



Welsh Affairs Committee

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From the Chair

22 May 2024

Rt Hon Edward Argar MP
Minister for Prisons, Parole and Probation

Dear Edward,

I would like to reiterate my thanks to you and Mr Barrow for appearing before the Committee on 15 May 2024, as part of our inquiry into Prisons in Wales.

There are several matters on which the Committee would be grateful for further information, as well as a few instances in which you agreed to provide further detail to the Committee following the session.

HMP Parc

In [Q264](#), I asked you whether there were any staff at HMP Parc currently under investigation for trafficking drugs. You agreed to take advice regarding what you were able to say on the matter, and to write to me subsequently.

Additionally, you agreed to provide data on the number of staff dismissed from prisons in Wales as a result of investigations into the conveyance of drugs and other contraband. I would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with this information too.

Education

During the Committee's visit to HMP Cardiff in February 2024, we were told by staff that for many prisoners learning to read was a "massive step". Staff raised concerns that such achievements were not sufficiently recognised within HMPPS' current training, skills and work performance assessments. Given this, will your Department consider reviewing the way HMPPS assesses training, skills and work performance?

The Committee has been told that the way in which education is delivered within prisons does not necessarily meet the needs of a significant number of the prison population. Additionally, it has been suggested that peer learning approaches be incorporated as a means of engaging neurodiverse learners. How confident are you that the current prison education system meets the needs of neurodivergent prisoners, and what, if any, plans do you have to incorporate peer learning into the prison education system?

Employment

The Committee recognises that gaining skills and securing a job is an integral part of a prisoner's rehabilitation, which has been shown to help reduce reoffending. However, businesses in Wales have told us that prison staffing shortages, which result in resettlement staff being reallocated to operational roles, are resulting in courses not being filled and Release on Temporary Licence opportunities going to waste. What, if any, measures are in place to ensure fewer employment opportunities are lost as a result of staff shortages?

Businesses also spoke of the impact that prisoner transfers can have on prisoners' ability to complete courses and take on opportunities, which was exacerbated by the lack of uniformity in the provision of employment, skills and related support across the Welsh prison estate. What steps are you taking to reduce the impact of these transfers, and what, if any, measures are in place to ensure there is uniformity in the employment opportunities provided across the Welsh prison estate?

Housing

Housing policy is devolved to the Welsh Government, however HMPPS funds several housing advisor roles to provide housing support to prisoners. The Committee was struck by the number of stakeholders operating in this space and was told by stakeholders that there was a need for clarity and co-ordination in order to improve the effectiveness of prisoner housing pathways. What can your Department do to clarify and co-ordinate the housing support available to prisoners?

Additionally, the Committee has been told that some prisoners are not being provided with suitable post-release accommodation as a result of Local Authority resettlement teams not being notified by prisons in sufficient time to prepare a resettlement plan. What is causing delays on HMPPS' side when engaging with external organisations, such as Local Authorities, and what steps are you taking to reduce such delays?

Health

Health is another policy area devolved to the Welsh Government, and the Committee was encouraged to hear of the close working relationship between Public Health Wales and HMPPS. However, multiple reports have found that prisoners are having to wait too long in prisons, often in unsuitable conditions, before being transferred to specialist mental health facilities when in crisis. What steps is your Department taking to ensure that prisoners are suitably supported whilst awaiting transfer to a specialist facility?

The predecessor Welsh Affairs Committee identified issues around continuity of treatment when transferring prisoners undergoing substance misuse treatment from prisons in England to prisons in Wales. To what extent do these problems remain, and has a transition arrangement between NHS Wales and HMPPS been established yet?

I would be grateful for a response by 7 June 2024.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen', followed by a small horizontal dash.

Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP