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I am an inmate of HMP ***. I have been resident here since [date]. I was also resident here from [date].

My crime related to Fraud by False Representation in connection with *** I was given an 18 month sentence in [year] served 4½ months in a CAT D prison *** 4½ months on HDC (a tag!) I’m now on a 7 yr sentence for a Proceeds of Crime (POCA) relating to criminal benefit from that original crime.

I served 3 months in HMP *** in [date]. While the physical space in *** was worse, ie the cells smaller and the high windows leading to a crepuscular existence. Remember, there is no glass across the barred window, just a perforated metal sheet and a wooden shutter. To keep warmth in one has to shut out the light. Plus the lack of a vista is depressing.

Access to the yard in HMP *** is a basic PSI right 30 minutes per day of fresh air. This was not always adhered to. For example, if it was raining the yard was closed.

When I first arrived at HMP *** one needs to exercise at the gym. In order to get into the gym one must be inducted. This induction took six weeks to get on coupled with the inclement weather meaning no fresh air. Plus no work meant that for the first nearly months I was locked in a small cell. No view. Depressing stuff. Just the one inmate killed himself during my time and one slashed his throat.

In the main, the HMP *** staff were diligent. I remember an Officer [name] being particularly helpful.

I eventually was allowed access to gym time and joined *** gym group. This 6 or so cohort trained well with the PE staff in the small gym on site.

I moved to HMP *** as I was closer to my wife and 2 children and network of friends for visits.

Healthcare

Reading the IMB 2021-22 report it notes the severe waiting lists for dentists. I have no personal experience of healthcare other than I tried to get a covid/flu jab earlier in the year and failed to get one. Anecdotal tales from chaps reveal year long waits for dentists. I’m not on any medication so cannot comment on the prescription process other than there is a vibrant trade in the meds issued ie re-sale of psychoactive substances. This brings me on to a new subject.

Drugs

Those are commonplace. Only last month there was an overdose and death. The Governor emailed the inmates (via our in-cell laptops) citing the number of code blues per day, ie people under the influence. No doubt you will seek out this figure. Clearly any of these could result in an overdose. What is commonplace is the vaping devices being used to inhale/burn bits of paper infused with WP5 or Spice. Attempts have been made to restrict movements with a vape pen have failed. Searches are lax, most tuck a vape in their shoe or pants and vape in the toilets at work. Twice at my work (I’m on bins) have people overdosed. This manifests as a man on the floor shaking violently

being sick and having soiled his trousers. This is commonplace, and violence follows sale of drugs trade in vapes. Some wings are dangerous places. Black eyes are a common sight. It is interesting to look at the drugs code blue figures compared to when visits was closed. Is the assumption is visitors pass inmates drugs. I'm sure they do but when in covid this route was closed did the amount of drug incidents slow down?

There are two factors given we were locked up 23 hrs per day maybe more people took drugs to get through? That's possible. My point is that the flow of drugs was still active given prisoners' families were no longer coming into the prison where were the drugs coming from? One has to look at the staff. Remember, a soaked sheet of paper is infused with WPS. This is easy to hide, difficult to stop. No easy solutions. As the famous Rat experiment with heroin showed, if one can occupy and make connections drug use goes down (see Chasing the Scream book on drug use). We are regularly locked up all day. This promotes unease, resentment, depression and increased drug use.

Staff Levels

Many of the failings identified in the 2021/22 IMB report stem from inadequate staff levels. What is the staff retention rate? How many new starters are still in place after 6 months? HMP [name] has the highest staff absence due to mental health.

We are regularly stopped from work or gym or bible class because of low staff levels. This prison cannot operate with the present levels of staff.

When I arrived I emailed the OMV this email took 2 months to get a response. Regularly, the reply for this tardy reply is there are 2000 prisoners how can we reply. How indeed, if a prison is built away from highly populated areas.

Look at the current influx of prison staff from other prisons. As you know the opilet reveals where the staff usually work. We are unlocked by staff from all over the UK: Lincoln, Stafford, Thorn Cross or the North East. This fire fighting of staff paying bonus and hotels is a short term measure. Why not close a house block? And staff the prison correctly.

We regularly miss evening yard. Be clear, this is the PSI 30 minute minimum. I put in a Comp1 asking why I was not let out. The common reply is "unforeseen circumstances." There cannot be anything in prison unexpected. The reality if there is a fight/drug overdose we miss out on our 30 minutes of fresh air per day.

Today (12th September) by gym has been taken away + work closed down. I was informed last night of this. The reason a staff wellbeing day. Good news to keep the staff happy by locking up 2000 men for the day.

I'm on an enhanced wing. It's called [name] and we are given perks for being good. Last week all these treats were removed due to staffing levels. For example, we have a table + chairs on the wing where we can eat out evening meal. Due to staff levels we have to eat next to the toilet in the cell. This is sowing dragons teeth of despair. I can see why other wings are regularly fighting. The other officers from other jails point to the poor management here. Bad behaviour is rewarded. Young man upset by something hangs off the balcony in HMP *** he would be carried off down the block. Here he is rewarded, given his TV back or a box of vapes. That incident is a daily occurrence. There are no senior or experienced staff here. Many have only served under the Covid regime which, locking up men for 23 hrs, promotes drug use, depression and suicide. It may promote a riot.

Education

Laughable. I asked both the head of Education and the head of Resettlement what the best job was to reduce reoffending. Both answered in the same way: the did not know. Madness.

Why are men recycling CDs here? The most boring, pointless job ever. I did two weeks in there. Mind numbing.

There are 4 fork lifts in the prison. Why are these not surrounded by men getting a fork lift ticket? Yes, some men are getting tickets to drive fork lifts, more could.

Look at the green academy. Why is there not a farm shop like at [name]? Why are there no qualifications within the green academy. Men are repairing wheels, which do not give a job. Apparently, a "Railtrack" course is starting soon, ie working on the Railways. Here is a tangible job paying a good wage. Get it staffed, get men jobs.

Look at the CSCS card ie to work on a building site one needs a construction industry card. Likewise a card for scaffolding, etc. Give men real jobs.

Where are the relationships with companies or recruitment agencies? The employment here is lax + slow. Not enough staff to administer.

Library Access

This has been withdrawn. If one has a full time job in the prison (not inc. education) one has no facility to browse + choose a book in the library. One can request a book via the prison laptop. Not quite the serendipitous joy of selecting a book off a real shelf.

Prison Laptop

This is a great idea and streamlines ordering food and facilitates emails with family etc. When I arrived at prison it took 8 weeks to get a laptop. Again, staff cannot cope with repairs etc.

CSCS

The construction industry card scheme. I had a job writing for an exam board, Pearson, writing CSCS questions for the Health + Safety exam. I informed education that I might be useful as a mentor. I was put to work pushing bins around the prison. I have GCSEs, A levels and a degree. Surely more use could be made of educated prisoners and an expansion of the Red Band system within the prison?

Gym

The access to the gym areas are good and generally the Gym staff helpful. It is notable four smaller outdoor pitches never get used. Low staffing levels?

The gym is regularly cancelled due to staff levels or staff training. Seek out the Residential Regime delivery emails from the Governor where gym is curtailed because he could not get enough staff to turn up for work.

Food

Dire. Regularly the food is delivered late + cold. There is a PSI directive that food should be served within 45 minutes of being put in a heated trolley. We get ours regularly 2 hours after.

Most days breakfast is missed off. While we can email the kitchen the responses are laughable. Nobody is managing the situation. When we complain to wing staff they do not have a spare man to walk over to the kitchens to collect the missing items. Sometimes the kitchen have ran out too. Fresh veg is again laughable. Our regular daily veg option is spaghetti or baked beans. The menu is changed after one has ordered it. For example, order cous cous salad, get rice salad arrive. Vegan pasty get tuna pasta!

Where is the qualifications in fine food or a clink style award winning restaurant. The kitchen here is scraping by.

The regular bread ration never shows up. It's almost too much of a cliché that an HMP cannot even deliver porridge.

Association

This is time out of the cell. On our "enhanced" wing we regularly used to have the doors opened to allow access to the garden. Covid put pay to this and what covid did in prisons was educate staff with what they could get away with. Many of the young staff here are not capable of holding a conversation. Just close the flap on the door + walk away. This breeds resentment and one can see why the hot headed types hit members of staff. Lamentably.

Church

Whilst there is access to a church for all denominations, it is notable that on Bank Holidays all church activities are closed. There is for example a regular Bible class and a Quakers meeting. The volunteers who staff these classes report they would attend, but prison staff forbids it. The bank holidays are long. One has no work and is locked in the cell all day. Again, the lack of staff pervades to every alcove of the prison.

Cells

The double cells have a toilet combined with a shower and a wash basin. The downside to this is no shower screen is provided. Do visit the cells and see how many men rig up a sheet as a temp measure. The toilet is open next to the desk, thus the men have to eat the food 2m from an open toilet. Remember, there is a dining table on the wing but no staff to permit men to eat at a table. Judge a society by how it treats its prisoners?

I hope these comments help you reflect that HMP *** is a failing institution, not addressing rehabilitation, paying lip service to education and keeping its men largely caged, allowing the proliferation of drug use and violence.

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I write this letter to you in order to provide you with some information regarding my experiences here in Welsh prisons. First of all, I must say, putting a small advert in a paper and offering people the chance to write in will put most people at a disadvantage immediately due to the level of illiteracy in English and Welsh prisons.

I start by telling you a little bit about myself. My name is [name] I am a loving father, as best as I can be, to three Children, [name] [age], [name] [age] and [name] [age]. I am a life sentenced prisoner with a minimum term of 16 years to serve. So far I have completed 6 years of my tariff. I have spent all of my time so far in Welsh prisons, with almost three years spent in HMP *** and the rest of my time has been here at HMP ***. Since coming into prison I have worked hard in turning my life around a full 180 degrees. I came into to prison with no formal education and have since amassed over 29 qualifications to date. Some of those qualifications are pretty useless and have no real value other than providing me with a sense of achievement and others are, I am led to believe, of some value, notably the qualifications I have gained equivalent to an A-Level and above. I am currently studying with the Open University for a Certificate of Higher Education in Health and Social Care which is equivalent to stage one of a degree.

All of this I have been hungry to achieve and been lucky in so far as finding one or two people in each estate who seen my potential and believed in me and assisted/helped me to achieve all I have to date. It is very sad to say that I have achieved more since coming to prison in [month] [year] than I did for [30-39] years prior to coming in to prison. I must say though, if it wasn't for my dogged determination in wanting to turn my life around and for the better, many officers and staff would have been happy for me to waste away doing nothing meaningful with my time. For the first time in my life I have grasped every opportunity available to me and am using my time very wisely to better myself in the hope of returning back to being a full-time loving father and a constructive and active member of society.

Whilst in prison I have had various jobs, usually in mentor roles, helping people to learn to read and write through the Turning Pages programme or helping a fellow prisoner to till out a menu, read a letter or being there for someone in their hour of need in my role as a Samaritans Listener. I regularly carry out many other roles such as making other willing prisoners aware of the courses run through the Prisoners Education Trust or the Open University and helping them fill their time and create a better chance for themselves once they are released back into society.

