of us will work with because that is what we do.

As to the command and control experience that I had, I was the governor at Wandsworth before I became executive governor at Wandsworth, which was an interesting transition, so I worked to a DDC before I had new-born freedoms. Interestingly, that transition became one where I had a boss and then I did not; well, I do, but it is Michael Spurr, so it feels a little bit different. The sense is how you test the boundaries you have. I have an in-charge governor who was on maternity leave when we were preparing papers for the original Committee, and we now have somebody covering that maternity leave.

So, similarly to Nick and Louise and that model, I have somebody on site every day focusing inward to make sure that the things we described earlier are being delivered. That allows me to push some of the command and control. For example, Nick was my boss predominantly in London, prior to a change at the beginning of this year, and he would have been responsible for the relationship with the Mayor's office; I have now been invited to participate with the Mayor's office on reducing reoffending for London in a way that I would never have been able to do before, because, arguably, Chair, the command and control model would not have allowed that, and now it does.

There is a point about the risk of making mistakes versus being innovative and getting out there and doing it. Fundamentally, the risk has not changed. The risk is as it always is, and, regardless of whether we are a reform prison or a non-reform prison, in reality the risk will be the same for all of us, but sometimes to be able to rely on central command and control will be useful.

Chair: Yes. I understand that.

Q183 Victoria Prentis: I do not think we have ever had such a positive session on prisons. Your enthusiasm is striking, and slightly surprising for the Committee to hear. To go back to challenges—I am sorry—for a minute, do you feel that the new freedoms you have are helping you with staff relations, for example? Can we deal with that first? It is particularly poignant as you could not come last time because of the quite major staff relations issue.

Nick Pascoe: Yes, I do. We do much more of our business locally, and the staff engagement surveys from Coldingley and High Down have both shown positive moves. The staff engagement survey results are much better. That is despite the fact that High Down particularly, but also Coldingley, has been very short of staff, so you would have expected to see a much more negative response. I was really pleased to see that.



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I do not think it is accidental. There is a correlation. Staff know that we care more, that there is more time to care for them. It is as simple as that. We are looking at our staff and we are looking after our staff. Louise has spent some money on staff wellbeing and staff support, and we have been able to do that with the freedoms.

Louise Spencer: I will give two small examples of what we have been able to do locally. Staff talked to me about how they felt with the reduced staff, the reduced regime and the pressures they were under. They felt pressured at times. It is not always an easy job being a prisoner officer. As a consequence, we were able to put in place an onsite counselling service.

We have somebody from Kingston University who is with us one day a week. Staff can see her completely anonymously—it is not connected to any of our attendance management procedures—and they can self-refer or be referred by a manager. That was a concrete example of something I was able to do; it was a suggestion by a member of staff that we were able to put in place. Obviously, we will monitor and evaluate it and see the impact over time.

We also have quite a large number of new staff compared with what you might see in other prisons—not as many as we would like, and I hope that will increase—and we have been able to put in place mentoring arrangements and additional support for those staff. That is being rolled out nationally next year, but we have been able to do it more quickly as a consequence of our freedom. Those things make a real difference to staff on the ground.

Q184 **Victoria Prentis:** That is really interesting. Mr Bickers is trying to come in.

Ian Bickers: We have worked very closely with our unions because Wandsworth has historically had some difficult union relationships. It is much better, and it has been much better over probably the last six, seven or eight years; and it is interesting that the unions locally are very engaged with what we can do and how we can do it.

To go back to the point about legislation, they were very interested in what that might mean for local staff pay and conditions, for example. What is interesting—maybe a first perception of negativity—is that I do not think staff would say right now that reform feels any different for them in Wandsworth specifically.

Q185 **Victoria Prentis:** I was going to ask you that as my next question. You do not think your enthusiasm would be mirrored throughout your establishment.

Ian Bickers: The enthusiasm for change definitely is. What staff see practically on the ground, at Wandsworth specifically, is that 52 prison officer vacancies make life there very hard work right now. We can talk



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about the fact that we have done it and that we have 78 job offers. We have to translate them now into—

Victoria Prentis: Real people.

Ian Bickers: People on the ground delivering next to their colleagues every day. That is the challenge. If you are a member of staff walking along A wing today, would you feel significantly different? The staff would say it has improved a bit. We have invested in wellbeing. We have talked about training. We talk about recruitment and what the regime will look like, but, fundamentally, it still feels pretty similar at Wandsworth. It is probably safer, it is less violent and there are fewer drugs around, but fundamentally, as a prison officer, you do not see more colleagues.

It has been in place since 1 July, so there is a transition to have to make. Like others, we have absolutely actively involved our men, our unions and our staff groups specifically. We did our first consultation event; there were 500 suggestions made by staff and we are gradually ticking those off a list. We said, "Tell us what you want and we will do our best to deliver it." One of those things was, "Can you interview staff rather than going through the current process?"—which we have done. We have trialled it, and we can continue to do it moving forward. They can see outcomes now in a way they were not seeing them before. We might have this wonderful cascade of positivity, but, specifically for Wandsworth, staff can see it coming, they can probably feel the change in some ways, but there is still more to do.

Q186 **Victoria Prentis:** Can I throw in one more question before you come in, Mr Blakeman? In terms of measurability of the effects of what you are doing on prisoners, for things like self-harm and assaults, both on prisoners and staff—just general safety issues—and rehabilitation, how long do you think it will be before we see the reforms that you are so enthusiastic about working?

Ian Blakeman: Can I answer that and the thing we were talking about?

Victoria Prentis: I thought you would.

Ian Blakeman: Can I also say that from here on in we are going to try hard not to sound Pollyannaish and complacent in our optimism? There are some real challenges, and that sense of change for staff is absolutely one of them. I do not think that people have yet seen all that change. There are particular reasons for that at Holme House. We are re-roleing from being a local prison to a Cat C training prison. That is a slow process, and we are only just beginning to see some of the changes coming through.

The other interesting thing is how long it takes to get people to accept that, when we say that we decide how we do things round here, we really mean it; we decide together that it is now us, not them, and we want to group together to make sense of our prison. It takes time to get people to embrace and accept that. There is no question but that the national



context impacts locally. We are pleased that we now have an offer that is being endorsed by the POA NEC. Within that there is the potential for local collective bargaining.

Locally, my trade union is very clear about getting local collective bargaining, where we can make the decisions together and, if need be, go to arbitration. Obviously, we will try hard not to do that, but if we need to we can. But it is us making those decisions; they are not national. That will be so important to us. We are hopeful that staff will see that offer as something they should vote for, because local collective bargaining will make a real difference to us.

As to how long things will take, Neil's opening comments reflected the fact that some of this in some places can be immediate. That will absolutely be the case at Wandsworth. Once those staff arrive in numbers, you will start to see a real difference straight away in terms of some of the outcomes. The important outcomes around reducing reoffending in the community through improved outcomes related to housing and employment will take longer. We would expect to see difference within a couple of years in those outcomes, and much more immediately in terms of the impact. More education, more work, more time out and, therefore, less violence and drugs are the things we need to see much more quickly, in a matter of weeks and months.

Q187 **Victoria Prentis:** Do you all agree?

Neil Richards: There are some things happening now. I can give you one example which might be a good illustration. We did some re-engineering around a pathway back into the community, which essentially resulted in the first releases on temporary licence from Ranby for over five years. We started some work externally on our own grounds. For one of those men, we influenced and discussed with the CRC some housing issues that we have managed to resolve.

There were five people out on ROTL. One of them has since been released and we have re-employed him. That is change, but it is just one. Capacity at Ranby is 1,098. I can give you an example of one today. When do we get to 1,098? I imagine it will be a little longer. I do not want to sound flippant about that, but there are real examples, which I am hanging our hat on, to show we can do this, but the challenge is scalability. I am not sure how long it will take.

Ian Bickers: There is a wider challenge. I can quote figures about the odd one or two we have been able to change and influence. We have seen self-inflicted deaths reduce significantly over the last 18 months. While we still have them—we are always very sorry that is the case—we have seen a reduction. I think the place is safer; there are fewer drugs around; and we have fewer attacks by drones. You can see some very anecdotal, tangible things.



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Specifically in London, there is a huge challenge about some of the things you listed and how, for example, we interface with the CRC. One of my challenges is being able to link up the search provision we are currently building at Wandsworth and how that absolutely plugs and plays into what the CRC is trying to deliver, because that is where we will see tangible benefits. We will become a remand centre. Typically, as others have described, we are going through a fairly significant amount of investment in infrastructure, so over the next 18 months the prison will look very different.

We have increased our family days from four to 12. We did that on our first day. I contracted with St Giles to offer level 3 qualifications the first day we had the opportunity to do it, and currently we have 27 men going through a training programme to be peer advisers working entirely within the prison. We have put together education provision, and we are now working out with NOMS how to procure that.

Those are tangible changes because of reform, but for me, looking to the longer-term stuff, if I see those boots on the landings in June/July I will start to get excited because that is when we will begin to make progress and motor forward. I agree with Ian that we are a couple of years away from being able to tick off your list of things we want to improve.

Q188 Victoria Prentis: Changing tack a bit, you are the crème de la crème of prison governorship. Do you think there has been sufficient training for the next wave of governors who will be given new-found freedoms? Do you think they will all be up to it?

Ian Blakeman: I do not think we would see ourselves in that way. We have had varied careers where we have had some fantastic opportunities to do training and professional development. I said to the Minister when we met that I could point to 20 people—I could have listed them there and then—who could do what we are doing just as well, some maybe even better.

It is not that there are not people who are perfectly capable and have the skills and experience. They are often doing different sorts of jobs. I was on the board of NOMS; I was not involved directly in running prisons. They are doing different sorts of jobs, but there are plenty of people with the skill and capability. There has been a challenge, because it is a tough job, and people have been occupied with it and have not always had the time to take advantage of some of the opportunities to develop.

Q189 Victoria Prentis: Do you think there is enough specific training for the new role on offer?

Ian Bickers: I have the sense that it is still in some ways being worked out, because there is still a lot of learning from us about what and how we are doing some of those things.

Q190 Victoria Prentis: What key skills do you think are needed?



Ian Bickers: They are probably the key skills we have talked about previously as an organisation, such as more focus on things like contract management. Contract management has been done centrally for a number of years. If it is going to come back to us as executive governors, there probably needs to be more focus on it.

Q191 **Victoria Prentis:** Is there any training on procurement?

Ian Bickers: I have had this conversation internally in relation to the development of our own SMT. The things people have not been doing any more over the past five, six or seven years of their careers—managing a budget, procuring things and being ultimately responsible for performance in an area—are ones where perhaps they have less skill than they would need moving forward.

In many ways, we probably know the answer to that question. Having spoken to colleagues in the MOJ on it specifically, there is a lot of thought going into exactly those things. I am sure we have all had our brains picked about what we bring to the job that is different from being a governor and in-charge governor.

Louise Spencer: For me, it is not necessarily about the need for training in contract management, for example. I think we are best at running safe, decent and secure prisons. I would like more flexibility to bring into our senior leadership teams people who already have those skills, either from other parts of the organisation or from external organisations. It is about importing those skills in a more flexible way than we have traditionally done in the past by assuming we can give ourselves those skills, when actually we are already very good at another job.

Neil Richards: I think I recognise that I do not have all those skills, which is why I tried to put the board model together, but I am quite a good general manager, and I would like to think I am a good team player and team leader as well. One of the reasons I structured our board in the roles we have is to bring in all those skills. I have some contract management experience and some procurement experience as well, but I am not an expert in any of those matters. Where I see myself as perhaps having a deficit, bringing together the team in a board-like manner has allowed me to cover the job to the base as well. I see the skill gap for myself.

Ian Bickers: We have all developed a model. I have people around me. Ian talked about a commercial director. I have an education expert, because for me that was a real priority in becoming a remand prison. The freedom we have been given as executive governors is to go into the market per se and recruit people to help; as a prison governor you might be great at running a prison but you might not be able to do all those other things. That is part of the freedom. It is an important thought about how the model evolves. How do you evolve a model that provides that type of expertise more locally to four, five or six establishments, because you cannot employ it in every single one?



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Ian Blakeman: It is also about how you draw on resources around you outwith the organisation. We are establishing an independent data and evidence advisory board. We are talking to the five universities in the north-east about how they can support us to do that. That board will meet quarterly and they will support us in making sure we are applying the data and evidence to get the best outcomes in the prison, so it is also about how you understand the talent out there, not in our organisation. There are plenty of people out there who have never worked in our system who could step in and be executive governors, with the right operational people running prisons. I am sure there are people who could come in and do a brilliant job.

When we were together as people who were going to be exec governors, we took the opportunity before the Queen's Speech to visit foundation trust hospitals and meet chief executives, and we visited some academy schools. We have learned from other organisations that have similar sorts of models.

Chair: That is very helpful.

Q192 **Alberto Costa:** I am mindful of time, so I propose being rather brief, and I would appreciate brief answers from the panel as well. Could I turn to financial control? You touched upon the skill set that you need. The former Secretary of State informed this Committee in July that reform prisons had received two forms of additional funding: "There has been some additional funding for the reform prisons in order to make the transition, but it is also the case that 69 prisons have received additional funding to deal with security issues."

