

Justice Committee

Oral evidence: [Pre-appointment hearing: HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, HC 750](#)

Tuesday 15 September 2020

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 15 September 2020.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Sir Robert Neill (Chair); Paula Barker; Richard Burgon; Maria Eagle; John Howell; Kenny MacAskill; Dr Kieran Mullan; Andy Slaughter.

Questions 1 - 43

Witness

I: Charlie Taylor, preferred candidate for the role of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Charlie Taylor.

Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Justice Committee, and welcome in particular, Mr Taylor. It is very good to see you again. We will come to some questions for you shortly. First of all, we have to go through our normal process of declaring any relevant interests. I am a non-practising barrister and consultant to a law firm.

John Howell: I am an associate of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators.

Maria Eagle: I am a solicitor who is not in practice at present.

Q1 **Chair:** We have in front of us giving evidence Mr Charlie Taylor, who is the Government's preferred candidate for the role of chief inspector of prisons. We have seen you wearing previous hats in the past, Mr Taylor. Thanks for coming.

We have had a look at your CV. Can you confirm that you have no interests or political activities that are relevant to the role?

Charlie Taylor: The only thing that might be is that Rob Butler sat as a member of the Youth Justice Board when I was chair. I do not believe he is yet in the meeting.

Q2 **Chair:** Mr Butler sent his apologies, but it is noted anyway. That is helpful. I do not think it would create a conflict in any event, but thank you for telling us.

Let me be clear on one other practical thing. This is a full-time appointment. Currently, you have an advisory role at the Department for Education.

Charlie Taylor: Yes.

Q3 **Chair:** Will you be continuing with that?

Charlie Taylor: I think it is unlikely. I am having some conversations at the moment, trying to work it out, but I think it is unlikely that I could marry the two posts.

Q4 **Chair:** The priority would obviously have to go to the full-time role.

Charlie Taylor: Absolutely.

Q5 **Chair:** Are there any other advisory things that might create a difficulty or take up time?

Charlie Taylor: I am a trustee of a charity called Dallaglio RugbyWorks.

Q6 **Chair:** Does that present any conflict, either time-wise or in interest?

Charlie Taylor: They have done some work in the past in Parc YOI. They have also done some work in the past at Barton Moss secure children's centre. By and large, it is an organisation that works in pupil referral units and special schools.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q7 **Chair:** Are you proposing to carry on actively as a trustee?

Charlie Taylor: Yes. Certainly at the moment.

Q8 **Chair:** Are you prepared to take advice, if need be?

Charlie Taylor: Yes, absolutely.

Q9 **Chair:** That is fair enough. You and I have met when we have been talking about youth justice and education issues over the years. Looking at your CV, that is very much where your focus, expertise and considerable success spring from.

What made you decide to make the move to something rather different, to the chief inspector's role, where the bulk of the work is going to be with adult detention? That is not a field you have particularly specialised in before. What was the thinking behind that?

Charlie Taylor: In some ways, to me it feels like a natural progression from my career as headteacher of a junior special school for children with behavioural difficulties and then of a secondary school for children with severe behavioural difficulties. Then I was an adviser to the Government on children's behaviour more generally, and next there was my review of the youth justice system, and then my work as chair of the Youth Justice Board.

Over time, I think I have developed a deep understanding of the factors that can lead people to end up in custody. I have a good idea of what works and what does not. I have real compassion for victims. I have seen the way that crime and criminality can destroy lives, but I also have a strong sense that we should treat people with dignity and humanity, even in cases where they have committed some of the most appalling offences.

To sum it up, this feels like an opportunity to build on the experience and expertise that I have to take on this challenge and to continue to provide strong, independent and impartial assessment of custody.

Q10 **Chair:** I was going to come on to that point. The nature of a lot of what you have done has been advising on and driving forward policy or operations of one kind or another.

Charlie Taylor: Indeed.