Unfortunately it is sad to say looking at my PNOMIS you would never be aware of any such positive actions that I have undertaken. I have been lucky at times and have had a positive entry or two added to my PNOMIS or so I have been led to believe. Times like when I pointed out a piece of paper that looked suspiciously like spice paper and it was removed by an officer to be destroyed; or the time when I worked in the *** (segregation unit) and found a fifteen inch screwdriver that was left behind by the B.T. engineer and readily informed by the staff who worked in the unit that I had potentially saved a person's life had it gotten into the wrong hands. There was a time when whilst working in the reception area, as an Early Days in Custody peer mentor, that I found and handed in a set of lost van keys that were dropped by the prison stores delivery driver. Had it not been for the few decent staff I had worked alongside in my various roles these acts would have been forgotten about and lost knowledge.

It's a sad fact that here in prison bad behaviour gets rewarded time and time and time again. I had a quick note entered onto my record where as someone gaming the system would get vapes, canteen

or some other reward for not following the rules, threatening to self-harm or acting in some other negative manner.

I am on the Incentives/Drug Free wing, where by you are told here in HMP *** that if you provide two monthly negative Voluntary Drug Tests (VDT) you will gain some reward as well as a certificate to prove you have provided these and entries on your PNOMIS record. For people like me, who had previously taken drink and drugs all my life, since I was a child in single figures, it is a big achievement, yet this goes unrecognised, we rarely if ever get the stated rewards/incentives. We never get the certificates and doubt it gets entered onto our record, so we are informed. What little we do receive is a last minute, hastily thrown together, thing. They have stopped the yoga class, the mindfulness class, the men shed, the sporting events as a reward, such as a monthly football tournament. There is no real incentive to do anything other than take drugs for those who are unable or find it difficult to remain drug free. I myself am driven to not take drugs, yet I feel for those who have achieved-very little in life, try their hardest to break the cycle of addiction to bring a slice of brief normality to their mundane experience of prison by completing the two VDT's to find out the manager couldn't care less, the reward is not forth coming, the certificate doesn't come and when you get to parole or speak to your Prisoner Offender manager/Probation Officer there is no record of your achievement. It may seem so little and insignificant to a normal person but let me tell you that to a lifelong heroin addict or alcoholic who is trying to turn their life around it is a difficult task to abstain and remain substance free when so much temptation is about and so many setbacks happen. Quite frankly it's a very hard kick in the nuts and makes you think why the hell bother, especially, if unlike I you are not strong willed.

For me safety is not an issue, but for many it is. I have come to prison and worked hard at getting fit and am around 19 stone, so that fends off much of the rubbish before it even finds me. But time and time again I see or hear of bullying that takes place throughout the whole prison estate. A bully could be in the form of staff on staff, staff on inmates and inmates on inmates. This could be due to drugs, something owed, something borrowed or any other multitude of reasons. Personally I live within my means on the meagre wages we receive, I rarely get financial support from friends or family, despite what the media would have you believe, we are far from living the dream eating pigs in blankets, organic turkey and marks and spencer Christmas pudding at Christmas. Prison is not a safe place for anyone bullying takes many forms; we are constantly placed under pressure whether it is from bullying prisoners, bullying staff, the food which lacks any real sustenance, the lack of sunlight or the constant lockdowns that they love to impose here at HMP ***. Safety or shall we say lack of safety takes many forms, for example, the poor healthcare, an illness has much time to get a grip on you long before you may get to see anyone from the healthcare team.

The mental health provision within this establishment in particular is terrible at best. It is a reactive system where those who create the most noise use up the majority of resources and where those who suffer quietly get little to no help. The help may not be forthcoming because in many instances men do not understand how to ask for help, or ultimately if they are suffering from a period of depression, for example, one may not be aware of the situation they find themselves in and recognise they are in dire need of help. Here in HMP *** if you are able to recognise that you may need some form of mental health intervention, the mental health team sends you a form asking if you bathe every day, if you clean your cell and other useless questions-. Staff will stand idly by and on many occasions happily watch a man suffering from serious mental issues. I have witnessed staff antagonising men or even winding men up for kicks when they are experiencing mental episodes. This form of bullying regularly takes place. Even when you ask for help you get none. Most days' staff carry out a quick welfare check on you, but this is just a quick look and off they go, there is no genuine care attached. At times when I have personally asked for help I've been laughed at and left to suffer in my mental anguish, like when I was removed from a job for apparent "security

intelligence" a day or two after losing my sister and locked up for around 22 hours a day with little or no contact with anyone. The job loss only resulted in me losing my red band, having my security level lowered from 5 to 4 and no cell searches., adjudications or anything. The role removal was a bit suspicious as it happened after me and a few guys on the wing submitted a few complaints about a certain officer's treatment and behaviour towards us. After crying out for help I was told there was an application that needed to be submitted via the digital CMS machine, which as far as I am aware was never processed and no one came to see me. When those who are charged with your care and wellbeing don't give a damn it rubs off on you eventually. When you are treated like animals ultimately you act like animals, as the saying goes.

On the topic of weapons, anyone with the will can turn anything into a weapon. Men who know how to utilise their fists have weapons fixed to the end of their arms. Others may brandish a mop or turn a BIC razor into a makeshift knife. There is little to say on this other than where there is a will there is a way to fashion a weapon.

I shall raise the matter of complaints; this prison does not listen to complaints, does not hear complaints and certainly does not take complaints seriously, I have even complained about such matters. For instance, I had a friend order and pay for a book to be delivered direct from Waterstones for educational purposes, an approved supplier to HMP ***. It was delivered via Royal Mail and recorded as directed. Yet the book went missing upon entry to the prison. After many applications and as many discussions with staff, I was directed by a manager (on the rare occasion you manage to find one) to raise a complaint or COMP1 about my book going missing. I have submitted several and after each submission I receive a message via the CMS informing me that this is not a complaint, and each time the manager assures me it is a complaint. Other complaints simply do not get answered. Other times you receive a reply from a complaint so late that when you submit a COMP1A to appeal a decision or lack of, you get a reply stating that you did not submit the COMP1A within the stated time frame. On the rarest of occasions when a complaint is upheld very little if anything changes. Even though it is our right to be able to complain people regularly get chastised for doing so, and that chastisement can take many forms, from dishonest security file entries to loss of jobs and lack of help from officers in order to put you at a greater disadvantage than you already suffer. The saying goes the biggest gang in prisons are the officers. If you are not accountable to anyone the system is open to abuse and abused it does get. The complaints process is severely broken and certainly is not fit for purpose. When I complained about being subject to religious discrimination it was not taken seriously and the reply contained untruths. I have never received a reply to my COMP1A regarding this matter, it is still on-going. Many times you will get a reply not even addressing the issues raised in the original complaint. Like when I complained about losing my job, as stated earlier, I got a reply telling me I was removed from the education wing for not being enrolled on any education course, when I have times, dates and certificates to prove it. That was not even my complaint and the real reason I was removed was for the 'nature of my complaints' and the nature of the complaint was about the staff not following the rules.

We rarely if ever get a set regime. I thought the whole point of jail was to give you regime, consistency and a structure to your day. You get none of that here even when it is fully staffed. The prison refuses to publish a set regime. Staff chops and changes the regime as they see fit. The governors here do not govern, the managers do not manage and the staff, who may have been here a few weeks, are left to take up the slack. In the three years I have been here I have never spoke to let alone seen a governor. Rarely if ever do you get to see a manager, all staff above general officer grade hide, so you can imagine the frustrations that build up here if you need to have issues sorted out. This prison, it is felt by the majority of inmates, is here to attack your senses, create confusion and anxiety, which in turns creates depression, frustration and pushes you to the brink of doing

things you may not want to do but, out of sheer desperation you are forcibly pushed to do. As stated above, those who play up get everything; those who knuckle down get nothing and lots of it.

The beds here are solid wood and the mattress you are issued is not much thicker than a thin book because it is battered and severely used, it may be a few years old at best. The solid wood has no give in it, does not cushion or spring and the mattress does not cushion, spring or aid a night's sleep, but leads to constant nights of unbroken sleep with constant tossing and turning. All this adds to the frustration and aggravation. Sleep deprivation is a tool of oppression used as a torture technique by many and outlawed by the UN, yet is legal and silently used by prisons up and down the land.

Here in prison you have the Internal Monitoring Board, supposed to be here to make sure we get the minimum we are entitled to. As with the management team, you never see or hear from them, even when you raise issues with them. If on a rare occasion you do get to see them they have are of no real use, they have no teeth, so to speak, and generally find in favour of the prison. When I was in *** prison you would regularly see the IMB stood at the hotplate upon lunch/dinner service. He would look at us in confusion, wondering why we have complained endlessly about the size of the portions and the state of the very poor standard of food. Let me say this, there must be some collusion or a set day they come round because as with inspections of prisons, there seems to be a magical abundance of food that appears, it is well cooked, nice golden brown fresh chips, etc. You can imagine our surprise at this also. Here in *** food is cooked and sitting in hot cupboards from around 10:30am-11am for dinner service around 5pm. The prison reform trust states food must be served within 2 hours of cooking if I remember correctly. The veg is cooked beyond recognition depleting what little nutrients were present before they were well over cooked.

Drugs are everywhere in prison, from cannabis to heroin and the so called spice. Drips and drabs may enter through visits and some by way of drone, but let us not confuse the issue, far more comes in by people employed in prisons. You may only bring a handful or so of tablets in through the visit route or a quantity in by drone. Yet here in HMP *** they regularly find kilos of certain kinds of vegetable matters or thousands of tablets. I shall leave this up to you to fill in the gaps. What does surprise me though, of all the big finds that are discovered in HMP *** vary rarely if ever does this make the news. Is this a cover up? Is it kept in house? Are the police not informed to carry out a thorough investigation? This perplexes me.

As stated earlier I have come into to prison to turn my life around and have done so. Playing the fool and being the big man and breaking the rules are easy. Trying to make good of a once shitty life is real hard, especially in a place where no one cares about you or your issues and are happy to let you know this on a daily basis. It's hard when the rules are bent and distorted on a daily basis to suit the aims of the officer trying to break you. It's hard when you are honest, you work hard, you help out, you keep your nose clean and at the slightest chance they get they knock you down. That is why a good many a person, and yes I refer to us prisoners as 'people', in prison end up giving up and playing the old game of cat and mouse in here. Maybe because they do not possess the strength of character or will to stay good, or have had enough of constantly having mind games played upon them, maybe it's because of learned behaviours, or simply they do not know how to act accordingly or maybe it's because of other complications such as mental health issues that need addressing instead of being ignored.