According to the White Paper, the Ministry of Justice will be devolving a number of powers and budgets to prison governors, which we have talked about. It further proposes that governors can start boosting their budgets by earning income for their prisons and reinvesting it in their regimes. In respect of financial questions, what do you have financial control over that you did not have before, and how does that benefit your decisions over allocations of funding? Can you provide us with some examples?

Nick Pascoe: The first one that comes to mind is some year-end flexibility, so there is not a mad dash to spend. We can plan and roll money over; we can spend ahead of ourselves if we think it is worth doing. That enables us to think more strategically. We have total control over the budget; we can move money around within it. We cannot break Treasury rules, but within that we can move money.

Coldingley is an industrial prison. The more we make, the more we can keep. We can say to prisoners, for example, "If you want us to spend money on doing something in the gym, we can do that if our industries raise money," and that gives them a buy-in to it that I do not think prisoners ever had.



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Neil Richards: We can vire money around. To pick a different example, come July we had underspent on direct staff costs. Ordinarily, I would have had to give that back to the centre; it would have gone back to the Treasury. I am now allowed to keep it, move it and invest it in a different way. We used that money to invest in setting up a training centre, literally across the road. I have also had the authority to over-recruit because of the reform.

I have deliberately over-recruited and have used the money that would have been handed back to set up a training centre to facilitate that training. Because Ranby is not, comparatively speaking, under as much pressure as colleagues down south, I might not have been prioritised under the national training framework to get the training places. That is how I have moved money around to meet a local need rather than its being centrally prescribed.

Ian Bickers: We have used money to look at some of our infrastructure issues around safety and security. We spent some money on that, which we were not able to do previously. We had a significant underspend on staffing as well, so we have a plan for about £500,000 to go into some of our infrastructure. That is about refurbishment and putting gates in the right places to keep prisoners and staff safe.

We have also used some of our additional money on violence reduction. Because we could not recruit staff, we have invested in physical things like body-worn cameras; every member of staff at Wandsworth will have a body-worn camera. From memory, the NOMS model said we would have 42 allocated to us. We have used some of our money to do that.

As Nick said, we are planning ahead. We are starting to plan now for what our education and work regime will look like next year. We are already buying things to change some of the infrastructure around the centres of excellence that we want to create. All of those are things that, as a prison governor, I would not have been able to do.

Ian Blakeman: I won't repeat things that colleagues have already mentioned. The only thing to add is that we are taking steps to free people up within the organisation to spend money in a way that they have not been able to do in recent years, so we have been pushing down thresholds within the organisation.

In terms of wider procurement, I have been able to step out of some of the procurement processes taking place in the region. In the north-east, there is an outstanding organisation, NEPACS, which supports prisoners' families. It has to go through a procurement process to compete for family services in other prisons in the north-east.

I said that I do not want to follow that process; I want to treat it as a partner, not a supplier. We will just work with NEPACS, so that it has the stability of knowing it will continue with that provision in my prisons, without the need to go through what I think would have been a



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procurement process that would have distracted it from getting on with good work. That is an example where I have flexibility to step out of those sorts of processes.

Q193 Alberto Costa: How much additional funding has been given to each of you to support the development of reform prisons, and what did it enable you to do?

Ian Blakeman: Part of it pays for us. We have not been able to take money out of headquarters yet because the same structure is still operating for the bulk of our prison system.

Q194 Alberto Costa: When do you expect to take out money?

Ian Blakeman: If the model grows and more prisons become like us, clearly there is a balance as to where the centre of resource needs to sit. At the moment, effectively I have a commercial director. That is an expensive resource and it could be seen as duplicating what already exists within the central Ministry.

I would argue that what we need to do is shift that resource so that it is more locally controlled and directed. It is the same with the HR director, the finance director and work on planning and governance. At the moment, we have dual running, effectively, because we have not been able to redesign the whole system. Importantly, we had some money to support mobilisation in the first year as we transition into new ways of operating. We also had access to grant funding to stimulate some of the things we want to do in the future. That has been important. No doubt colleagues in the wider system would look at us and think, "Wouldn't it be nice to have access to that sort of resource?" Absolutely. It is critical to running the sorts of prisons we want to run.

Nick Pascoe: We employed a specialist, and there was an expectation for some of that money that, if we grew into a bigger cluster, that resource would be used across it, so it is not just for as is but for the future as well.

Q195 Alberto Costa: Can I turn to a comment made by the Prisons Minister last week on 6 December? Sam Gyimah told the House of Commons that the education budget would be ring-fenced. To your knowledge, is that likely to apply to other budgets, and would that not undermine your financial freedoms?