Q11 **Chair:** The role of the inspector is rather different. You are not there to performance manage or to form policy. You are there to be the independent overseer and reporter of what is happening. How do you think you will be able to make that step change? Is there a risk that you will get too close to it?

Charlie Taylor: I absolutely agree. The chief inspector is not a management consultant whose job is to go into prisons and then come out with a lot of advice about what should be done. It is critical that the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

inspectorate stays the right side of that line and that they are an inspectorate, not a vehicle directly for improving custody.

In some ways my experience at the Youth Justice Board has helped with that, even though part of the role is an advisory function. There is also a role in monitoring the justice system and providing impartial advice to Ministers across Whitehall about the state of youth custody and the effect that policy may have. But you are right. At times, I will have to check myself to make sure that I do not cross that line.

Q12 Chair: Mr Clarke, your predecessor, had a reputation for being very willing to speak truth to power.

Charlie Taylor: That's right. I think every chief inspector should have the right to be able to speak independently and to be absolutely frank about the state of custody and what the inspector finds on inspections. They should be honest about things that are going extremely well, and when they are not going so well.

There are other opportunities. The primary function of the inspectorate is to provide independent and honest feedback; to hold a mirror up to the system.

Q13 Maria Eagle: Welcome, Mr Taylor. Can you tell us how you think your professional background will benefit you in the role of chief inspector of prisons?

Charlie Taylor: It will benefit me in some ways. I have seen the journey, and I have a good understanding of the sorts of factors, social and environmental, that can lead to people, first of all, behaving badly and then getting involved in the youth justice and, ultimately, the adult justice systems. I think I have a good understanding of those factors, as someone who has specialised in behaviour throughout my career.

I will bring my knowledge and expertise in education. Although education is not directly inspected by the inspectorate, because colleagues in Ofsted take on that role, nevertheless I think that will be important as well.

I am starting in a reasonable place, in that I at least have a good idea about the youth justice system and youth custody. I have visited a number of adult prisons over the years as well. I have a good understanding of the way in which Whitehall works. Having an understanding of how things work stands me in good stead.

Q14 Maria Eagle: You obviously have experience of the youth justice system. You have mentioned it a couple of times. To what extent have you visited women's prisons? Do you have any understanding of what leads women to offend and whether or not the factors are the same as for male offenders?

Charlie Taylor: Some of the factors are the same and some of the factors are different. I have not visited any adult women's prisons. In my



HOUSE OF COMMONS

time at the Youth Justice Board there was, thankfully, a small population of girls within the youth justice system.

What you often see are children who come from extremely chaotic and complex backgrounds. They have often been exploited through criminal-type activity and have ended up getting pulled into the justice system through those sorts of ways. I think I have a reasonable understanding of that, but certainly when it comes to adult prisons, no.

- Q15 Maria Eagle:** As somebody who used to be Prisons Minister, I have to say that there is a small number of women's prisons and they are often overlooked institutionally in my view. It is certainly something that I hope any chief inspector would focus on in a way that is appropriate to their role.

There are other forms of detention that you will be inspecting, such as immigration. How are you going to have an understanding of the way in which such inspections should be different, given that their role and purpose is different? They are all different from the youth estate.

Charlie Taylor: They are indeed. There is an inspection framework, which I think is a good starting point. It is really for me, as much as possible and notwithstanding the restrictions put in place by coronavirus, to get around as many different places as possible, to get under the skin of institutions and understand how they operate, the particular and unique challenges they face and how those are different from other bits of the estate. I have good experience of visiting police custody and court cells, which I have done on many occasions, but less so with immigration centres, so it is incumbent on me to make that a real priority in the next months.

- Q16 Maria Eagle:** How do you think you are going to develop the additional skills, knowledge and experience you will need for the different aspects of the job that perhaps you have not encountered before?

Charlie Taylor: Listening to people, above all. I came into my review of the youth justice system knowing lots about children's behaviour and children's education, but not knowing much about the youth justice system. I would like to think that over the course of the year, by visiting as many places as possible and listening to as many different people as I can, I could build up and develop that level of understanding and expertise.

- Q17 Maria Eagle:** In your view, as you embark on this role, what are the biggest challenges affecting our prison system at present?

Charlie Taylor: There are a number. I would start, inevitably, with the response to Covid-19. Your report, which came out earlier in the summer, and the inspection reports from the inspectorate—the short scrutiny and the scrutiny inspections—applauded the work of the Prison Service in their initial preparations and on bearing down on the work they were able



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to do in preventing what could have been serious outbreaks within custody. I think it has gone very well at that end.

The next particular challenge is about the pace at which prisons are able to operate and to unlock, and go back to a sense of normality, while at the same time keeping prisoners and people who work in prisons safe from the risks of the virus. Getting that balance and challenge right is enormously important. We know that if people are locked up in their cells for long periods of time, it will have an effect on them. Inevitably, it will have an effect on them. It will have a knock-on effect on the mental health of people who often already have mental health difficulties or fragile mental health.

I see that as a big challenge. There is access to things like visits and, particularly in the youth estate, education, and for adults to work and training opportunities. Additionally, there are challenges in transferring prisoners. At the moment, it is very difficult for prisoners to transfer, for example, to an open prison. The Prison Service is looking at ways they can do that. The journey out of lockdown and what happens in the next year or two with Covid are critically important.

The second thing, which to some extent is a knock-on effect, is the issue around capacity. At the moment, the overall number of people in custody has fallen a bit; we are at about 79,000 or something like that. That is partly because courts have been substantially closed and lots of cases have not gone through. That bottleneck will begin to open. As a result, we are going to see increases in the numbers of people going into custody. There is then a big challenge, with the Covid restrictions in place, about how the Prison Service is going to make sure they manage that new group of people who are likely to start to come into custody.

Next, on capacity, there is another challenge, which is that over the longer term the Government are looking to recruit 20,000 more police officers. It is likely that they will make more arrests and therefore more people will go through the courts and end up in custody. That will potentially raise some capacity issues for the Prison Service.

On a more general point, I would say that the biggest challenge is about harm in two ways: first of all, self-harm and the risk that Covid and its effects play on people's mental health. The risk of self-harm increases. In the last 10 years, we have seen levels of self-harm increase substantially in custody. That is hugely concerning.

There is also harm and safety when it comes to violence. We have again seen the levels of violence increase, albeit that they have reduced over the last year or so, but from a high point. Violence has a really corrosive effect on an institution. If prisoners who may already have a tendency towards violence feel they are in an environment where violence is a commodity, the risk is that they are more likely to become violent. If officers and staff are feeling anxious and at risk of violence, it makes it far harder for them to do their job in a productive way.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I would say the three main challenges are the response to coronavirus, capacity issues and violence and self-harm.

Q18 Maria Eagle: What do you see as the inspectorate's role in addressing those challenges?

Charlie Taylor: Let's take Covid to begin with. I think the inspectorate needs to push as much as possible—I know Peter Clarke has done this—in order to get as much access as is safe and reasonable to places of custody. We have gone from short scrutiny inspections to scrutiny inspections, which are more detailed and closer to the normal inspection framework.

We should be pushing for greater access, where possible and where it is safe. While doing that, we should also be flexible about the approach. Where there are local outbreaks of coronavirus and high levels of community infection, and where infection is growing in prison, we should understand that there will be limitations on the level of inspection that will be available.

Secondly, when the inspectorate inspects custody, we should make sure that it is absolutely clear, open, independent and honest about what it sees there. We have seen this with recent scrutiny inspections, where the inspectorate raised concerns about things like access to education, access to visits and the roll-out of mobile phones and video technology in custody, and it has been able to play an important role in flagging that up to the public, to Ministers and to Parliament.

When it comes to violence, the role of the inspectorate is to hold a mirror up to the system and to be really clear about the data that it sees, as well as giving a narrative view of what it feels like in prison on the ground. That is by talking to prisoners, prison officers and governors, and weaving that narrative, as the inspectorate does very well, into its current framework.

When it comes to capacity, it is not the job of the inspectorate to comment on policy, but it is the job of the inspectorate to make a point of noting if it feels that capacity is having a knock-on effect on delivering a safe, humane prison.

Q19 Maria Eagle: Have you had any discussions with either the Secretary of State or the Prisons Minister about how the challenges that you see in the system should, or could, be addressed?

Charlie Taylor: Obviously, I spoke to the Prisons Minister and the Lord Chancellor as part of my old role, but I have not yet had a chance—subject to the approval of this Committee—to sit down and talk to them about the challenges that they currently face.

Q20 John Howell: As chief inspector, you could be inspecting areas or aspects of the youth justice system that you previously had oversight of, or involvement with, in making recommendations. How are you going to



make sure that those are dealt with objectively?

Charlie Taylor: It is worth saying a couple of things. Very soon after I took over as chair of the Youth Justice Board, Elizabeth Truss—who was then Secretary of State—announced that the commissioning of custody places, which had previously been a role for the Youth Justice Board, had moved over to the newly created Youth Custody Service. I arrived at a transition period, just over three years ago. I had very little involvement at the Youth Justice Board in specific organisations—for example, things like prison placements and commissioning of prisons. Our role moved much more to monitoring the system and advising Ministers.

The area where there may be a conflict is in the development of the secure school, which is something I have had very direct involvement with over the last four years. This is a new form of youth custody that is run by an educational organisation. In effect, it is more of a school with walls than a prison that does education. I have obviously been involved in the selection of the provider, and in the criteria for selection and those sorts of things.

In my report in 2016, I said that I did not think the prisons inspectorate should be inspecting the secure school. I felt it was something that Ofsted could do. If Ministers decided that the prisons inspectorate should be involved in the inspection of secure schools, obviously I would recuse myself from that process.

Q21 **John Howell:** Given your experience of the youth justice system, what have you learned from that about the adult estate that can be put into practice?

Charlie Taylor: It is about the challenges of institutions and the difference that things like buildings make. The buildings and environment vary hugely across the secure estate. You can see, certainly through the youth justice system, how different environments throw up different sorts of challenges. What has been interesting is the way that establishments have worked to get around those.

There is some interesting learning from education in youth custody. Referring back to the Sally Coates report of 2016, there are ways that best practice from education can be introduced in adult custody as well.

Finally, the most important thing—this is what it comes down to—is that when I did my review in 2016 one of the things I was constantly looking for was what really works in custody and in the community to keep kids out of custody. I think it applies equally to adults. Ultimately, the thing that really works and really matters is the interaction between the adults who are caring for the prisoners or for the children in custody, and that relationship. Relationships are absolutely key to making it work.

Adults or officers who are calm, authoritative, respectful, knowledgeable and understanding make an enormous difference. You can see that as you travel around youth custody or adult prisons. Some officers have got



it. They have an amazing ability to walk into situations and calm them down; to get under the skin and really understand what is going on with the people they are looking after. That ability—their radar—means they can spot things beginning to rumble and trouble coming, and are able to intervene at the right moment. So often, at times when things have gone wrong, it is when people do not have that level of experience, and sometimes it can be a challenge.

Q22 Chair: Is there a role for encouragement and recognition of success in the inspectorate's work?

Charlie Taylor: Absolutely. It is a really important role that the inspectorate plays. Inevitably, it gets underplayed, but I know it is valued by the Prison Service, by individual officers and by prison governors. It is flagging up some of the outstanding practice. If you are a prison governor, your opportunities for getting round and seeing other establishments are inevitably relatively limited because you are so busy. I think the prisons inspectorate plays an essential role in being able to flag up when things are really working well and when they come across an institution that is facing up to a difficult challenge and making real progress. There is huge learning that can be done from that, and the inspectorate plays a critical role.