Anyone who does care about our predicament, fortunately there are a few, understand the vicious cycle we are forced into. You only have to look at the Scandinavian model of the corrective system; it works and it is proven to do so. By criminalising mental health we are massively failing people and their needs. The inability of prisons to rehabilitate people breeds further criminality. When you hear ministers in the Inside Times telling us that employers favour soft skills, over actual skills, needed to gain suitable employment it shows they do not live in the real world. There are elderly men in the

English and Welsh prison system who have been in and out of prison all of their life from early teens and who are still unable to read and write. That must be the biggest hurdle to employment. It breeds frustration and compacts what most have been led to believe all of their life, that they are stupid, when in actual fact many are talented individuals and need help in realising that talent or being able to release that potential. Like myself for example, this was the disconnect I needed to implement change, I wish I could have done it on the outside in a different way. The thing is I knew I wanted to change; I had many talents in my repertoire already and was very hungry to change, I knew I needed to change and wanted to change my life around. Again I say if you treat people like animals you create animals.

What I propose is; you need to sort the diet out and provide us with the minimum amount that the government states male or females need to survive and maintain all of our bodily systems, a minimum of 5 portions of fresh fruit and veg a day, etc. By feeding us a very poor diet lacking in any real sustenance creates many other ailments from mental health issues to physical health issues and beyond. Provide us with a decent amount of exercise that has many well documented health benefits. Locking us up for twenty two plus hours a day is unhealthy. Rehabilitate people realistically and appropriately by looking at why they have committed crimes by providing us with real skills alongside that of behavioural programs; to enable us to gain real employment upon release where we can make a difference to our life's, provide for our families and actively take part in society. There are many sectors that would benefit from a skills driven initiative in prisons. Implement more ROTL to C-cat prisoners in order for us to gain the trust of our peers. How else must we earn that trust and show we can be trusted? It seems far too often that we all get tarred with the same brush. Punitive measures are out dated and proven not to work. Let me assure you many people incarcerated in the prison system would jump at the chance to change their life around for the good; many won't or may be unable to, but those of us who do, wish to do so and try our best to do so must be supported appropriately in order to do so. Rewarding of bad behaviour must stop immediately. I often ask why it should be only D-cat prisoners who are given a chance to work out of prison. Many community projects would benefit from the extra man power, or enable prisoners to gain valuable real time work experience. Unless we are to feel value in what we do and provided with the chance to make a real difference and fully reintegrate in society the majority of prisoners will fail to break the cycle. Help us!!

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In response to your article in Septembers edition of Insidetime regarding Welsh Prisons.

I am [name] and was at HMP *** on remand for a crime that was never committed from [date] until his trial where I was unanimously found not guilty on [date]. [number] days!

Never being in trouble before I was in total shock and didn't really know what was happening to me when I arrived at HMP ***.

I was on suicide watch but didn't really have much help.

The next day I was given an induction but it was all too much and I still didn't know what was happening. I told them that I needed my medication as my APN at home was treating me for anxiety and depression and had just changed my prescription and care plan but they were not interested and insisted on giving me medication that prevented me from sleeping.

I received emails from my Mum but they were difficult to read and it was difficult to get onto the CMS on the wing as they were constantly broken.

Communication with the outside world was almost impossible.

I did eventually manage to have my parents land line phone number cleared so at least I could ring them every night but they had to pay a lot of money into my account to allow this to happen as phone calls are costly and due to the mobile reception being very poor where we live setting up the cheaper mobile calls was not an option.

The process of getting friends and family passed for phone calls was a nightmare which did not help my mental health! No one cared!

It was 5 weeks before I could get a visit with my parents due to the 4 CMS machines on the wing not working! No one cared! The process of getting friends and family cleared for visits was equally stressful and I nearly gave up at one point. This caused a lot of unnecessary stress for us all.

No one seemed to know how many hours visiting I was allowed. Security informed invisible walls, (after my Mum tried to phone to book a visit) it was 4 even though I was on remand. After lots of searching and enquiries made by my Mum it was actuality 14. How to book visits was equally frustrating as it could not be done online. I had to book the first 4 hours on the CMS and after that my Mum would have to phone or email invisible walls to book the dates, which was not efficient and time consuming. Again no one seemed to be able to tell us.

The conditions were terrible although I was on remand I was locked up for 22 hours each day most days due to lack of staff or other reasons. Bored and only had the television. My Mum had originally asked if they could take in some drawing paper and pens as I loved drawing but this request was turned down. They were told I would have to purchase it, as the food was so bad I needed my money for the canteen order. My parents were told lots of stories from other visiting families who had sent goods and books in for their loved ones but they were never received yet some were handed in at the visitor centre after being cleared by security.

I informed them about my medication but it wasn't changed and I wasn't sleeping as a result my Mum eventually sent a copy of my prescription and health plan to me which I never received, in fact I hardly received any of the letters that were sent to me from family and friends. Mum emailed invisible walls regarding this and security informed them that the letters were on file waiting to be photocopied. I have never received them!

Mum emailed invisible walls regarding my prescription and was asked to email a copy to the security who would pass it onto the nurse. She received a reply from the nurse saying that the GP had dealt with it but it had not and I was still on the wrong prescription. Mum emailed the nurse and informed her that it hadn't been dealt with. Eventually I had a call from the GP saying the prescription had been changed but it would take about 4 weeks for it to be actioned. About 2 months before my release the prescription was corrected! Due to my loss of weight however I was prescribed protein drinks to take and did eventually put on the 2 stone that I had lost.

I shared a cell with a convicted paedophile and then again with another convicted person although I was on remand.

I applied to be an enhanced prisoner after 12 weeks filling in the form but never received any sort of response! My parents had difficulty in getting my own clothes to me but after a couple of goes was successful.

The food was appalling and certainly not nutritious in any sort of way. Jacket potato with beans consisted of 2 boiled potatoes with beans on the side, sometimes the food was so bad that it couldn't be eaten. I went without many meals re-lying on the canteen items that I had purchased.

I applied for work after 9 weeks but was told that they didn't know if I was trustworthy as only been there for 9 weeks and I never heard anything after that!!

Their website states how good the prison is and how they care for people with special needs. I had first hand experience that they don't care and do not help if you are special needs. An example of this is that I had a cellmate with a very low IQ and was like a child, he couldn't manage his money and was in debt with his vapes, he never had enough money to buy even a bottle of lemonade from the canteen. I helped him with his order every week eventually getting him out of debt and actually having money to buy a treat for himself, a bottle of lemonade. This person was not the only one needing help that was never given.

I didn't dare to complain whilst on remand for fear of what might happen to me. That being said most of the officers were civil to me but it was the security who made life difficult and the system.

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I am writing this letter in response to the article I read in the ‘Inside Times’, asking Welsh prisoners for their opinion on the state of Welsh prisons.

My name is [name], I am a [30-39] year old male from [location in Wales]. I have been in the ‘system’ half my life, and have plenty of experience regarding how prisons operate (unfortunately). The past few years I have definitely seen changes for the better in our prisons. Currently I am a ‘peer-mentor’ in re-settlement here at HMP ***. I have to say that in all fairness there seems to be much more focus regarding support, employment, re-settlement in the community and education. These are all key-factors in a prisoner's chance to successfully stay out of prison and never return. I think if more funding was focused on these areas you will find a decrease even more in re-offending levels. I can personally verify this first hand, as with the support of the education team here at HMP *** I successfully enrolled in a Open University course studying Environmental Studies, or which I can gain a Bachelour of Arts degree in the subject. Currently I am just about to start my 3rd year after successfully passing the first two modules. This has given me hope and something to aim for in the future, where I can use my qualification to start a career in an area of the market that I am passionate about and also hopefully become a role-model for my children. Through my learning and teaching my children about the importance of how we treat this planet, they will then also want to follow in the same footprints. This is not just the case with me, there have been many prisoners starting degrees the past few years, this can only be a positive. As mentioned not just in the ‘now’ but in the future also. It's not only further education that is helping prisoners but everything from neuro-diversity to multimedia skills, when an individual learns something new in my opinion it changes their mindset. The re-settlement and education team here are on the front line regarding a person returning or staying out. Everything from CSCS cards (I am currently doing also), PTS (rails), BICS, roofing courses, food hygiene and even Barista (Just to name a few) are courses that are on offer here, so everyone gets a chance to learn a trade/qualification they can then use in the community to successfully never come back and live a happy life whilst being an asset to the community and society.

Food (our menu and canteen)

Another factor in an individual's Journey whilst being incarcerated that can be the difference in one being positive or negative is their diet. I have recently read that funding has been increased for the food budget in prisons. This is good, but in my opinion, yes they can now feed us more, but what about better? The saying we are what we eat is true, it changes how we feel and how we function. We are quite lucky here at HMP ***, there is a different veg daily with our food and also have a healthy option daily. This is not the case with all Welsh prisons though. I recently spent time at HMP ***, I went in there 109kg and came out 83kg. Often I would see inmates looking and also saying they felt malnourished. It was shocking, the only vegetable on offer daily was a serving of over-cooked mixed veg, a measly serving of some diced carrot, diced swede and a few broad beans. The choice on our canteen was shocking also with only bananas and apples in regards of fruit to order. Everything was always out of stock, leaving only un-healthy, full of sugar, processed crap left to order. All the meals were processed, well ultra-processed! Something needs to be done about the state of that prison, I don't know how they can get away with what they serve there. With all the evidence currently arising about ultra-processed foods, emulsifiers and preservatives it's wrong that sadly it's either eat them or starve at ***. Even though the choice and quality is ten-times better here in HMP ***, there still could be room for improvement. We should be allowed a better choice of sources of protein daily. Either with our meals or in our tea-packs a small portion of nuts or an egg.

There is a fruit choice instead of pudding in the evening and instead of crisps over lunch, but it mainly consists of an under-ripened apple, of which we receive in our tea-packs. Why not a different fruit daily, or at least say a banana one day, apple the next and orange the third. I do also think prisoners should be allowed a multi-vitamin daily also to make up for what they're missing out on (we can order on the canteen, but the majority won't order as we have to budget to the penny). This will help them feel better and also, if one's health is better surely in the short and long term, will be less of a stress on our already struggling NHS. A person's health can deteriorate very quickly in prison, this can be avoided by the amount of nutrients, vitamins and minerals they intake. A healthy prisoner is a happier and more productive prisoner, therefore not just bringing about benefits for the individual but also the staff, healthcare system and even their family, because if they know their relative is happy and healthy they are less stressed also, so as mentioned the food is up to scratch here and the best I've seen in the past 13 years, but there could be room for improvement, especially with the rise in our food budget, spend that extra on more nutritious food not bigger portions of unhealthy crap.