Ian Blakeman: At the moment, we are putting more money into education. We are taking the opportunity to enhance provision by moving money around and spending more through our education providers. We welcome the idea. I would not want to see governors taking money out of education and using it to supplement other things in the prison, because fundamentally we do not do enough education.

Of course, there is a balance in the extent to which Ministers will want to direct the work that we do. In due course, we may find ourselves in



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discussions with Ministers about quite how that is going to deliver the outcomes they seek. After all, they are our elected representatives; they have the right to determine how the service operates. I think we would want a voice in a conversation that said, "Let's just talk through why we think that to use money this way achieves the outcomes you want." Ultimately, they get to decide what those outcomes are.

Ian Bickers: This example is not quite the same, but health money is ring-fenced as well and there are good reasons for that. Historically, health and education money would have been used potentially by governors for other things. To have some steerage, and to be told how and where to spend that money, would perhaps be a step too far. If someone said to me, "At Wandsworth the £2.8 million on education is ring-fenced, but you need to spend it here, here and here," that would be wrong, but to have that money and know that it will be spent on education helps drive the outcomes we are looking for.

Nick Pascoe: More important is how we define education. We need to use a broader definition than—I won't say chalk and talk—basic classroom education. We want to think imaginatively about how we spend that money rather than moving money out of it, perhaps getting a range of providers to deliver a range of things.

Q196 **Alberto Costa:** How much additional income does the panel estimate it could earn? What additional income generation initiatives could you undertake through being given the additional freedoms?

Ian Blakeman: Our focus is on using income generation to fund growing activity. Specifically at Holme House, where we have some impressive industries, effectively it is about getting a cost-neutral increase in capacity in the prison.

Currently, we have about 800 jobs as a Cat C training prison that can hold 1,210 men. We want 1,210 jobs. To get that growth, we need to do it through income generation, to make it cost-neutral. At Kirklevington Grange, which is an open prison, we run a social enterprise. We have a community café, which is very well received by local people, and the idea is to use that money to invest in the work in the prison.

We are not about trying to make money; we are about trying to grow work. I think that over time we will be able to grow the work at Holme House without needing more money from central Government; we will be able to do that through the income we generate in the workshops. It is hard to put a number on it, but that is the approach we are trying to take.

Ian Bickers: I can put a number on mine; it is pretty much going to be zero. As a remand prison, we have people there for very short periods of time. We are converting what we have as designated work space at the moment, as Nick says, into a wider education space. Our primary aim is not going to be around income generation. As a Victorian prison, we



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simply do not have the infrastructure to offer that capacity, and with our changing population we are not going to have the consistency of men to deliver that work either, so ours is relatively straightforward; we have to put a zero in that one.

Chair: Ms Green, do you want to pursue anything further on the education and health side?

Q197 **Kate Green:** I think we have heard a lot about education, but perhaps you could say a little bit about how the autonomy you now have has been applied in relation to physical and mental health facilities. Could you also address concerns I have heard expressed by some health professionals, not necessarily within the Prison Service, about the need for specialist knowledge and expertise in commissioning health services, and whether moving that too far from NHS commissioning would cause any concerns?

Nick Pascoe: It is not my desire to take over health commissioning. I think it is co-commissioning, which is the current arrangement. I have a very good relationship with the regional health commissioner and we meet and talk regularly. I would have to employ an expert to do that if I did it myself. It is about a relationship. There may be a different model, but it is now very much a partnership with commissioning. The bids for the two prisons, High Down and Coldingley, were recently evaluated by prison staff alongside NHS staff, so they were working together.

Q198 **Kate Green:** Has anything changed in the way you have done health commissioning?

Nick Pascoe: We have better lines of communication because the health commissioner talks to me directly. We have much more engagement, and that is better. I understand her needs and she understands mine, so in terms of the re-role of High Down we have been able to have a discussion about the point at which we change the healthcare provision.

Do we need to keep healthcare provision going in an in-patient facility? She has been very receptive, saying, "You need to look broader than High Down; you need to look across the whole system and think about it." We have had some positive engagement and that has been an added value, but I do not want to commission healthcare myself.

Ian Blakeman: What has changed is that we have significantly strengthened the "co" element of co-commissioning. It is still health money; it is still commissioned by NHS England health commissioners, but the extent to which they recognise it is co-commissioned now is much greater than previously, and again that is the direction of travel for the whole organisation. Nick described the particular work he has done because of re-competing health services; that is a model of what everyone else will try to do about writing specifications together much more than we have done previously.

Ian Bickers: We are just about to embark on a new commissioning service because of re-roleing to a remand prison. What has been



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interesting in very early conversations about that is the change of emphasis in what that means for immediate care, initial mental health screening and how we might be able to use a link into the community.

In theory, we will not hold men beyond 54 days, which means that there need to be close links to the communities our men will go back to. I have already started to highlight to the commissioners some issues we may have around not being able to help and treat people well within prison, but to think about how we link that into the community. That exists not just around mental health but around substance misuse. If we have people we are maintaining in prison because of the short period of time they will be with us, how do we link that into the community?

Like my colleagues, it is about co-commissioning. NHS England probably got very nervous when they heard that these four people were going to start commissioning services. Like Nick, I would not want to touch it at all, but I want a voice at the table about what it might look like and how it might work. Interestingly, when we reconfigured our reception to push more people backwards and forwards to court, our prison officers worked alongside our health staff to define what that will look like moving forward. When we have redesigned and physically changed our reception building, our prison officers will have worked alongside and helped to work that through as well.

Neil Richards: The answer to the question is no. I do not think anything has changed. There is a reliance on partnership working and relationships, but that has always existed. I would like to see it taken slightly further by having a much clearer definition of the scope of that voice—almost an executive voice—around the table. I have no problem; commissioning at Ranby is great. We have a good healthcare provider, and we are about to go through a procurement exercise, next year, in partnership with NHS England, but having an executive voice around the table might be more useful in future.

Q199 **Kate Green:** Could you say a little more about that?

Neil Richards: It is the ability to say, "I disagree," because at the moment, if the NHS commissioner said to me, "Well, that is where we're at. This is what the points say, and that is what you are going to get," I would have to take it because it is a partnership relationship.

Q200 **Kate Green:** That will change.

Neil Richards: I have no indication that it will.

Q201 **Kate Green:** But you would like it to.

Neil Richards: I think so. Yes.

Ian Blakeman: The importance of getting mental health services right is evident every day in our prisons, and I welcome the work going on at ministerial level to try to make that work better. We need it because we



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have had incidents recently in our prison where it simply has not worked. We need to have those systems working better.

Q202 Kate Green: May I ask about the way you are working on resettlement services with community rehabilitation companies and how that relationship works?

Ian Blakeman: I will start because I have the advantage of working with Durham Tees Valley CRC, which is a differently constituted CRC. That is all I can speak about. I get very positive engagement, good relationships and a recognition that we share aligned targets.

We are trying to achieve the same thing. We want to work together closely with colleagues in the National Probation Service and other partners locally. We are going to try to do something in the north-east and with Durham Tees Valley to show what can be done when we all work together. Durham Tees Valley is effectively a publicly owned CRC. Even with Durham Tees Valley there are challenges because of the funding stream. We are keen that the probation review now being undertaken will ultimately deliver a smarter way of working together, because clearly there are challenges in the current landscape and how we are supposed to deliver those services.

Nick Pascoe: It is an area where we need to do something. We do not contract-manage the CRCs. I might want to, but it is easier if you are in a better defined region like the north-east. High Down is in Surrey but is really a London prison. Coldingley is much more a national resource, so it is harder to manage. We have two CRCs in High Down currently, and that is complicated. To be frank, I do not think we are where we ought to be yet.

Nigel Hirst: It is a first-generation contract, and first-generation contracts come with difficulties first time round. That will evolve. Some of the questions we will ask as the early adopters, and across the piece in other establishments, will formalise how they look in the future.

Q203 Kate Green: There are so many questions about what you will be accountable for.

Ian Bickers: Geographically, in London it is a massively complex problem. You have one CRC with 32 boroughs, and 32 boroughs will deal with housing, for example, very differently. Ian might have one provider in the north-east. What are you accountable for? I can be very clear about that up until the gate. I go back to the point I made earlier. How we plug and play into the CRC is interesting.

We have been talking to London CRC about what we can do to get them in much earlier than the current standard processes we work to, in order to start working with men before they are released. Men still walk around the prison asking, "Can I see a probation, guv?" They have not made that leap of faith to the changed world of CRCs. Their thinking about what it means to them is different from ours. There is still some work to do



around that as well.

Ian Blakeman: Can I pick up the point about what we are accountable for? Of course, we cannot be directly accountable for what happens once the CRC takes over responsibility for supporting men back in the community, but we almost have to behave as if we are. That comes back to the convening rights point we talked about earlier. If we are not focused on what is going to happen when people return to their communities, we will not do our job.

We have to be mindful of how we take that accountability, but it is about behaviours and our attitudes towards them. We want to say that our prisons are about making society safer, protecting the public and making sure people do not offend. That includes making a difference in the way local authorities support people into housing; it makes a difference in terms of our education being translated into real jobs that people can hold down, and drug treatment continuing beyond the point at which they go through the gate. We work with all our partners locally and we want to share those outcomes, and I think we should.

Nigel Hirst: At Ranby, we are in a lucky position, in that we are moving forward. Some early adopters have to re-role as well as trying to take reform forward. In early January, we are looking at cohorts—where the men live. We are doing it in a structured way. We started by asking the men and the staff first. We are talking about having a unit that may hold some of the men who are serving three months and under. They will be paid to live there, so that we can develop what we need to be doing with them three or four months before they are due to be released, rather than picking them up at the last minute. They will be paid to live and work in that environment, so that they can make relationships in the community earlier rather than leaving it until just before release.

Chair: That is very helpful.

Q204 **John Howell:** Mr Blakeman, your point picks up neatly where I want to carry on, not so much about the things you are accountable for but the whole performance management system. Are the performance management standards set by NOMS or by you? Does NOMS monitor them or do you monitor them, and have they been tested enough in your own prisons?

Ian Blakeman: To the first of your questions the answer remains both. We still measure everything we used to measure; we still report all the different management information. We are now setting our own measures for what matters, but there is a lot of work still to be done, so no, they have not been sufficiently tested yet. As set out in the White Paper, how we are going to make sure we have those common measures so that we can have league tables and judge like with like will be absolutely critical. That will be an important building block in the new future system we are talking about.



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In the meantime, we have a good set of measures and we determine locally the things that we say are critically important for us. One of the things we are trying to do is to be much more open about that and involve others in it, and share that information. I spoke earlier about how we want to use data much more within prisons, so that people know what the critical numbers are, and share that information with our local community so they know what is going on.

There is a whole lot of work still to do on that. It will be important to get it right, but in the meantime we are continuing to have that focus on management information. In both NOMS and the Ministry of Justice there is proper scrutiny of what we are doing, and we are still subject to all the external scrutiny you would expect us to be subject to.

Q205 John Howell: All of you can come in on that if you want to, but as a follow-on, to what extent is the performance management system able to manage changes in behaviours rather than simply managing different aspects of the business?

Ian Blakeman: That is what we are trying to design in the new approach. There are some fundamentals that tell us whether prisons are functioning well and are safe and decent. We will, quite properly, still want to make sure that information is being captured, interrogated and scrutinised—at the moment, twice daily by Ministers. That is absolutely right, but in order to be more innovative and have opportunities to create some of the different outcomes, we want the scope to think differently about what is important to us. Those things will change over time.

At the moment, I imagine that the numbers that matter most to Ian are the number of vacancies, the number of recruits and the number of people offered jobs, and the number arriving on the landing. We want to be able to focus on our numbers—the things that matter to us—and be more innovative about that, at the same time as quite properly maintaining all the scrutiny around the core safety and decency stuff that is fundamental.

Neil Richards: The only thing I would add is the continuing importance of external scrutiny by the inspectorate of prisons, the independent monitoring board and some of the processes that sit within that—the quality of prisoner life and the quality of staff life. All of that external scrutiny continues to be really important.

Ian Bickers: To come back to your point about how to measure and mark a change in behaviour, it is a very difficult question to answer. Intuitively, we might know, running prisons, whether or not we have changed somebody, but it is a very difficult thing to measure. You might see it by way of interactions with the CRC or you might be able to measure it much further down the line.

Ian is right. We have the NOMS dashboard. It is still there; it has not gone away, but nobody holds me to account on it as they used to. We do



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a lot of that ourselves internally. Internally, we have developed a whole different set of measures around things that make the prison feel safe and secure, and we use feedback.

Once a month, I sit down with a group of our men and ask them about the lived experience of Wandsworth. They tell me absolutely as it is. No holds barred. They will tell me whether they can or cannot get kit; whether or not they can get access to showers; whether they can get to work; and whether the food is any good. It is almost unique and very difficult to measure through a league table. It gives us a sense of purpose about the things we need to change. We have feedback from them.

We do the same thing with feedback from staff. Staff have the same opportunity to talk to me on a monthly basis. We put those two things together and try to work the system in a better way to deliver better outcomes. My residential managers are measured on simple things like how often we can get kit changes done; how many windows are out; and how many obs panels are out.