Q23 Kenny MacAskill: What do you see as the main challenges and your own priorities for the inspectorate as you go forward? How do you intend to approach that, caveated by where we are with Covid? How will that affect the work now, as well as the priorities you will have in the coming years?

Charlie Taylor: Getting the response to Covid right is essential for the inspectorate. I know the inspectorate understands that what is of primary importance is to keep prisoners, prison officers and staff safe within custody from the risk of catching the virus. On the outside, families of prisoners and families of officers see that as a huge priority as well. At the same time, the inspectorate needs to return as soon as possible to greater and more detailed levels of inspection. We need, where we can, to get back to normal and to be flexible in our approach to doing that.

The second area I am interested in is the ways in which we can present and show the work of the inspectorate. For example, I am interested in ways that we can get our reports out more widely and make our reports more accessible to people and help them to be able to see and read them. I am interested in the way that our recommendations play out within custody. That is something I would also like to look at.

The final thing, as someone who has come from an education background, is the role of leadership in custody. We know that great leadership matters almost more than anything else in institutions, whether it be a school or a prison. I would like to think about ways the inspectorate could brigade the outcomes that we see on leadership and think about how we may be able to present them.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

- Q24 Richard Burgon:** How will your experience of producing reviews of the youth justice system and the use of pain-inducing techniques on the youth estate inform your approach when it comes to inspections and the recommendations that HMI Prisons produce?

Charlie Taylor: I have produced two extensive reports, first into the youth justice system and, as you say, into pain-inducing techniques in the youth estate. I think I understand well the process of putting together an independent report.

To some extent it goes back to what the Chair said at the beginning of the session. Inspection is not the same as policy development. In both of my inspections, part of the recommendations that I made were about changes of policy by Government. The reports that I did were enormously helpful for me in the process of building up an objective view of an establishment and of a system, but I need to be wary about not crossing the line that we talked about on what is policy and what holds up a mirror to the system.

- Q25 Richard Burgon:** There has been a trend over the last few years of prisons increasingly not implementing or accepting HMIP recommendations. How do you think that can be improved? Do you think that some types of HMIP recommendations should be enforceable?

Charlie Taylor: Whether they are enforceable or not is ultimately a decision for Ministers. I do not think that is a debate that I would like to jump into at this stage. I heard recently that the Prison Service, for the first time, is fulfilling more than 50% of inspection recommendations. There has been a small improvement recently, and that is obviously something to be noted and encouraged.

In some ways, you are talking about two different challenges. One is where a recommendation does not get accepted. Most of the time, in my experience, those recommendations are not the fundamental things that the prison should be putting right. They tend to be more peripheral, technical issues, but nevertheless the chief inspector has the opportunity to be in contact with the Secretary of State or, ultimately, to use the urgent notification system, if they feel that some real concerns are not being addressed in custody.

- Q26 Dr Mullan:** First, Mr Taylor, thank you—should you move on to hold the post—for being willing to step up and continue your public service in this way. We need people like you.

Charlie Taylor: Thank you very much.

- Q27 Dr Mullan:** Obviously, it is a high-profile role, a public-facing role, and there will be a broader interest in your views on the criminal justice system beyond just the narrow remit of the prisons inspectorate. I want to pick up a few things with you.

I looked at your review of the use of pain-inducing techniques in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

youth justice estate. I think you did a really fantastic job of articulating the views and experiences of young people in custody who had been subjected to those techniques. There were dozens of examples where their voices were articulated directly, or you reiterated what they said to you. But I struggled to find a single example in the report of prison officers' experiences of using the techniques, why they value them and why they think they are important. Is there any particular reason for that? I would be interested in hearing your comments.

Charlie Taylor: I had a number of quotations from prison officers and governors in the report, particularly prison officers, if I am right in thinking.

Q28 **Dr Mullan:** Maybe one, but the balance is very much one way.