Exercise

We are allowed to have an hour on the yard per day, either before work or if unemployed during the day. This is ample, more would be nice but I understand that with a regime as strict as it is in prison and staffing on a knife's edge this is not amicable. Regarding gym sessions, if employed we're allowed 3 a week. Gym is key to a prisoner's health, both physically and mentally. As the same endorphins are released when you train as when you take cocaine, the gym is extremely beneficial for people with addiction problems. I know this personally as I have struggled in the past with addiction ranging from heroin, cocaine and crack to ketamine, diazepam and amphetamine. I have an extremely addictive personality, so when I train it is doing multiple positive things, keeping me fit, healthy, in shape whilst also keeping depression and anxiety at bay. And when I was using substances it kept cravings away due to the endorphins – dopamine and serotonin. As cocaine was my drug of choice, these two chemicals would flood my neuro-transmitters and I wouldn't even think of the drug, ridding the cocaine cravings out of my brain, whilst the cravings are being replaced with the (endorphins) – serotonin + dopamine these then give you a pure natural "high" that makes you want to go to the gym, and there's nothing wrong with getting addicted to the gym. The gym staff are cool here I know they want us inmates to be able to go more but that's not up to them unfortunately. I recommend that the gym sessions be split into two, one cardio and one weights, after then the lads who want to do weights go, then cardio the day later. Then after splitting the two groups and increasing the gym sessions to 6 a week (like it used to be) people can do weights for 3 and cardio for 3. By doing that inmates can benefit from both weights and the cardio, weights do wonders like, putting muscle on, losing fat, help with all kinds of mental health complications including addiction and cardio, now cardio is not just beneficial it's essential for things such as keeping or getting your heart rate as it should be, your lungs – especially if the individual is an ex-smoker, also getting your lungs where they should be regarding oxygen intake this then further helps lower your BPM, so basically with cardio's benefits to your heart and lungs this then further helps the rest of your organs as they are also receiving the correct amount of blood that should be going to them. So when prisoners have say a liver condition or kidney complication (for example) cardio will help through the increase in blood going to the liver and kidneys, from the heart. I'm passionate about the effects of endorphins on drug users and how they can literally change a cocaine addict, over a week of training both cardio and weights the addict will beat his craving and feel awesome, normally the light bulb moment comes after the week when I tell them about the cocaine 'high' and training 'high' are both the same. I recommend that training should be prescribed by doctors and drug agencies here, allowing extra sessions for people who want to come off drugs, while coming off or have recently stopped using. 1.) It gives them an incentive, 2.) it will help and 3.) it makes them personally experience how that gym 'high' is the same endorphins as a drug high. I am currently enrolling in a P.E.T. (Prison

Education Trust) course in substance abuse, where I will gain a qualification in Drug and Alcohol counselling. My calling in life is to be a Drug Youth support worker, as I have the best experience (past-experience) on addiction, weight-training/cardio, support (I have helped many friends detox off drugs) and a genuine passion, passion is not a strong enough word obsession with wanting to work with teenagers up to Y/A (21-25). To make them realise you will end up ruining your life. I was a straight A student, all top-classes predicted A*-A in every subject, but started smoking cannabis and by 15 selling cocaine. I had that taste of how easy it is to make money and not work. At 16 I then got expelled (caught smoking cannabis). At the time it didn't bother me, I started selling more. By the age of 18 I could earn £2000 a day if I wanted. Then started using, before I knew it I was hooked selling to fund my habit. Then came the jail, every sentence was either directly from drugs (intent to supply, possession) or because of drugs (Burglary, theft) even the sentence for bladed article was due to drugs as I would never have a knife on me if I wasn't paranoid someone was going to rob my drugs. But I am changed now been clean off heroin for 5 years and cocaine for 3.

Sorry for going on it that section it's just I am so passionate over drugs and rehabilitation and also helping youngsters by making them aware in the end you will get caught and ruin your life, ending up either dying or being in and out your entire life. The drug service here at *** are awesome, my worker [name] is a legend and they are a great support to all individuals struggling with addiction. But I do recommend that they should be able to prescribe the Gym to the service users, maybe leise with the gym and prison staff and enquire about an extra couple of gym sessions for prisoners using the service [substance misuse service] maybe they could say if they provide a clean V.D.T. (Voluntary Drug Test) to show the individual is clean and is genuine about staying sober. This then also gives them a further motive to stay clean, so they can get extra gym?

Healthcare

The Healthcare system here is staffed with 1 Doctor and a team of nurses and pharmacists throughout the prison (Also a dentist, optician and a mental health and drug agency). The staff I have all seen have been very professional and mostly all easy to speak to. It's not the staff I have any issues with (Healthcare staff), they are only following procedure it's the procedure in it's self. I find, not just in this prison, every prison I've been too over the last 13 years, and not just Welsh ones it was the same in HMP [prison in England] and HMP [prison in England]. There's a trend of 1). Taking individuals off medication they have been prescribed in there community 2). Not prescribing certain medication that is needed 3). The lack of ergency when an individual is needing medical attention at a hospital 4). The way that every prisoner is viewed in the same manor that there trying to blag them for medication they don't need.

This 'suspicious' way of putting security before one's health is a major concern. Over the years I have witnessed many individuals self harming as there not on the meds they should be, people dying because they have not gone to hospital when they should have, people suffering in pain for prolonged amount of time when they should have gone straight to A+E. This has to change, diagnosis' are being missed leading to further complications and symptoms that should be dealt with in hospital are not, leading to them getting worse. If one currently says he needs to go to hospital for say a ruptured/twisted hernia, all that happens is a team of nurses come to your cell take your temperature, your heart rate and blood pressure and if your ob's come back slightly raised or normal they say 'your fine' and offer you paracetamol. This is unexeptable as I'm sure there are many conditions where your ob's are fine but still need urgent medical care. But if a person has a 'spice attack' and a 'code blue' is called they take them straight away. Recently my friend [name] broke his leg before coming in, he had to wait 3 weeks before going. With me I have 2 hernias and a lump that is suspicious, I need to go to hospital, I've lost a lot of weight, can't urinate properly and constantly in pain – I need to go to hospital, but all I am given is paracetamol and told I'm on a waiting list. The complications that I am suffering with are with me constantly throughout the day. This is not a personal attack on the Healthcare system here at HMP ***, this is the procedure throughout the

prison estate, security is put before one's health! I think like the way an assessment is made to determine the level of risk regarding one's health and medication. For example a prisoner that has not long to serve or left and has behaved throughout their sentence shouldn't be seen as the same risk in security's eyes as one who is serving a lengthy sentence and has been playing up constantly. In my opinion if there was a system used by healthcare that takes into consideration the length of one's sentence, the type of sentence and also the offence, how they have behaved, if they have any previous for abusing the prescription/medication in the community and in prison and any escape attempts and evaluation could be made to determine the level of risk the individual poses. This could then be a system used throughout the prison estate to help figure out if a prisoner poses a risk (if any) when they say they need to go to hospital and also a risk they pose (if any) with regards of controlled medication. If I was to create such a system there are many ways this could be done (just suggesting) two reliable systems to calculate this risk are either a simple mathematical system, using a score out of 10 for each of the supposed risks then figuring out the estimate at the end, the higher the number (1/10) the higher the risk. I'm sure an application could be created then used throughout the estate, this would cost, but in the long run many prisoners' lives would be saved and also help with regards of the amount of claims against the prison system for medical neglect, saving hundreds of thousands per year in personal injury payouts. Secondly an algorithm could be programmed, where all the information a prisoner's behaviour, medical care and sentence is used to calculate the risk level. I'm no computer engineer, but with the rise of A.I., the use of algorithms and applications for almost everything there has to be a way we could use technology to help with this archaic, and in my opinion a breach of human rights, current way the prison system deals with decisions to send a prisoner to hospital (or not)! Sorry I went on a bit there but people (including myself) are suffering, in pain and in fear of the unknown of what is wrong with them. We have paid for our crimes by coming to prison, one shouldn't have to pay with their health. Not everyone saying they need to go to hospital or they need the medication there prescribed in the community is trying to blag them for whatever reason.

Conclusion

As the article read, you wanted an opinion of the current state of Welsh prisons, here at HMP *** I'm happy to say they are actively helping with trying to reduce people coming back. With the increase of such programmes like the 'employability hub' and the chances of getting out with a degree or tickets like P.T.S. or C.S.C.S., there are chances the majority of us would never get the chance to grab when living a life of crime. It can only be a positive to focus more on re-settlement, education and employment along with actively educating more inmates about the importance of a healthy diet and exercise. These are all essential, all combined if one takes them seriously and into consideration, coupled with self-belief and the want to change, any convict can successfully stay out of prison, become a valuable asset in their community and society and live a long healthy happy life.

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At HMP *** I had 2 lots of 1 hour association/domestics at HMP *** I only have 1 hour and remain locked in my cell the rest of the time. I preferred the cells at HMP *** because they had arched ceilings, traditional doorway arches and solid brick walls. At HMP ***, the walls are metal and the room is just a box and instead of making a satisfying thud when the doors slam, they clang and make a horrible noise (echoing).

The cells at HMP *** are larger and as I am a single cell prisoner, I find the HMP *** one larger than needed to be honest. I can see that a HMP *** twin cell might be cramped though with 2 people in it.

The cells appear more hygienic at HMP ***, the ones at HMP *** do smell of urine after being used for so long, but new flooring and a new paint job would fix that.

At HMP *** there are also pigeons nesting there, while at HMP *** not even the seagulls stay around for long (pigeon noises are soothing).

At HMP *** the building itself was obviously built with pride, having each course of stones a different size to the last. At HMP *** we just have a metal box to look at when we are outside on exercise/association.

The food here at HMP *** is not very nutritional or healthy, I will probably never eat beefburger again after eating a HMP *** one. I mainly eat vegetarian here now. The food at HMP *** was excellent, it was nutritional and healthy, with lots of choice and a full 3 course meal, but with nothing fancy added, it was plain but good for you, whereas most of HMP *** food is ultra-high processed, HMP *** meals tasted like they were assembled and cooked from scratch in the kitchen. One thing that is missing from both is butter.

Overcrowding

HMP *** did feel overcrowded, with a lot of people exercising, but HMP *** does not feel so crowded, despite there being more here.

Safety

I am at risk from other prisoners because my offences were speech crimes involving race, but I have never felt unsafe at either prison. I am also disabled and have limited mobility and upper body movement.

Emergency bells can be left with no response at HMP *** for up to 45 mins. At HMP ***, its 2 minutes and checked is working daily.

I have strip-down and body washes within my own cell each night, so my experience of safety may be because I have avoided the public showers which have no cameras and are known to be places with a potential for violence. Generally I have found other prisoners to be helpful and considerate, despite a lack of self awareness and self respect in many.

Education

I have been within the prison system for almost 6 months now and my request to begin lessons learning the Welsh language has not been met. I know of one other prisoner on my wing who is also waiting for Welsh lessons. Due to staff shortages even when there are courses available, they are not open for weeks at a time, leaving prisoners locked in their cells for 23 hours a day (apart from to collect medicine or meals).

Rehabilitation

I have just been introduced to my instructor for rehabilitation and I have another 9 months to go, so I guess the timing is okay and it is also specialist rehabilitation, that my probation officer who did the pre-sentence report said would be difficult to arrange as there were not many people specialising in it, so its good that this is now happening. I am looking forward to seeing her again next month.

