HOUSE OF COMMONS

Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation in Wales, HC 702

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Ruth Jones (Chair); David Chadwick; Ann Davies; Gill German; Ben Lake; Llinos Medi; Andrew Ranger.

Questions 1 - 37

Witnesses

I: Elisabeth Davies, National Chair, Independent Monitoring Boards; and Charlie Taylor, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

II: Su McConnel, Executive Member, Napo Cymru; Hugh McDyer, Regional Organiser, UNISON Cymru; and Gethin Jones, Executive Committee Member, Public and Commercial Services Union.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Elisabeth Davies and Charlie Taylor.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this oral evidence session of the Welsh Affairs Committee. My name is Ruth Jones and I am the Chair of the Committee. I am very pleased to introduce our first session in our inquiry into prisons, probation and rehabilitation in Wales. In our first panel this afternoon, we will be hearing from scrutiny bodies who are responsible for monitoring conditions within prisons and the welfare of those held in prisons. Our second panel will feature trade unions that represent staff working in the Prison and Probation Service in Wales.

It is quite warm in here today, so if Members or witnesses would like to remove their jackets, please feel free to do so. Before I begin our first session, I will ask Committee members to declare any interests that are relevant to today's session. If not, we will carry on.

Welcome to you both, Charlie Taylor and Elisabeth Davies. Thank you very much for coming and appearing in person before us this afternoon. It is so helpful when people come in person, so that is really appreciated. I will ask you to briefly introduce yourselves and explain the role of your organisations in monitoring prisons.

Charlie Taylor: My name is Charlie Taylor. I am His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, and our role is to report on the treatment, conditions and outcomes for prisoners across the 123 prisons over the two countries. We also do immigration detention, military detention and court custody as well.

Elisabeth Davies: Thank you very much. I am Elisabeth Davies, the National Chair of the Independent Monitoring Boards. The Independent Monitoring Boards, or IMBs, monitor prison and young offenders institutions across England and Wales and they monitor immigration detention facilities, including chartered flight removals across the UK. There are about 141 IMBs in all, with 1,200 members. They are comprised of unpaid public appointees. They are drawn from the local community, and are often referred to as the eyes and ears of the local community.

We work quite closely with HMIP, Mr Taylor, and his inspectors. We play a crucial part, obviously, in the independent oversight of places of detention. Last year, members made just over 35,000 visits. If you are thinking about the difference between IMB members and inspectors, it is probably worth reflecting on the fact that IMB members are in and out of prisons weekly, which is quite different from members of the Prisons Inspectorate, for example. Their regular presence matters hugely in terms of preventing ill treatment.

Q2 **Chair:** You said you work closely together. Is there any way that the collaboration between you could be improved or is there anything that is a barrier or blocking it?

Charlie Taylor: The fact we have offices that are directly next door to each other means that the collaboration is very good. We have informal meetings regularly and talk to each other around the office, but we also have a memorandum of understanding between the two organisations, which means that we will always read IMB reports before we come in, but we will also always consult the Chair of the IMB when we go to inspect a prison. The information that we get from the IMB is incredibly helpful as evidence that we can use as part of the inspection.

Elisabeth Davies: I think there is just that commitment to triangulating the data, if you like—a commitment to sharing the support and sharing the learning. That is what the commitment exists to do. Whether that is happening informally or formally in the prison context, it is happening.

Chair: That is helpful, thank you.

Q3 **David Chadwick:** Good afternoon, prynhawn da. Our predecessor Welsh Affairs Committee ran an inquiry into prisons in 2024. Since then, clearly, there has been a change in Government and the capacity crisis has continued to mount significant operational challenges. What are the most significant challenges facing the Welsh prison estate today and have they evolved over the last year?

Elisabeth Davies: One of the primary issues is, unsurprisingly, population pressures. You have just alluded to it there. I would say that England and Wales are equally affected by population pressures. However, there are some specific concerns raised by Welsh IMBs. We have an increase in out-of-area prisoners arriving at Swansea Prison, for example, where they are having a destabilising effect. These arrivals tend to be later in the day, so they are negatively impacting the reception processes, and the prison has seen an increase in self-harm, violence and substance misuse rates as a result.

At Usk and Prescoed, we are seeing prisoners who have arrived and they are not ready for open conditions. They are not expecting open conditions or they are misinterpreting what to expect with regard to open conditions. I will just give you an example. We were talking to one prisoner who was expecting to see their family and be working in the community soon after arrival into open conditions, whereas in reality that takes about 20 weeks. There is a mismatch around their expectations.

I talked briefly about population pressures, but staffing issues are a general concern of Welsh IMBs as well. Again, I would say that that is not unique to Wales. Most boards report concern with staffing levels and inexperience, particularly at Berwyn in north Wales, where in January 2024 over 40% of the band 3 prison officers—they are the officers who have supervisory responsibilities—had been in Berwyn for less than 12 months. The staffing issue is very real.

Access to illicit items is also a concern that IMBs are raising. I do not know if you want to pick up on anything there, Charlie, but I would say

population pressures, staffing concerns and access to illicit items are the big three.

Q4 **David Chadwick:** To follow up on that—you mentioned January 2024—the second half of the question was about how issues have evolved since last year. Can you answer that part of the question?

Elisabeth Davies: I would say the issues have remained pretty much the same, because these are not new issues. If you speak to IMB members, for example, they will feel that they have been raising these issues consistently, time and again, in annual reports over a number of years.

Charlie Taylor: Just to add to that, I would say that the difference that we have seen has been increasing ingress of drugs, and using drones to get contraband into prisons. We are seeing that as something that has become much more common. Serious organised crime is making a huge amount of money with very big mark-ups, being able to fly drones in and out very quickly. They are often hard to detect. The technology they use is often a step ahead of the technology that the Prison Service has.

There are also unique vulnerabilities in certain prisons. For example, Parc currently has a programme to replace its windows to make them more defendable, but at the moment the windows at Parc can be very easily breached by drone ingress. That is one of the reasons why drug use at that prison has become such a concern.

However, in terms of Elisabeth's other point, population pressures are particularly affecting Swansea, Cardiff and Berwyn, which is now taking a remand population from the north-west of England. It was originally designed for a small remand population from Wales and then a larger category C population from the north-west of England and from north Wales.

Finally, on the issue of staffing, the last thing I would mention is lack of purposeful activities, so prisoners not having enough to do with their time. Actually, some of the purposeful activity scores in Welsh prisons are slightly better than they are in prisons in England. We and our colleagues at Estyn will give a rating for prisons in Wales. Things are slightly better, I would say, on that front in Wales, but they are not nearly good enough. Prisoners are not doing enough of the activities that the public would expect them to be doing, such as working, training and education, which will make them less likely to reoffend when they come out.

Chair: I am sure we will return to prisoner activity in a minute.

Q5 **Andrew Ranger:** Thank you both for coming. I want to expand a bit on what you have already touched on. How are prisons in Wales performing when compared with equivalent prisons in the English estate? I will start with Ms Davies, please.

Elisabeth Davies: I would suggest that broadly we are seeing parallels across the English and the Welsh estate, which I talked about in terms of the population pressures, the staffing pressures, and the illicit items. I do not think there is any real difference to highlight. We are seeing some issues, which I have talked about, that relate to specific out-of-area issues. What we are seeing is that there might be a difference across different categories, but we are not seeing a difference across different parts of England and different parts of Wales.

Charlie Taylor: When we inspect prisons, we inspect them against our expectations, and included in our expectations are our four healthy prison assessments. We assess prisons for the levels of safety, and for respect—which includes things like staff-prisoner relationships, healthcare and those sorts of things. We also inspect for purposeful activity and for preparation for release. We give them a score of one for poor and four for good; reasonably good is a three and not sufficiently good is a two.

I would say generally, particularly in our scores of safety, Welsh prisons are performing slightly better than prisons in England, so they are a little bit safer in our view than prisons in England, notwithstanding the fact that Parc, at our recent inspection, had deteriorated quite significantly. Swansea, Parc young offenders institution, Usk and Prescoed all scored a four for safety, so they are all rated as good for safety. Cardiff scored a three for safety as well. A three and a four for the two local prisons or reception prisons in Wales—Cardiff and Swansea—is good, and much better than we see in most prisons over in England.

I would also say that our scores for purposeful activity again are slightly better, as I said, than we are seeing in England, but many of the challenges that are faced by English prisons are also very similar to those faced by Welsh jails.

Q6 **Andrew Ranger:** Interesting. Do you think there is an identifiable reason for what you have just said?

Charlie Taylor: It is always hard to put your finger on some of those comparators, but I would say a couple of things. I would say the leadership, particularly at Swansea and Cardiff, has been really strong in recent years and more consistent. That has helped a lot. Prior to our previous inspection, the leadership at Parc had also been consistent. There had been a leader in place, I think, for about 13 years. That makes a real difference to prisons. I also think some of the most acute difficulties with retention are not faced by some Welsh prisons, as in the prisons in the south of Wales, where they appear to do a better job of hanging on to staff. I think that is partly because they are reasonably safe places, which means that they are good places to work.

There is a positive cycle that places like Cardiff and Swansea are in, but if you cross over the border to, say, Bristol, it has been far more of a challenge. Berwyn is another case, because it has always been a challenge to have enough staff in that jail. I was there a couple of weeks

ago and they are just about up to their full complement. There is an improvement there.

I think it will remain a challenge, given Berwyn's location, in terms of always having enough staff there. I would say it is the quality of leadership and retention of staff that are probably the two biggest factors. There are also some cultural strengths. For example, Swansea Prison is for people from south Wales. There is a sense of community about that prison and about Cardiff that perhaps you do not always get in more disparate bits of England.

Q7 **Andrew Ranger:** That is really interesting; thank you. I just want to look at the women's offender population and women's prisons. How does the performance of Eastwood Park and Styal, so the prisons in England where the majority of Welsh women offenders end up, compare with the rest of the women's estate? I will start with Mr Taylor.

Charlie Taylor: Well, in those two jails we have considerable concern. We have not been to Eastwood Park for a little bit, but we were there two years ago and we were very critical about what was going on, particularly about the care levels for some of the most vulnerable women. We recently inspected Styal and we had some similar concerns there. Our safety score at Styal was only a two, which is unusual in a women's prison. Usually, they tend to be safer than men's jails.

There remain some ongoing concerns at those two prisons and certainly they are probably two of the three women's prisons across England that are performing the least well. Part of the challenge that they face is that their population is coming from a long way away. If you are sent to a prison from the south-west of Wales, and you end up in Eastwood Park, it is a long way for family and friends to stay in touch.

We recently did a thematic report, which I commend to the Committee, called "Time to care", which was about looking into what are the things that help women cope best of all in prison. One of the things was about being able to keep close ties with family members, which is critically important, particularly with children. What we found was that women's prisons were not as creative or imaginative in making those visits a much more positive experience than we had seen in some of the men's prisons. There is some work to be done for the Prison Service there.

Elisabeth Davies: I would just go back to what lies behind your question. I think it is important to acknowledge that there is, as yet, no women's facility in Wales, and all women are being detained, as Charlie Taylor was saying, far from their home, their families and potentially their children.

The impact of this on Welsh women cannot be understated, and it is the most significant difference compared with Welsh men in prison, I would suggest. However, we do note some positive steps. In Styal, for example,

Pact, which is the Prison Advice and Care Trust, bring children from Wales to visit their mothers.

In Eastwood Park, I would say the most significant issues that the IMB has raised regarding Welsh women's access to services has been around access to healthcare. For example, in Eastwood Park, the IMB has reported delays in securing records from GPs in south Wales. The prison healthcare team did not have direct access to healthcare records, unlike for those registered with GPs in England. Prisoners had to be given interim treatments before their medical history and their prescribing history was known. The same is true in Styal.

It is worth reflecting on the numbers that we are talking here. For Styal, 5%, I think, of the prisoners are Welsh women. In Eastwood Park it is about 33%. It is worth reflecting on that, I would suggest.

Q8 **Andrew Ranger:** Thank you very much. The final part of this question is to Ms Davies. To what extent do the findings of the Welsh IMBs align with the findings produced by HMIP and, if there is a disparity, what might be the explanation for that?

Elisabeth Davies: I do not think there is a disparity. It goes back to what we were saying at the beginning. In advance of a visit by HMIP, I know that HMIP inspectors—and we have this set out in the memorandum of understanding—are looking at the IMB annual reports. They are using that as the trigger for specific areas that require inspection. They are talking often to the Chair of the IMB, but certainly to a member of the IMB. Combined with the more informal recognition that Charlie Taylor and I are able to give to this issue of triangulating data, I would say that there is not a disparity. Often, we are seeing exactly what the prison inspector is saying reflected in the IMB annual report, and vice versa.

Charlie Taylor: I agree. We are looking at things through a slightly different lens. The IMB is monitoring, while we are actually going in and inspecting. We are in prisons less often than the IMB. We will go to places at least every five years, but more often if it is a place that we are concerned about. Inasmuch as there is a difference, it is that we are focusing on slightly different things when we are going about our business.

Q9 **Ben Lake:** Thank you both for coming this afternoon. I note that not a single prison in Wales received a score of good for the purposeful activity healthy prison test and, indeed, written evidence submitted by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons to the Committee notes that the amount of time that prisoners in Wales were spending out of the cell "varied between and within prisons in Wales." What are the most significant factors that might explain this disparity and inconsistency? In addition, what can prison governors do to try to improve the situation? I will start with Mr Taylor.

Charlie Taylor: In terms of our recent inspection in Cardiff, they were reasonably good, so they got a three in our inspection. Similarly for Usk and Prescoed, we were actually there this week so we will see how that inspection goes, but they were reasonably good as well.

In terms of governors, the difficulties that we see in England are that they do not always have leverage over the contracts that are being run in the prison; they are set centrally from Whitehall. The arrangements in Wales are slightly different and, in my opinion, more flexible, and to some extent they are therefore more successful.

Now, the scores in Wales are not great by any stretch of the imagination. This is our lowest scoring healthy prison assessment across the board. The scores in Wales are lower than they are for other healthy prison assessments. Nevertheless, I think there is a bit more flexibility about the way that the contract is managed through the area director's office in Wales, which does seem to be able to manage those contracts a bit more astutely and effectively than sometimes we see in prisons in England, where often the governor has many other priorities and does not always have the time or the expertise to be able to focus on the contract management that is required by the contracts that are let in England.

Sorry, it is a rather technical answer, but I think as a result of that, we see that purposeful activity in Wales is a bit better than in England.

Q10 **Ben Lake:** Given that the situation in Wales allows for greater flexibility with regard to some of the contractors, what are the main factors that would impact on the ability for them to have more time out of the cell?

Charlie Taylor: There are a couple of things. Having enough staff is critical and having enough staff of enough experience is really critical. Being able to bear down on things like the ingress of drugs again makes a difference. If you are dealing with the results of drugs, which are often violence, debt, bullying and having prisoners under the influence, again, they are taking officers' attention away, which means that people do not get unlocked in a timely fashion as we would expect them to be.

Population pressures are also affecting particularly Cardiff and Swansea. In the past, if someone had a short sentence, they would have stuck around in prison for a bit and, if it was a very short sentence, they would have completed their sentence there, but there is such pressure now across prisons in England and Wales that people get shipped out almost immediately as soon as they are sentenced, which means they are having to move and go somewhere else, sometimes for a matter of only a few weeks or months. That just adds to the churn. The turnover of population, particularly in Cardiff, Swansea and to some extent in Berwyn as well, is having an effect on the prison's ability to be able to deliver purposeful activity.