The basic things prisoners tell us are fundamentally important. We measure how long it takes for somebody to get a visit booked and how long it takes to get mail delivered. Those are things that could potentially destabilise the prison. For me, right now, when I do not have many staff around, they are vitally important measures. We have developed those. We check ourselves against it. I hold my in-charge governor to account for it, and as a result we are able to drive forward the business.

Nick Pascoe: It is important to understand the difference between performance measures and indicators. If you get the wrong measures, you will drive a perverse behaviour. If you simply measure the level of self-harm, you provide a disincentive for a prison governor to take a transfer for a prisoner who is a prolific self-harmer. That will be wrong if the transfer is right for that prisoner. While self-harm might be an important indicator, you should not try to measure it by some mathematical method because that will drive a perverse behaviour. I have seen it happen in the past. We have to avoid that.

John Howell: That is very helpful.

Q206 **Chair:** We have covered a lot of ground. From April 2017, what will be the relationship between you and NOMS? What is the model going to look like? Is it a bit like the LEA and the academies, where it withers away, or not? Do you know? Have you been told?

Neil Richards: I don't know; I have not been told. It depends on where the White Paper takes us in the direction of travel, doesn't it? I would absolutely rely upon the continued support of NOMS with some of their specialist provision. For example, the commissioning strategies group has developed an evidence-based approach to some of the interventions that will work.



By “interventions”, I do not mean just our recognised offending behaviour programmes but a wider suite of interventions. We are reliant upon that; we are using it and trialling it. We have had support through specialist OD colleagues who understand our business and have come in and helped me design what a board would look like with a keen understanding of what the business looks like as well, so they complement each other. I would like to see that specialist support remain. Certainly, I have relied on NOMS. I can give you a lot more examples.

Ian Blakeman: There is a clear direction of travel set out in the White Paper, empowering governors and giving more and more of us more and more authority and power. There is a lot of work to be done to work out what that means for the wider organisational structure. Obviously, you have advocates in front of you for being able to have their own prisons.

We would argue that the opportunity to grow the executive governor model—those of us who run more than one prison—and operate on a bigger scale is absolutely the right way to take it, but there are wider considerations that need to be worked through. When we started, we were described as pathfinders, trailblazers, or whatever language was used. We want to make sure that the lessons of what we are doing are understood, and that there is an opportunity to shape and influence the approach taken in response to the White Paper.

Ian Bickers: We are now in a very good place potentially to push some of those boundaries. We are probably all advocates of wanting to take this into other prisons to use the skills, knowledge and experience in the teams we have built around us to push this forward in other ways. The thing that struck me probably more than anything else is having the freedom and ability to engage with people in a completely different way, whether that is Nick’s example of being able to work with a brand-new governor to help that person embed themselves and run a good, safe and secure prison, the outward-facing work we probably have not had a focus on before but need to be able to do, or the cluster model where we can use the skills and abilities we have developed, grown and bought in. That absolutely has to be the case, which again is White Paper language.

Nigel Hirst: The models need to be tested further. As an early adopter, you need the ability, if you make a mistake, to say it has not worked and share that widely with colleagues in public sector prisons.

Louise Spencer: There are some potential benefits to linking prisons into clusters that would naturally fit together under offender flows. Ian’s prison is to become a reception centre; we are becoming a sentence prison for Cat C men. There are some natural linkages between putting those prisons together, along with other prisons where men might move as they serve their sentence, so that you can make sure that the intervention services for the men are provided at the right time at the right point of the sentence.



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Nick Pascoe: First, I agree with that, but I do not think we want to reinvent the large regions because I am not an advocate of that; 12 or 13 prisons are too many. Secondly, I never thought I would hear myself say this, but, distancing from NOMS, policies that are written can be very helpful.

We have not had a bonfire of policies. NOMS produced an excellent policy on the treatment of transgender prisoners. If we had all sat down to try to write that policy, we would still be there and some of us could have got it badly wrong. Therefore, there is value in policy. It is about recognising what you can step away from safely and do better, and having a bedrock that you can look to.

Chair: It takes us back to the point about central skills that Mr Richards and others were making. Lady and gentlemen, thank you very much for your evidence, which has been extremely helpful and useful, and very wide ranging. I am grateful to all of you for coming some distance, in some cases, to give evidence to us. We very much appreciate it and we will follow the work with fascination and interest. We wish you every success in being the first movers in relation to this. Good luck with it.