Drugs and Weapons

I have not seen drugs or weapons, although I have heard drugs are available and that some prisoners have weapons. The main drug that appears to be a problem at HMP *** is spice. At HMP *** I was told there were no drugs there, so some prisoners were hoping to get to HMP *** to acquire some. I think there is a wing here specifically for illegal opioid users, which I think is a good idea because it prevents new people from the chance to become addicted.

Welsh Language

We have officers who are dual language here at HMP ***, but I have not heard it being spoken and I am still waiting for lessons in it.

Improvements

I think more use of single cells would help to prevent violence, preferably with their own showers. I think well educated male officers who can provide good role models to prisoners are lacking at HMP ***. There are some, but not many, whereas at HMP *** there were many, but much fewer female officers. Female officers may help to de-escalate violent situations, but I think those situations are less likely to occur in the first place with large/strong good male officers with degrees and good character. More regularity and reliability would help prisoners to bring order to their often chaotic lives. More nature would help prisoners to feel connected to the world around them and less likely to re-offend.

Second Letter

This is my second submission and is entirely about HMP ***.

The exercise yard is full of rubbish, bags, tins, bottles, trays, vape cartridges, all thrown out of people's windows. I believe this is a result of how dirty the rest of the place is. The tables for eating from have only been cleaned once in the 5 months I have been here. It is not uncommon for apple cores or used tissues to sit on top of the touchscreen consoles we have to use for 48 hours.

Some officers remove our food trays from our cells by kicking them out of the way, like you would a dog bowl. I think this is more thoughtless than a deliberate provocation.

Neither *** or the NHS Healthcare have enough staff. The last time people on the wing had regular work/education was July. I have not been allowed to visit the library for an entire month because of the lack of staff and was forced to miss chapel on a Sunday for some reason. Because Healthcare do not have enough staff to provide the 2 nurses required by law to give me my pain medication, it was 3 hours late yesterday morning. Usually it is between one and two hours late every day.

One week we had no bin bags or loo rolls for a week. Most weekends there are no loo rolls available. I have known us go for 2 or 3 days with no milk for our tea or breakfast cereal and some days no tea pack/breakfast pack.

We are not trusted to eat from plates, we have toddlers plate trays and the food is mainly ultra high processed, where instead of getting a proper meal we get 2 cup-a-soups and a small bit of pasta, or cold chips on a tray still soaking wet. The trays received from the exercise yard are just put in the sink with all the rest, despite them having been outside with seagulls and who knows what else trying to eat from them.

When I am in church the service is interrupted by security radios, when it would be a simple matter for them to turn them down quieter or wear an earpiece.

The water here is the most toxic water I have ever come across. If it touches a wound or rash it stings like chemicals. When it is boiled in a kettle the smell of it makes you choke. You can see red marks on the back of people's necks where the shower water hits.

I have managed to avoid seeing any direct violence, but over the last weekend there was a huge brawl. I have been told that part of the cause for this was the settling of financial debts. Vape cartridges function as currency, as they cost us £3 a pack. For someone who is not working, or in education, the prison gives them less than the price of a pack a week. This encourages people to get into debt which leads to violence when they cannot pay their debts.

This could be prevented by providing e-cigarettes and vape cartridges through the NHS like they are outside of prison. This would stop them being used as currency and would cut down on the drug trade, as the only way to pay for drugs then would be through bank transfers to an account on the outside, as anybody would be able to get vapes for free from the GP.

The officers here do not seem to be deliberately trying to be awkward and the healthcare staff are all good, it appears to be the organisational structure itself that is at fault. For instance, in Healthcare instead of saying what time meds should be given, there is just AM and PM and since it can be new staff every day, most days meds are given later and on some occasions, not at all.

Both Healthcare and *** tell me they have chronic staffing shortages which also does not help. I mentioned in my last submission about the type of buildings we are in and what our surroundings are like. It would help just to have some nice murals painted around the place like they have in HMP ***. Forests and scenes of animals would be good, or even a large landscape mural on the tin box that we see when we exercise, which is an entire block of the building.

The officers here do not want to be keeping us locked in our cells for 23 hours a day as it makes the atmosphere much more tense and dangerous for them, but with only 2 or 3 staff to an entire wing for the day, what else can they do, when they need to borrow other wing's staff to give us any time outside our cells?

P.S. From my limited experience, I would say that nationalised prisons are far superior to private prisons in every way and far more likely to rehabilitate a prisoner.

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I am *** and I’m serving a IPP sentence. My tariff was 4 years and 3 months and I was sentenced in [date]. I saw the article in the “Inside Times” newspaper, to which I’m responding. To answer some of the questions, I’ll go in order of what was mentioned in the article.

Firstly, the living conditions at HMP *** are really good. The cells have showers, phones and are really clean and tidy. Over-crowding is a problem but that’s nationwide from what I read. Safety is of concern, but I attribute that to a few different factors; the availability of “spice”, poor management and the lack of staff, but mainly due to the lack of opportunities and progression that we all need. I’m living on [prison wing], which is the Vulnerable Prisoners side of the prison and it feels like we’re just being ‘wearhoused’. The main part of the prison has all but everything that can be done with regards of vocational training and behavioural courses.

The prison just don’t want to spend money on sex offenders rehabilitation. There are currently three wings and they are all liken to induction units. There are lifers/IPP’s, first timers, veterans and young offenders all mixing together. There are Enhanced prisoners, standard regime, basic regime and prisoners that have come from the “block”, all being placed on the same wing. It’s a recipe for disaster. I see people getting on the netting, at height – people assaulting staff, people smoking spice and it mostly goes unpunished. In fact, if you behave and keep your head down, you get no recognition. But if you act out and misbehave, the staff will do anything for you – it’s backwards! It’s causing a lot of resentment to the likes of us lifers who just behave and have to put up with idiots “kicking off” daily.

Only five or six years ago it was completely different here. [Prison wing] used to be the induction unit and Basic regime for prisoners that misbehaved, [prison wing] was a intermediary wing for veterans and prisoners trying to get their enhancement, and [prison wing] was the Enhanced prisoners unit/long term/lifers wing. When it was like that, the prison was quite decent. There was a clear progression for prisoners and a ‘carrot to dangle’ for good behaviour. Prisoners behaved, got educated, got good jobs “giving back” all in the pursuit of getting on the ‘enhanced’ wing where your door was open more and where there was peace and quiet!

Now, unfortunately, that’s all gone. It’s just chaos on all the wings. The senior officers are constantly leaving the role as they can’t control the prisoners. There’s staff walking out daily. There’s always staff shortages which leads to restricted regimes (Bang up) that’s all leading to a constant state of unrest. There is only three workshops – a print shop – sign shop – and a soldering shop. That’s because it makes money for the prison. Over on the mains, they have a carpentry shop/course, Bricklaying course, Mechanics course, plastering course, Railway track courses, Bike repair, Gardening NVQs, Personal fitness training, Good parenting courses landscape gardening courses and many many more vocational training courses. But nothing for us! If there is staff shortages, they bang us up just so they can keep the “mains” regime running. And the staff are quite open to telling us that we are less likely to make a fuss so they send the staff over there. Most people on [prison wing] are sex offenders (guilty or not) but we are still human beings with the urge to rehabilitate and be released to live our lives out in the community! Yet we are being treated like animals, no opportunities and no training courses, behavioural or vocational! I see people getting recalled constantly as a direct result of how poor the rehabilitative pathways Parc VP wings are providing. Two years ago, I signed up to learning the Welsh language. It was put on my timetable to attend each Wednesday, but the teacher has never turned up to take the class. Not once! Things need to change here, rapidly!

We need something to aim for. We need courses and training – something that we can use on the outside for a better life and something that we can contribute to the community with instead of just being wearhoused!

Unfortunately, there is a entrenched culture amongst the staff with regards of working on the “Nonces” wing. They don’t want to be here. I’ve heard some staff saying “how can you work with those dirty b*****ds”. That attitude is rife here. Over on the mains, they have a visits hall for prisoners families to be able to order freshly cooked food and drinks, but although we have a visits hall of our own, with a kitchen area for cooked food, it is never staffed. Therefore our visitors only have a snack machine that’s rarely stocked. There’s deep seated issues and a tangible discrimination when it comes to working with sex offenders. It feels hopeless just being here. The self harm is like nothing I’ve ever seen. I’ve been to some prisons that have never seen an incident of self harm, but here I see it almost daily. Only a week ago, did a over tariff IPP cut his abdomen so bad that his intestines fell out! He had to hold his innards in his hands. Three weeks before that, a different prisoner did exactly the same thing. You really have to see it to believe it.

IPP’s needs to be looked at, and something put in place for our progression. It’s a common theme that we’ve all but lost hope for release and the future. At least make it easier to let us live out our lives in custody. Give us a wing to live on without having to put up with the drugs and violence, and the poor attitude of staff making life even more difficult for us. More opportunities and training is essential! Train up the youngsters with a trade to get out to! Give us some help to maintain self worth; give us hope! Our food is getting tampered with because the non sex offenders (mains) do all the cooking. We have had chemicals added to our wet food, the fly zapper emptied into our mash potato, and I even emptied a flask of soup out into a tray to serve, and there was a whole piece of human excrement at the bottom. That is only the tip of the iceberg, please believe me.

I hope this gives you a idea of what our daily life is like on the VP. Change has to happen. It cannot go on like this for us and it needs an outside intervention, please.

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In response to your “inquiry into the state of Welsh prisons”; here is my observation.

Being a prisoner on a ‘V.P.’ (Vulnerable Person’s) Wing; known here as ‘Houses’, my observations will reflect that perspective.

Having been in prison approaching seven years in three different establishments. HMP [prison in England], (contracted then to ***), HMP [prison in England], (contracted to ***), and HMP ***, I’m able to compare conditions at HMP ***.

HMP ***, as you will know is an ‘in-house’ prison – (which are known inside as Black and Whites, due presumably to the officer uniform colours).

My stay at HMP *** has only been recent, some twelve weeks by when you get this.

My experience of ‘V.P.’ prison conditions:- i.e. – segregation for safety reasons was at HMP [prison in England] 2016-2019 and here at HMP *** over the last twelve weeks or so.

HMP [prison in England], was until circa 2016 a ‘mixed’ – (‘mains’ and ‘V.P.’) establishment, when it finally converted to V.P. – though the term was no longer needed.

In light of this only [prison in England] compares with HMP *** – though having said that, [prison in England] is a very progressive establishment, which I would suggest the Welsh Affairs Committee should visit as part of your “inquiry into the future of Welsh prisons”.

As further background we need to take into account – the structures of the three prison sites:

- HMP [prison in England] and HMP [prison in England] are from the same ‘Building Pattern Book’ – with variations in layout – of which I recommend a parousal – (so as to compare with HMP ***).
- Both [prison in England] and [prison in England] were opened about a little over [number] years ago.
- The main distinguishing feature between [prison in England] and [prison in England], (on the one hand), and HMP ***, (on the other) – is hight of residential accommodation.
- Both [prison in England] and [prison in England] are two storey establishments.
- [Prison in England] has a ‘Two Pitch’ pattern as drawings will show. This gives a college campus feel to the place. (I presume you will have site plans).
- [Prison in England] has a sheltered housing estate feel to the residential area, with a more ‘industrial estate’ feel to the workshops area, (as you can see if you get plans and photos).