Charlie Taylor: Indeed. We spent as much time talking to children as we did talking to governors and to prison staff to really get an understanding of where pain-inducing techniques were being used, of when they were being used in an appropriate way and when we felt they were being used in an inappropriate way. Certainly, we were not setting out deliberately to see it from only the children's point of view. It was a report aimed at looking at not only the safety but the efficacy and the extent to which policy was simply being followed.

Q29 **Dr Mullan:** Okay, thank you. I understand that under your chairmanship of the Youth Justice Board the aim was to move towards a model of child first. Would you expect, as an inspector, that you are going to be thinking about prison as prisoners first in your approach? If that is the case, how do you think the public and prison staff would feel if that was your emphasis? If it is not going to be, it would be good to articulate that.

Charlie Taylor: It is a different role, so I do not think it is my role as inspector of prisons to articulate it in that way. The idea of child first, offender second—it was a two-part strapline, rather than just child first—was about getting the right focus in the right areas when it came to supporting children who ended up in the youth justice system, not least because the reoffending rates were, and continue to be, incredibly high, with the risk that children were coming out and creating more offences.

When it comes to the adult estate, it is not the role of the inspectorate to start thinking in those sorts of terms; that is for Ministers and for the Prison Service.

Q30 **Dr Mullan:** I think in the past you have expressed a view that short sentences were something that you did not feel were necessarily helpful in the justice system, and I think you welcomed a review of them. Again, just to explore broader issues that are going to be of public interest, what do you think is the purpose of short sentences in the justice system?

Charlie Taylor: That is specifically when it comes to the youth justice estate, and I would not want in this sort of area to stray into the adult estate. There seemed to be two main areas where children were coming



into the justice system for short sentences, and it was sometimes people coming in for as short as a four-month DTO, which involved two months in custody. It appeared to be for two main reasons: either there was consistent breach of the terms of an order; or magistrates in particular, and sometimes district judges, just became exasperated by the number of times particular children were coming up in front of them. They seemed to be the main areas.

- Q31 Dr Mullan:** What do you think the public think about the prospect of not having short sentences? Just to measure your understanding of how the public view these issues, how do you think the public would feel if they were to hear that we were not going to use short sentences anymore?

Charlie Taylor: Again, this is not a comment about the adult estate, because I am not in a position to comment on that. In my time reviewing the youth justice system, and at the Youth Justice Board, what I felt—at times there can be a challenge in communicating this—was that taking children away from the home environment for a very short period of time simply was not enough to be able to begin to get under the skin and fix their problems. It had the potential to make things worse.

If when I was running my school you had said to me as headteacher, "Charlie, we have a kid who is coming to stay with you for two months. Can you do what you need to do?", it would be extremely difficult to make progress. Children on very short sentences do not always settle well in custody. They are almost ready to go when they have arrived.

I think the way to explain that to the public, when it comes to children, is, "Ultimately, we need to make sure that we are stopping children from reoffending."

Dr Mullan: I understand that.

Charlie Taylor: If we see that custodial sentences have a higher reoffending rate than community sentences, we are not helping the situation, particularly by locking someone up for a very short period of time.

- Q32 Dr Mullan:** I understand. What I was asking specifically is, what do you think the public as a whole think about the use of short sentences? I appreciate the argument against them and that there is a role for articulating that there are limitations, but what do you think the man on the street would think about that if you were to chat to him about it casually?

Charlie Taylor: That is why I articulated it in that way, because it always slightly depends on the way you put the question to someone on the street. If you put the question as, "These kids are terrorising your neighbourhood. Isn't it about time they were locked up?", lots of people would say, "Yes, I couldn't agree more." But if you articulate the question differently to, "What do we need to do for these kids in order to stop them terrorising your neighbourhood?", and "Here is something that is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

proven to be more effective?”, I think you might get a different response. That was the reason why I was making that argument.

Q33 **Dr Mullan:** In the broader sense, what do you think prison is for?

Charlie Taylor: I think prison has three functions: first, to punish offenders as a result of the decision of the court; secondly, to protect the public from people who may put them at risk; and, thirdly, to rehabilitate people and to help them to be less likely to commit offences when they come out, and to go on to lead successful lives.

Dr Mullan: Great, thank you. That is very helpful.

Q34 **Andy Slaughter:** Good afternoon, Mr Taylor. Could I ask you about the ongoing review, which I think closes at the end of this month, about the role of the independent statutory bodies and what changes should be made to that? Specifically, I think the point is raised that, should this position go on to a statutory basis—that is, be defined in law and have some of its functions set down in law—would that make any practical difference? Would you support that? Secondly, if there should be an amalgamation of various bodies, including HMI and the independent monitoring boards, what do you think are the pros and cons of that?

Charlie Taylor: It is not an area of policy that is appropriate for me to comment on at this stage. Peter Clarke has been feeding into the inquiry, as has the inspectorate currently, but from my position and point of view, it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

Q35 **Andy Slaughter:** I see what you are saying. I am not asking you to say what you would or would not live with in the role, but to get an idea of what you are thinking in terms of what you would do in the role and how that might differ from, for example, what the IMBs do. Can you not at least say what you see as the pros and cons, or what the difference in function might be between the two bodies?

Charlie Taylor: There are certainly differences in function between the two bodies, and they operate differently and independently from each other. The prisons inspectorate, through the statutory responsibility of the chief inspector him or herself, has that specific role.

The IMBs have a different role when it comes to understanding what is going on and monitoring. That role varies and is a more informal role at times, but nevertheless they feed reports directly to the Secretary of State, as well as to the governor and the Prison Service. I would not want to get pulled into what a new system might look like if Ministers were to decide to merge the two organisations, because I think it is for the current inspectorate to be involved in the debate rather than for me at this stage.

Q36 **Andy Slaughter:** That is a slightly disappointing answer. I have Wormwood Scrubs in my constituency, which is a prison that has not been without its problems over the years. In the year, I get a report from



HOUSE OF COMMONS

HMI but also from the IMB, and I value some of the differences in approach.

Charlie Taylor: Indeed.

Andy Slaughter: It gives a rounder picture. I am looking for your appreciation of what the differences are between those two bodies and what they do.

Charlie Taylor: I think the inspectorate follows a specific framework, the healthy prison test. It goes to each prison and is able to run through that. The inspectorate also has the opportunity to do thematic-type inspections; it is able to look more broadly across the secure estate, while IMBs are specifically located in individual prisons and, therefore, are able to give a more regular and slightly differently nuanced flavour of what things are like there. There are differences in the way that different IMBs operate and in the way they choose to use their powers and responsibilities.

Q37 **Andy Slaughter:** Yes, they are not all perfect. That is what I was looking for—an appreciation of what they do. Obviously, you will have to work with whatever system is devised, so I see your reticence on that basis, but what I was looking for, and you have now given, was at least an understanding of what the IMBs offer, which is something slightly different from HMI.

I have one other question on that subject. It is also in the consultation, and again you might not want to answer. At the moment, the term, I think, is notionally about three years for this post, but, in reality, the last two excellent appointments have done considerably more than that—I think, four and a half or five years. How long would you think was a reasonable period for you to be in the job, and would you like to see that set down or would you just like to play it by ear?

Charlie Taylor: I certainly want to be in the job for three years, and I am really excited and looking forward to taking on the role. As to how much longer I might or might not want to be in the role, perhaps you should ask me in a couple of years' time. Different inspectors have been in post for different periods of time, but I would not particularly want to pull a number out of a hat and say, "This is the right number of years for the independent inspector to be in place."

Q38 **Chair:** Do you think it is important to have enough tenure to establish that independence?

Charlie Taylor: Going back to what I was saying about short sentences for children, it is extremely difficult to make progress with a child in a very short period of time. Similarly, taking over an organisation, certainly to really get under the skin of it and understand how to make things work, always takes, in my experience at least, a minimum of three years.

Chair: That is helpful.



Q39 **Paula Barker:** Hello, Mr Taylor. I am interested to understand how you would ensure that not only you but the inspectorate maintain independence from any political or other pressures that you may encounter.

Charlie Taylor: It is absolutely critical. Peter Clarke and his team, and previous chief inspectors, have been able to establish a real gold standard of independence. As a result, it is an enormously well-respected inspectorate. Coming in as chief inspector, I would see it as absolutely incumbent on me to maintain that. We have an inspection framework that we follow. We choose when, what and how we inspect, and it is essential that that is done without political involvement or interference, without fear and without favour.

Paula Barker: Thank you.

Charlie Taylor: To add to that, I would like to think that the two independent reports that I have produced on the youth justice system will, I hope, give the Committee at least some assurance that I am someone who believes very strongly in maintaining independence.

Q40 **Paula Barker:** Secondly, what would your approach be to working with other inspectorates and other scrutiny bodies?

Charlie Taylor: The relationship between the inspectorate and other bodies is absolutely critical. Andy Slaughter talked about IMBs. That relationship is enormously important. There is a huge amount of information that the inspectorate is able to glean, not least in its risk assessments, from looking at IMBs.

On top of that, there is the work of Ofsted in inspecting education in the youth and the adult estate, and the health inspectorate and the work they do. We saw that particularly with Covid cases, where the CQC has been enormously helpful and instrumental in flagging up challenges with Covid. There are also challenges around mental health. I see an inspectorate as bringing together a group of experts who will shine a light on an establishment, hold a mirror up to it and give a frank and overweening view of the challenges and successes that it faces.

Q41 **Chair:** This Committee, as you probably know, did quite a lot of work on the situation of younger adults in the youth justice system in the 18 to 25-year group.

Charlie Taylor: Indeed.

Chair: There has been quite a lot of discussion about the particular needs they may have, to do with maturity and other matters. How much of a priority do you think that is for the inspector to be alert to?

Charlie Taylor: I obviously read your interesting and informative report on the 18 to 21 offenders. It is part of a broad spectrum. Most people who are in custody are in the younger bracket, the under-25s bracket; in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

particular, most of the people who are coming in and out are very often in that bracket.

It is really important that the inspectorate focuses on that, but in some ways what is important is that the inspectorate goes where they feel they have the most concern, and they have two ways of doing that. They have the inspection schedule that they can follow, and there is flexibility within that, which they use depending on intelligence they get from a number of different sources. They also have the opportunity to use thematic inspections to look at the state of a particular, broader area across the prisons estate. For example, there was the one that came out earlier this year looking at the use of segregation in the youth estate.

Q42 Chair: That is helpful, thank you very much. You have talked about—or anyway we understand your position—the importance of the independence of the inspectorate from Government. Have you thought about what the appropriate relationship should be between the inspectorate and this Committee?

Charlie Taylor: The first thing is that I would see this Committee as an enormously important partner in helping to understand what is going on in the Prison Service. It would also be about building up the relationship in terms of the usefulness and effectiveness of the many reports that you put out. I hope we will be of enormous use to the Select Committee, through the reports that we put out, in your deciding what you want to look at in your reports, and helping you more generally to get wider in-depth understanding of the prisons estate and the challenges that it faces. I know that Peter Clarke and previous chief inspectors have enormously valued the importance of the relationship with the Justice Select Committee.

Q43 Chair: Thank you very much. Do colleagues have any further questions? Mr Taylor, unless there is anything you want to add, thank you very much for your time and for your evidence. We have to consider our report, but I am very grateful to you.

Charlie Taylor: Thank you very much. Do you know when your consideration will be completed?

Chair: We intend to move to it as soon as this meeting finishes.

Charlie Taylor: Very good. Thank you very much indeed.

Chair: Thank you. The evidence session is concluded.