Finally, in terms of space, Cardiff is a relatively spacious site for an inner-city prison. Nevertheless, for the number of men that it currently holds—

and similarly at Wandsworth—it is difficult to find enough activity for them to do, even if you have the staff to unlock them to get them to the activity in the first place.

Q11 **Ben Lake:** Thank you; that is very useful. Is there an ideal amount of time for which you would like to see prisoners out of their cells doing activity?

Charlie Taylor: In our expectations, we have a minimum of 10 hours a day. It is something that we rarely see in prisons in Wales or in England. I would say a notable exception in Wales is Parc YOI, where they consistently get children out of their cells for up to 10 hours a day and sometimes 12 hours a day in some cases. I would say, as a closed prison, it is one of the best performing across the estate of England and Wales.

Ben Lake: Do you have anything to add?

Elisabeth Davies: With regard to time out of cell, it is quite a multifaceted issue, isn't it? Charlie Taylor has talked about population pressures. I would say that the staffing issues relate to that inability to run consistent and productive regimes. It is about doing what you said you were going to do. Often if you speak to a prisoner, they will forgo time out of cells if they were going to be applied or held to a consistent regime—as long as they know what to expect. There is that issue.

There are general infrastructure issues as well, which I do not think Charlie Taylor talked so much about. For example, Eastwood Park does not have a care and separation unit. That means that segregated women are placed in cells on normal wings, as it were. Consequently, other women will need to stay in their cells when those women are being let out.

At times it is what IMB members would refer to as a lack of ambitious leadership as well, which will take me on to the second part of your question. By that, IMBs often note that an ambitious governor and a motivated and skilled senior management team can make significant improvements.

So what can you expect governors to do with regard to time out of cell? There are three things here. They can create a stable and predictable regime, so that speaks to the point that I was making that if you speak to prisoners, and IMBs frequently do, they get that sense that they would forgo time out of their cells as long as they know what is being promised and they are going to be held to that.

The second issue is that governors could develop a central focus on positive prisoner and staff relationships. That is through clear and open communications, through prisoner councils, and through newsletters. That is about a functioning and effective key work system as well.

Thirdly, governors could work creatively with current resources to develop relevant offerings. The example I would share is from Swansea,

which has introduced painting and decorating parties of prisoners to help with prison maintenance, and it has introduced a life skills course that teaches prisoners the basics. That might be how you switch on a washing machine or how you boil an egg. It does not need a lot of resources or a lot of funding to implement it, but it really matters to the prisoners.

Q12 **Chair:** It is a matter of public record that this Committee has been scrutinising HMP Parc, especially given the 17 deaths last year. We visited and we have taken oral evidence. We get letters from people who are very concerned that their friends and family members are in HMP Parc, detailing all sorts of issues and instances where harm has happened. The fundamental question is: how concerned should we be about the safety of these men?

Charlie Taylor: I think very concerned. Parc has had a pretty good track record as a reasonably safe prison. In our last two inspections prior to the one we did earlier this year, it scored a three for safety, so reasonably good for safety. When we returned this time, we found a very big deterioration in safety and we went from a three to a one—our lowest score for safety—and that is almost unprecedented. There were enormous concerns about what was going on in the prison.

I think there were a number of factors that were a cause of this. You will have heard, too, in your previous investigations into the jail, they had difficulties with staffing, they had huge issues with ingress of drugs, they had a changeover of contract and, critically, they lost a very experienced director and deputy director at a similar time. They then had a lot of these deaths. They had, sadly, three suicides, and they also had a number of non-natural deaths due to drugs. That also knocked the prison for six.

This was a jail that people had considerable pride in. People liked working at Parc; they were proud of the jail. Some of that pride and the real sense of community that the jail had has been diminished by the catastrophic effect that these deaths have had on the staff and on the population as well. However, despite our low score, when we did go back to the jail in January we thought there were some positives there. There was a bit more grip by a new director who had been appointed. The number of deaths had diminished since that shocking high that there had been earlier last year.

The regime was not nearly good enough, but there were some reasonably credible plans to get prisoners out and about and doing some of the things that, in the past, we commented on reasonably positively. There was also a sense among the leadership team and officers that morale was beginning to improve. There were some green shoots, but I would not want to give you a false assurance on that. We will be back at Parc within the year and we will want to see that the improvements that we began to see have been sustained. However, there is a long way to go.

Q13 **Chair:** We have read the latest report and it shows a stark deterioration

since 2022. The previous iteration of this Committee was concerned before the general election, and the concerns have not diminished at all. You have talked about G4S addressing these issues, but in the latest report it has gone down dramatically in three areas. How confident are you that it can actually turn the ship around?

Charlie Taylor: We have reasonable confidence. I think with the experienced director that they have got in, who has a good track record elsewhere, there is a sense that things are beginning to improve. There is also a programme that the Prison Service is supporting, which is to replace the windows at Parc. Ultimately, we will not get the level of stability that we want at Parc until the security on the gate has got better, particularly with things like searching staff, but the protection against drones can be improved in the jail as well.

While that happens, it continues to be difficult to defend that jail against drones that are coming in and out very quickly. We did not want to go as far as reassuring you that everything is all right. We absolutely would not want to do that. We are very worried about Parc, but we are a bit less worried than I think we would have been had we been there six months before.

Q14 **Chair:** Thank you. Ms Davies, in terms of the IMBs, you talked about the thousands of visits that go on across the UK to various prisons, but last year the IMB at HMP Parc was unable to produce an annual report.

Elisabeth Davies: Yes. The annual report for 2023-24 will be published imminently and the Committee will be sent a copy of the report. There is no doubt in my mind that Parc has had a very difficult year and, of course, there is real concern about the levels of death that have occurred recently. However, in the annual report, which as I say is due to be published in the coming week, the board is of the opinion that the new director and team are actively confronting the issues and have begun implementing the necessary changes to improve safety. It is very much the green shoots that Charlie Taylor alluded to.

There have been resourcing issues facing the Parc board. The Parc IMB at its full complement should be 17, but it dipped down to two during the time of 2023-24, which of course had a severe impact on the board's capacity to monitor. If we go back to what I was saying at the beginning, IMBs are made up of unpaid public appointees. They are freely giving their time, so it is like many voluntary organisations, although they are not volunteers—they are unpaid public appointees. If you look at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, which draws comparisons, it will say that, in Wales, you have real issues with people who want to become trustees but they do not want to become the officers of local charities. You have people who want to volunteer post covid, but they want to volunteer ad hoc or they want to volunteer remotely. They do not want to go into these places. As you can imagine, that is creating real issues.

The cost of living crisis is also creating real issues. If you think about it, the IMB has the additional challenge of recognising that this is quite a challenging role; this is not going to be for everyone. I know that.

Q15 **Chair:** You have already said that there are thousands of these visits going on every year. Why was it Parc that was unable to produce the annual report in a timely manner compared with, say, the other Welsh prisons?

Elisabeth Davies: It is not just Parc. There have been other prisons where the annual report has been delayed; we have a real issue in terms of the sustainability of IMBs. I would suggest, Chair, that one of the things I have been doing is—certainly, there have been all sorts of steps we have taken at Parc to mitigate the situation. We now have seven members, which is still far off the complement, but we are coming together to support the Parc board. That is very much with IMB members from other Welsh prisons, for example, as well as non-Welsh prisons.

I can also say that since I became the IMB National Chair, the sustainability of IMBs has been my absolute focus. We have engaged extensively with IMB members and we are now in a period of testing changes with small advisory groups ahead of a year of change and transformation, which will look at both expectation management and the clustering of a number of IMBs. It is firmly on the agenda and something is being done with it, but we obviously have real issues with regard to Parc, there is no doubt about that.

Q16 **Chair:** As you said earlier, you are the eyes and ears of the community. It is a real issue, isn't it?