One negative aspect at [prison in England] compared to [prison in England] – is the exercise yard allocation.

In [prison in England] each wing has its own exercise yard.

At [prison in England] – due to the design features, two adjoining wings share a yard – this has an effect on the flexibility and smooth running of wing regime yard routeens, which complicates staff work unnecessarily.

HMP *** compounds the problems at [prison in England] – since four wings have to share one exercise yard – which exacerbates any attempts at wing regime management – meaning only one hour a day per wing cohort plus one mixed level worker's evening yard – [prison wings] at daily exercise.

All this further complicated by three flights of stairs – from ground floor to fourth floor upper winds 'main entrances'.

This all putting an inordinate strain on staff workloads. A situation which could have been avoided had procurers of the establishment engaged those involved in such establishments – Prison Managers/Governors, senior and middle management staff and inmates, and not relied on 'off the peg' designs by cowboys. Here again people management considerations were not factored in.

Finally, on 'Building Pattern Book' design, HMP *** as you probably know, is a [prison model]– a ***.

This design presumably for maximum staff utilization, (in theory) – practice appears somewhat different; and unfortunately proves [prison in England] Director's (Governor's) predictions to some of us at the time of HMP *** opening – 'that the design could lead to problems'.

As one involved for 18 years in the Housing Association movement, the work of the Rowntree Trust comes to mind – especially their work on the socio-economic characteristics of differing social strata of residents as tenants and owner-occupiers. Rowntree showed that different social strata behaved differently in various social settings. A case in point the 'Oxford' experiment – a middle class designed housing estate, housed by low income working class tenants – many unemployed. In a few years it apparently became a sink estate.

What I'm getting at is that running costs and staff efficiency considerations can be undermined if sociological and psychological conditions as well as socio-economic backgrounds of residents are not taken into consideration.

Further to this, I presented a Prison Reform Trust paper circa [2010-2019] on the subject [paper title]. In this short [number] word paper I observed prisoner characteristics I'd come across i.e. a cross section of ages, background, behaviours and cognizance as well as quite divergent sentence tariffs; plus numerous sociological, psychological and neurological issues, which some sections, more than others of the prison's service, are beginning to get a deeper understanding of.

In the paper I suggested the establishment, within the 'England and Wales Jurisdiction' of around *** prisons – to assess both new intake and revolving door 'old timers'. Then sort them out according to sentence length and issues. Fast tracking short termers into identified rehabilitation issues and putting them on appropriate rehabilitation courses prior to release, and if possible/necessary, conditional early release and compliance.

Further to this – a linked reform of sentencing policy linked to a post release strategy with outside rehabilitation centres – such as for example Rhoseren outside Aberystwyth, as 'half-way houses' for 'conditional post release rehabilitation,' in cases where deemed necessary.

This would require a change in sentencing policy, as well as a longer-term (10, 20, 30 years), media, press and public education policy regarding the need for progressive, (and not reactionary) judicial and custodial rehabilitation reform.

That is, a long-term social-cultural public education programme on the lines of the former 'seat belt' and 'drink drive' campaigns. So as to educate and inform, the political class (at all levels), the press and media as well as social media and thus the general public.

Done effectively this could transform all levels of society from this present negative and reactionary environment, which is frightening similar in a 21st century form to the early post World War One era across Europe, prior to the emergence of fascism.

And lets remind ourselves of Georgi Dimitrov's words after he defeated the Nazi court charge of burning the Reichstag: "Fascism will return – but in a guise we will not recognize."

My observations on a HMP *** V.P. wing.

This perspective can only reflect conditions on a small area of the prison – the two V.P. wings being only [fraction] of all wings on the three *** tower blocks.

My wing being [fraction] of them.

Various points observed:

- Induction wing.
- V.P. Induction.
- Wing regime.
- Lock up times.
- Wing association times.
- Yard exercise times.
- Gym. times.
- Chaplency times.
- Work allocation times.
- Wages.
- Education.
- Rehabilitation.
- Vaping.
- Canteen.
- Meal routine.
- Other matters: Recycling, welsh language.

HMP *** accommodation layout. As you will know from drawings, HMP ***, at present, has [number] four storey blocks on the *** model as described on the top of page three. Two V.P. wings are in *** Block on [prison wings].

V.P. Segregation Challenges.

The segregation considerations in such a building design, let alone out on the prison campus, pose some challenges to both prison management and prison staff who have to ensure safe working of such a system.

This is why you as the Welsh Affairs Committee, along with the Welsh Government and all Ministry of Justice organizations within Wales, should have a direct impact on all prison, (as well as probation and policing), matters in Wales, especially design specifications.

This should involve getting advice on the sociological and neurological impacts of various designs, by specialists such as the Rowntree Trust and others.

Ideally there should be a 'Welsh Prisons Working Party' to encompass all the above intended groups, and including the five Welsh police forces and representatives of the legal profession in Wales.

A short analysis of HMP *** V.P. wing.

Induction - Induction wing.

Since there is no V.P. [prison wing] I was placed in a 'Mains' cell with another newly arrived V.P. prisoner on the base of *** Block, on a 'mains' [prison wing].

This is understandable, though not desirable, due to V.P.s being only [fraction] of this prison's population.

No new prisoner induction on V.P. wings. This maybe due to current staff shortages, I don't know.

There is a room available between *** and *** V.P. wings, called the ***, which could be used.

No induction impacted less on me as a twice transferred prisoner, but is vital for new intake prisoners, and even more so as V.P. prisoners due to risks.

Wing regime staffing

Wing regime staffing appears to be the fly in the ointment of HMP *** smooth running as a prison, over and above design issues.

This factor has a direct impact not only on wing management, but also on the smooth running of all sub-departments, from health care to gym, chaplancy and other activities, including work – which at times have to be curtailed.

The causes you will aware of:

- The nature of the job's limited appeal
- Thus the high turnover
- The elephant in the room – the impact of Brexit on recruitment
- The newness and inexperience of many prison staff

The main issue – poor line management. This is probably due to two factors – staff retention and inexperience.

This is compounded by no clear wing management, due to the above factors, compounded by constant 'lock-ups', which waste staff time and induce a negative 'them' and 'us' 'wing culture'.

This is caused by willy nilly wing staff deployment, who often are not familiar with the wing or its residents – hence a very negative atmosphere between many prisoners and staff – which is not conducive to good rehabilitation practice – nor to identify any outlying issues some prisoners may have:- various mental issues, including elements of Aspergers, also isolation, especially in some new intakes of all ages, and cognitive decline in some elderly prisoners due to lack of interaction and motivation. Also the highly sedentary regime routine, which exaserbates the above.

Various points observed

- Induction wing – only on 'mains' wing in [prison wing]. No V.P. induction wing.
- V.P. Induction – No V.P. induction, as far as I know – maybe due to staffing issues.

- Wing Regime – Again due to staffing issues, if not in work, 22-23 hour lock-up. Association on wings 1 hour PM M-Th, or alternate days M-Th. Non F, 1 hour Sat, Sun PM. Wing Yard: 1 hour 7 days a week – yard exercise.
- Gym Times – Circa 1 hour – I get one session Sat AM. There is one M, PM, and I believe Sun AM plus enhanced prisoners.
- Chaplency Times – Christian-Protestant V.P. service 2nd 1 hour service Sun AM. When volunteers available M PM Bible class on [prison wing] – ‘social room’, called the ***.
- Work allocation – M-Th, either morning or afternoon shifts – not both times. No F. shift.
- Wages – Wages vary c. £10-11.00 – plus talk of introducing a bonus scheme pension £8.00 – 0.70p for T.V. (10p a day).
- Education – None on V.P. wing (I don’t know if there was before covid/Brexit).
- Rehabilitation – I’ve not heard of any on V.P. during the last 12 weeks – This may be due to prison officer and/or education staff shortage.
- The *** room, while small – a small sitting room size, could be adapted for social, educational and rehabilitation purposes. At the moment it appears to be under utilized.
- Wing Regime – Is to all intents and purposes non-existent.
- Comparison – To put it simply ‘B’ Cat (Category) HMP [prison in England] V.P. wings had a far more open regime on the 2016-19 period, as probably was the case here, prior to Covid, Brexit and wage inflation issues.
- Vaping – There appears no vaping – non vaping cell allocation here.
 - Non-vapers are not catered for.
 - This is a violation of policy.
 - In my case, as one who had a heart attack 12 years ago, I shared a vaper pad-mate until a week ago. Others are in a similar position.
 - Also, probably due to staff shortages, vapes are not confined to cells.
 - Though having said that – I observed the highly addictive nature of vapes – far more than cigarettes even.
 - This leading to debt and debt issues, and sometimes to violence issues.
- Canteen – A good range of products, despite recent price inflation.
- Meal Routine – A very restrictive ‘open up’ and ‘close down’ cells, straight away regime – which means staff spend ages running around from cell door to door opening up and locking down cells.
 - Again, this could be due to staff shortages and possibly fear of either violence (rate on this wing) or drug issues – an ongoing issue.
- Other Matters –
 - Recycling: Though there seems to be a plan for recycling in the offing, it has yet to materialise – due no doubt to staffing issues. Recycling at present is totally non-existent.
 - Suggestion: A fully implemented recycling scheme wing by wing could not only help the environment, but could provide prison jobs and certified work experience training and possibly create an income base for the prison, albeit on a small scale. It would also educate the whole prison population as regards the needs and benefits of recycling.
 - Welsh Language: Again, so I understand from the library, there are future plans to develop a Welsh learners and readers group, which for now are held up due to staff shortages.
 - Suggestions: Keep a record of prisoners language(s) – English, Welsh and others.
 - Possibly have wing Welsh language mentors
 - Go (over time) to fully bilingual signage in the prison.
 - Introduce structured and certified Welsh language “Deep Imersion Course” – ‘Mini Ulpans’.

- Plus Welsh language reading and writing course.
- Also suitable Welsh language laptop learning and audio-visual material.
- HMP *** have a dedicated roving Welsh language and society promoting officer, who could help at HMP ***.

Major Weaknesses in Regime - Bad Communication Systems

Basically, as last years prison visit notes – responses to prisoner requests in some departments fall by the wayside, as has been my experience on several occasions, e.g.

- Mislaidd property on arrival – all my legal rehabilitation programme
- Education and creative writing work
- Every query was basically ‘fobbed off’ – this again no doubt due to huge work overload.

A view to overhaul prison line management

This from my observation is the weak link in HMP *** management, due no doubt to staffing issues and training as well as experience levels.

Conclusion – Some Issues

If we are honest with ourselves, many prison issues are external. Not only socially, but politically.

As politicians you are often caught, as its said, between a rock and a hard place, i.e. between media hacks and so-called social media and opportunistic journalism.

This in turn creates a turbulent political atmosphere on a parliamentary level, resulting electoral representatives often having to respond to whipped up hysteria on all sorts of issues – especially in this internet era.

A case in point being the judicial system, which often becomes the whipping boy of reactionary opportunism. Hence our present prisons overcrowding issues and judicial backlogs.

On a Welsh prisons and judicial level, maybe the Welsh Affairs Committee can see a way forward.

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I’m a [50-59] year old Welsh prisoner, and have been in and out of prison since [date], 35 years to be exact, I’ve seen the system change over 4 decades, I won’t go into details but we really need to get together as I have solutions to problems in the system from the prisons to the probation etc. I’ve been in now for [number] years for armed robbery, I’ve been deemed unsuitable for rehab courses, so I took it upon myself to educate myself (IGCSE Higher Maths) 7mths, I’m just about to start my second year at Open University in Astrophysics, but I’m coming up against a lot of flake in the system and I don’t know why.

2nd Letter

Thank you so much for answering my letter. I was well chuffed when I opened the letter its not everyday you receive a letter from a “Rt Hon”.

My full intention is the state of the whole estate especially welsh prisons. I have over 34 years of coming to prison and every sentence has been over 12mths. 18mths – 17 years E.D.S. In order ([date] 30 mths) ([date] 12mths + 12 mths) ([date] 18 mths) ([date] 5 yrs) ([date] 4yrs 9 mths) ([date] 11yrs 6mths) ([date] 17yrs E.D.S).

After seeing your ‘ad’ in the Inside Times asking for Welsh prisoners to contribute their opinion on the state of Welsh prisons.

1) Living Conditions: HMP *** prison’s living Conditions are one of the best I’ve seen, due to the fact its only been open [number] years. One of the main reasons go down in either old fittings not being maintained, or prisoners not being trained properly into cleaning, and staff not monitoring workers when they should. Pay can be an issue, as if your BIC’s tracked and expected to clean a landing or shower for £10.00 a week there’s no incentive there for the prisoner to do the job properly. As BICS the British Institute for Cleaning Science is a fully recognised certificate with various skills including full bio-hazard training again different prisons have different pay rates. And if a prisoner can cut a corner and still get the extra pay for cleaning a Bio-hazard they will. Private prison’s *** always pay more than the public sector prisons and that can have a big effect on a prison, again especially if staff are not monitoring the work.

2) Overcrowding: answers its own question that’s a no brainer.

3) Safety: This area could be split up into different categories: Mental heath, OCGs, lack of staff, (a big one staff training), the regime.

4) Education: there are good teachers within the welsh estate and there are bad ones, unfortunately education has also become a business, where the education dept will put you on a course that has no progression value for your rehabilitation, sometimes it feels like they are just wanting the numbers, on the flipside of that there are good opportunities. Like Railtrack. It is getting better and easier for x-prisoners to gain employment, a lot more apprenticeships would be a good thing.

5) Weapons will always be a problem, and they are becoming more prevalent especially with the younger prisoner. Again active monitoring by staff would reduce the problem but never iradicate it. Drugs, where do you start? One way you could go is to seriously punish the dealer and help the user at the minute it’s the other way round. Again staff training on entry points of drugs into the prison, as the availability is that it is just as easy to get drugs in jail as it is outside of prison.

6) The welsh language in *** wales prisons is practically non-existent, HMP *** have run welsh speaking classes to be honest there is no point in wasting time and money, HMP *** in *** Wales I'm unaware of how there prison adopts welsh speaking classes.

7) Rehabilitation, is practically a lottery in respects of what course you will be put on and who gets to go on. Until you get the staff to facilitate the programmes in a way that the prisoner wants to engage as part of there sentence then again there are a lot of prisoner's who are unhappy in not being able to progress through there sentence because they can't get on the relevant programmes to help them progress towards release.

There is an age category of prisoners that are being forgotten about within the system and that's the over 45-50s, as the majority of them are non-control issues there needs and wants go over looks as most of the staff resources are used to deal with the younger prisoner, as the next generation of prisoner has no respect for authority within the prison and with staff becoming younger and younger with no life or lived experience it's a ticking time bomb, some of the assaults on staff that I've seen over the last 10yrs is shocking on female staff as well. Prisoners should have more say about there sentence it then makes them more accountable through there progression of there sentence. Jails need to become more like prisons and not places where you came to sell drugs make money and meet new drug dealers and criminals. I have realistic solutions/projects that could be looked into more and even trialed in certain prisons. Let me know if your seriously interested. I'm studying Astro-physics with the OU by the way.

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I am writing to you on behalf of my fiancé who is currently in HMP ***. My fiancé and I wish to remain anonymous.

My fiancé got your details from the Inside Times newspaper, and wish to write about the ongoings that are happening at HMP ***. My fiancé is only in prison on a recall, and has been since [date]. My fiancé suffers with severe mental health which the Prison Officers are aware of; However: the things that my fiancé has heard, and seen are absolutely disgusting.

My fiancé can hear the Officers and inmates talking about him and when he goes and asks the Officers what they said, they said "It's all in your head," but my step-son can hear them too. It affects my fiancé's mental health even more as it's occurring all day everyday.

Some of the Officers are corrupt, what I mean by that is inmates having mobile phones and drugs brought into the prison, and some officers are aware. Officers are victimizing my fiancé and it's despicable, and they are going off what the inmates are saying.

There does need to be improvements made 100%. More help with rehabilitation, not enough on the Welsh Language being taught. There's overcrowding in there and their safety is a concern. My fiancé has completed all the courses the Parole Board has asked him to do and he has to stay in prison until [date], which I think is absurd.

One officer has even asked my fiancé's ex-cellmate to set him up. WHY?? All my fiancé does is work all day everyday, then 9 times out of 10, he's on the phone to me. The inmates are constantly calling my fiancé's name, he can hear them mentioning all sorts, and I tell him to tell the Officers but yet again he's told "It's all in your head".

I am very concerned about my fiancé's mental health, and the state he gets in when he rings me. The availability of drugs in there is definitely on the increase and not a lot of rehabilitation. I think if the officers done for the inmates regarding things such as the Welsh Language and classes, the prison will run smoothly, but as it stands the Officers are allowing the inmates to have free range of the prison and that is not right.

Officers should treat inmates with mental health with respect instead of mis-treating them. The prison definitely needs investigating. It's disgusting that my fiancé has to wait to see a Psychiatrist, where is the prison's duty of care. My fiancé's safety is my only concern, and if he was released into my care then I can and will get the help he desperately needs.

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I am writing in response to an article I read within INSIDE TIMES.

I am a [40-49] year old life sentence prisoner who has been at HMP *** for ***, prior to this I was located in the High Security Category A estate. For a lifer such as myself the establishment fails to accommodate any of my needs as a life sentence prisoner. A new policy was recently introduced banning the annual clothing parcel except if you are transgender or from the LGBTQ+ community then you are allowed 2 annual clothing parcels. You are also permitted to purchase footwear and clothing from Amazon, however anyone not from the community is not permitted. There is very little continuity and consistency from senior management whom you very rarely have any opportunity to see. Staffing levels are very poor although in my experience here most staff are very pleasant. It does not take a degree to see that HMP *** is focused on *** as opposed to Rehabilitating. Methadone is so prevalent here, there seems to be absolutely no encouragement to get people off it. So *** gets them intoxicated for their entire sentence then releases them into the community only to come straight back again where the cycle starts all over again.

My experience of HMP *** is that the establishment encourages needy dependant behaviour as opposed to providing people with real skills such as independence and self-reliance. Recent generations are far more bone-idle and pampered and very self absorbed and entitled. When you draw comparisons to war generations, who are tough, resilient, independent and not needy. HMPPS should operate to instil by force if necessary those lost morals and values of our war generations.

- Self-reliance
- Pride
- Community Spirit
- Independence
- Hard workers
- The re-introduction of National Service should be considered.

In terms of prison, it fails dramatically at the purpose it is used for and when you delve into what actually really goes on within the walls you realise that the Public/society are actually being put at more risk when you warehouse people with complex needs and issues in a place where those issues become more complex. You then release them back into the community. A total contradiction to imprisoning people in the first place. Please feel free to contact me should you require any further contributions.

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I am currently in HMP *** no Rehabilitation, support or mental health support, Drugs everywhere no support. Left to your own devices, canteen items are expensive yet wages have not gone up. Chips, Donuts, cakes no vegetables, salad or fruit to buy on canteen yet you can purchase make up, skirts, leggings and mascara on the canteen and food is unhealthy, locked up a lot. People who assault staff and prisoners are rewarded yet well-behaved inmates are forgotten about backwards that is... Discrimination, Abuse of power etc... No Progression in here its just a Dumping Ground worst *** jail ever... NO Incentive or reward for being enhanced and following regime and rules and procedures. Changes is needed throughout top to bottom, food, regime, treatment, support, visits for people who live far like North Wales, Kent, London, Surrey. Thank you.

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My name is *** and I am a prisoner at HMP *** in ***. I am serving a two-year sentence and I have been in 5 different prisons during my sentence. 2 of these have been in Wales (HMP *** and HMP ***) so I believe I can provide some insight. HMP *** (as prisons go) was quite impressive. There was an emphasis on education and the Welsh Language, regular keyworking meetings, healthy food and good staff who were fair and professional. HMP *** however, is the opposite. There are no Welsh Lessons, staff are incompetent (the typical response time to an Emergency cell buzzer is 30-40 minutes) and can take days to complete simple tasks when politely asked 3 times or more per day by a prisoner for something as simple as a Comp-1 or DIRF form.

Furthermore, there are no regular keyworking sessions and the situation with food is diabolical. I am a Vegetarian with allergies to peas and lentils who is still waiting for an appropriate dietary arrangement. Often I cannot eat the food provided so I go hungry. I have complained and nothing has been done. We have no option to buy our own fruit and vegetables as none are available on the Canteen. Impromptu “Lockdowns” are common, with the last one lasting 4 weeks straight. Just this week we have been given mouldy fruit twice and my wing *** served frozen chicken to the prisoners for lunch this week too. Please do something, we are still human beings after all.

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To inside times

I am writing in response to your article asking about the prisons in Wales. I am currently a prisoner at HMP *** and I would like to just highlight the change since the last time I was here in [year], the food has changed for the better dramatically since last time.

There is hardly any spice/drugs going around which intern makes the this prison very safe.

You have to swap 1-4-1 razors since a officer was slashed so self harm and people getting slashed just doesn't happen. My medication which I have been on for years for addiction-schizophrenic-bi-polar were sorted the very next day on arrival and although the staff are mostly new they are as helpful and fare as they can be.

The floors used to be all ripped up and patchy, now all new flooring and new beds and cupboards and new windows, so overall this jail has improved a lot not gone backwards.

I would like to remain anonymous in the paper if published.

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I write this letter as a disabled, wheelchair using Prisoner who has been held in *** Wales’ *** Prison for over [number] years. As a Lifer of now nearly [number] years I can only honestly say this is THE WORST RUN PRISON IN THE ESTATE. It was opened in [year] to a fanfare of having ‘HMP *** values’ and a new way of treating Prisoners. The original Governor [name] was then removed within *** due to allegation(s) of ***. [Name] then held the reins for *** before a failed Governor at another Prison was sideways moved here – [name]. Over *** years now he has mismanaged the BEST BUILT Prison in the Estate into a den of iniquity where ‘duty of care’ and Rehabilitation are just Non existent. He has overseen a staff team so demoralised by his not fit for office action(s) that HMP *** now has the highest resignation rate for staff in the Estate, and 16 female staff have been sacked and/or imprisoned for their varying nefarious acts. He has, like in HMP [prison in England], had No drug strategy in the Prison. This has resulted in deaths, mental health deterioration, debt, bullying, and serious self-harm. As in his other Governor roles in other Prisons, he has systematically kept men suffering severe mental health conditions in the Segregation Unit. Anyone of us men who raise our voices here via the press, MPs (me to ***, *** and others regularly) are brutalised on *** orders, resulting in staff assaults on me, us, threats and bullying by staff, Basic regime, No pay etc, etc, etc. He has also allowed Healthcare Safer Custody, and Security to breach Policy, rules, PSIs when it comes to disability needs. The OMU department here is SHOCKINGLY badly run. Staff have no real understanding of Parole, Re-Cat, Tag etc, and Psychological assessments for men to do courses to progress to Cat ‘O’ and release can take YEARS to be undertaken. Employment and Education figures here are ridiculously low. There are now nearly 2,000 men held here but with nowhere near enough places to work, learn, earn. Canteen prices are through the roof, whilst wages are on the floor.

That’s a regime that leads to drug dealing, bullying, debt, self-harm, mental health abuses.

Senior staff are only in their Governor, Custodial Manager, Senior Officer roles because there are NO long-term, experienced staff willing to come here under this TEAM of Governor(s). [Name] never sacks anyone in a Senior role here despite the YEARS of abuses to us! That then sets the tone of Senior Staff knowing they can do anything they want because they are never demoted or removed. EVERY Custodial Manager, Senior Officer, and Governor grade here needs to be retrained before keeping their roles. NONE of them have any real understanding of rules, Policy frameworks, PSIs, because they’ve simply been allowed to work without having bi-annual appraisals by line-managers. Area management for Welsh Prisons also needs a full overhaul as they come in here non-regularly and allow this place to continue to be so poorly mismanaged. I am a former professional outside and the running of this Prison is shocking. The Governing TEAM here must urgently be replaced, and they all must be demoted and relocated, or sacked. Their totality of incompetence is now, over many years, nothing short of corruption.

[Name] MP has recently praised HMP *** but hasn’t been here ([name] MP) doesn’t ever talk to the men on the wings. If they did the Governor(s) would either show them around the VP wings, not general population, and hand pick chosen men who are in the pocket of management.

If HMPPS are going to open so-called ‘*** Prisons’ then they MUST have *** staffing levels in them, a *** budget to run them, and a Management TEAM who follow rules, PSIs, Policy frameworks, and HRs.

HMP *** truly does have the capabilities to be THE BEACON PRISON FOR REHABILITATION but not in its current format.

The *** Houseblocks should be run separately but under One Prison ethos! *** -Remands, VPs, *** -CAT 'B' LONGTERMERS and CAT 'C' Course Programs. *** – CAT 'C' Course finishers, trusted jobmen, CAT 'D', Parole, release men, ROTLs.

'[Name]' (Prison Governor – oh, the fun police in MOJ must have been wetting themselves...) is due to finally leave here at the end of [date].

"Please" bring in a Pro-active, younger Governor TEAM who have the experience, knowledge, capabilities, and WANT to run HMP *** with a real culture of Rehabilitation.

All HMP *** has done thus far has churn out MORE criminally minded, drug-addled, mental health suffering men back into the communities to steal, deal, rob, defraud, maim, and kill the people its meant to change for. This Prison is a smoke and mirrors, massaged figures, debacle of how NOT to run prisons.

I don't know if this is what you were looking for? Most likely not. Someone needs to be willing to say this to you all so here I am.

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Dear Chairman,

I write having seen an article in the September issue of Inside Times, and that the Committee would like to hear from prisoners in or have served in Welsh prisons.

One would like to invite you and all other committee members to PLEASE come and visit HMP ***. I send this invite as I genuinely believe that you will not believe what I have to say and the only way you will believe me is to visit the prison and witness it for yourself.

- Living conditions:
 - Parts of the prison are not. The older parts of this prison are in need of up-dating. The showers are not fit for purpose. Cells are in poor condition.
- Overcrowding:
 - Every prison is suffering the increase in numbers. It becomes dangerous when the number of people on a wing increases but still only have 2 officers when there should be 3 or 4.
- Safety:
 - In a word, poor. Overcrowded wings with not enough staff will always only end up one-way. Some wings with the appropriate number of staff doesn't mean anything because 99% of the staff are either too idle and incompetent! Or intimidated to do anything. Mobile phones, weapons and drugs in this prison are better stocked than canteen and food.
- Education:
 - If there are enough staff in to run it you get it. There are not enough spaces for people to have a fair crack of the whip.
- Rehabilitation:
 - Mr Chairman, I have been in prison for [number] years. I have been in prison in Scotland and England before coming to Wales. There is no such thing as rehabilitation in prisons. Despite the many millions of pounds in tax-payers money wasted on nonsense like Offending Behaviour Courses re-offending in the UK is huge. Thinking Skills Programme has been running in prison for many years, it is the most widely used offending behaviour programme in UK prisons. In a recent evaluation of the course compared looked at reoffending rates of individuals who have completed TSP. The study involved 20,000 people who completed TSP, meaning results are seen as reliable. Among individuals that had completed TSP 46.5% reoffended within 2 years of release, suggesting 1 out of every 60 people who complete the course will be deterred from committing a crime. 1 out of every 60 people. That's alright if those people are paedophiles, rapists and or murderers, 1 out of 60 won't reoffend. The Sex Offender Treatment Programme was stopped after 25 years in 2015/2016 as evaluation proved it made sex offenders worse and reoffend. Control Anger and Learn to Manage It Course has been stopped because evaluation proved that done nothing at all. We now have Kaizen Course, how long will it be before evaluation proves that makes people worse, does nothing or proves that 1 out of 60 won't violently attack someone? Look at Norway. Reoffending rates are that low its not worth recording. Look at Finland. Their rates are that low too.

What are they clearly doing wrong? They must be doing something wrong! Teaching people skills, jobs, trades, educating. That will reduce reoffending. As it stands, I come to prison. If I'm in long enough I can do an offending behaviour course that will make me worse or do very little. I've served my time and get out. I can't get a job due to my convictions. I can't get a job as I still have no education worth having. I then get offered a job after a year or 2 on benefits of £100 and some pounds every 2 weeks. My job is minimum wage working 48 hours a week. After rent, food, bills, tax and the rest I've got £1.36 left. Or I can go back to selling heroine or cocaine making £15,000 per month tax-free, only "working" 16 hours a week. When Britain was executing criminals did it stop people committing murder? NO! When Britain started giving life sentences did that stop murders? NO! Since Britain started giving Whole life orders, has that stopped people committing murder? NO!!! Has the threat of execution lowered crime rates in America? NO! Mr Chairman, I say this as a serving life sentenced prisoner who is a murderer. I have seen Britain's "rehabilitation". I have seen Britain's reoffending rates. If the committee, if MPs, if those who can change things want to ignore someone like me, fine! If you truly do want to lower the offending rates and want to rehabilitate offenders you really need to open your ears and listen. Once you have listened actually take action.

- Drugs and weapons:
 - As I said previously, plentiful. What do you want? Here in HMP *** some of the wings have very poorly designed windows. Further to this are the idle, incompetent and possibly retarded staff. There are windows in cells that have no "glass"! It is an open hole. In a lot of cases this has been the reality for months. Drugs, mobile phones and weapons are freely and openly passed from cell to cell because there is no "glass". Drones are flown straight to cells because there is no "glass". Prison staff and prisoners have things like paint, urine, excrement, cups and a whole manner of things thrown at them because there is no "glass". The only reasons to remove the glass from the window are:
 - To smuggle illicit items into the prison! Or
 - To attempt to escape lawful custody!
 - Nobody has been removed from this prison to a higher security prison! The windows remain open holes for many months. And the Head of Security finds it appropriate to photocopy mail, ban clothing parcels and stick his head in the sand.
- Welsh language:
 - Not used, taught, or encouraged as much as it should be in a Welsh prison.
- Activities:
 - By way of employment within the prison, they are more of a punishment. There is nothing of any worth that would be of any use outside of prison. Activities for entertainment and socialising, again, very little of any worth. I personally have a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector Level 3 qualification, meaning I am a tutor. I have offered many times to comprise and mentor basic origami, 3D origami, crystal art painting, match stick modelling, peer mentoring and other course up to level 2. None of my offers have been considered! Amongst the minority of prisoners who have an IQ above 10 there is a gold mine of knowledge, experience and individuals who genuinely want to make a positive difference.
- Food:
 - The most difficult thing prisons have to offer is the catering course. I have never seen anyone pass it yet. The food budget per day per prisoner was £2.16 per day. It

is now £2.70. At £2.16 per day x 1,700 prisoners = £3,672 per day = £1,340,280 a year. Even at £2.70 a day the catering department here are not spending £2.16 per day per prisoner. Not a chance. HMP *** is ***.

- Healthcare:
 - In 2019 I requested an ADHD test despite not being assessed nor spoken too one of the medical “professionals” judged that I did not meet the criteria for a test. The parole board last year recommended I should do one-to-one trauma based therapy sessions. Over a year later nothing has happened. Not one of their recommendations has been actioned.
- Incentives:
 - The IEP scheme that “rewards” good behaviour. What a load of nonsense this really is. Here in HMP *** you are rewarded better if you misbehave. I am an Enhanced Prisoner and have been for some time. As it stands I can spend £33 per week from my private cash. Great... But my family can not afford to send me money thus I have no private cash. I get 6 hours of visits per month. Brilliant... But my family cannot afford to travel to visit me. I have seen my family ONCE in 7 years. I can have extra gym sessions. Yes... But I have old injuries which mean I cannot go to the gym. Every 4 months I can spend £100 on the M and M clothing magazine or Argos or Amazon. Nice... But my family cannot afford to send me money! Argos do not issue magazines! M and M magazines are as common as rocking horse excrement! And prisoners are not allowed internet access and staff are not allowed to do it for us. So what incentives are they for me as a reward for my positive behaviour? If you misbehave the prison and its staff will give all that you desire so you stop being a problem.

Mr Chairman, as I have said, if you think I am lying or that “surely it can’t be that bad”, please test me! If you announce your visit things will be covered up and hidden. If you do an unannounced visit you will see the whole ugly rotten truth, and I will be here to answer every single question you may have.

I sincerely hope this makes a difference. I sincerely hope you visit this prison. I sincerely hope that those in power with power actually listen and take action.

Thank you most kindly.

Yours most sincerely,

[Name]