Elisabeth Davies: It is, and it is not for everyone. The example I frequently use is, and this might be unfair, but compare it with Coffee Morning or Cancer Research UK. Do you want to volunteer and raise money for Cancer Research UK or do you want to go into a prison or a place of detention locally? Of course, the answer might be you want to do the former, not the latter.

Q17 **David Chadwick:** Prisons, by their very nature, are designed to keep people in. That is a description I am sure everybody would agree with on a very basic level. One of the really astonishing revelations has been the fact that they are struggling to keep things out, which implicitly we would expect prisons to be very capable of doing. To what extent are the challenges facing HMP Parc, particularly ingress of illegal substances, comparable with the challenges facing other equivalent prisons within the England and Wales estates?

Charlie Taylor: I think Parc has some real challenges. It is partly its location. It is a semi-rural location, which means that people can drive up a side road and release a drone very quickly. Drones can now be piloted from much further afield, and we have heard potentially from abroad as well, so there is someone who launches the drone but the actual control of it can be done elsewhere. The accuracy of drones has improved and

there is a unique vulnerability with the windows at Parc. However, when compared with other jails in England, it is not uniquely bad.

There are many other prisons that are getting hit very hard by serious organised crime. It is an issue that the Prison Service faces across the country. Even in some of the long-term high-secure estate, holding some of the riskiest men in the country, we are seeing drones coming into prisons. It is an issue of national concern. It is an issue for the Prison Service, for police services and, in some cases, for security services as well, to begin to reduce the issue.

Drones represent a new paradigm because of the amount of substance they can get in. In the past, throwing stuff over the fence was dependent on how much you could throw, or it was staff members bringing things in illegally or things being passed over in visits. That restricted the amount that you could pass over. What we are now seeing is drones with quite big payloads—one I heard about recently had an 11 kg payload. Of course, that means that a very large amount of drugs and mobile phones, which are used to direct activities, can come into a jail with just one drone delivery. That is why I think it is such an acute problem. Parc is not unique in the difficulties that it faces on this front. Only when the windows get fixed will we ultimately be able to stop this threat.

Q18 **David Chadwick:** What do prisons need to stop the threat?

Charlie Taylor: There are a number of things. There are technological solutions, which some prisons are beginning to develop. I think there is scope for that to operate further. It is also about physical security. It is making sure windows are in the right place and, for example, there is netting in place of sufficient strength to protect things like exercise yards. It is also about having CCTV cameras and ANPR—automatic number plate recognition—cameras around the environment as well. Co-ordination with the local police is incredibly important and where that co-ordination works well, that is also effective.

It is about making sure that staff are properly searched as well, and visitors, so there is not that risk of corruption. It is also about having staff who do the day job well—for example, making sure the grass is cut so that packages cannot be dropped into long grass, and making sure that rubbish is cleared up, because we have seen packages disguised as rubbish being dropped in at prisons. It is about staff and security staff being on the case in the prison and making sure that the correct checks are done.

Finally, when a package is identified as having been delivered to a specific cell, there is no point in searching that cell the next morning. It needs to be searched within half an hour. Otherwise, whatever came in will be dispersed around the prison by the time that door has been opened. Having people available to search cells at night as well is critical.

Elisabeth Davies: Mr Chadwick, I would add that the availability of drugs and illicit items is often one of the main concerns of most IMBs, so I would say this issue is certainly not unique to Parc. However, many of the deaths are still being investigated, either by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman or through the local coroner, and you need some reassurance that we will monitor the outcomes of the processes. I am sure both Charlie Taylor and I will be doing just that.

Q19 **Ann Davies:** I have been to Parc and I have been to Eastwood Park, and it was a really worthwhile experience to visit both. I want to ask about Welsh women in particular. I am aware that the clock is running away with us a bit today, but how do the experiences of Welsh women in prison compare with those of their male counterparts? Why is the self-harm figure so high in Eastwood Park?

Charlie Taylor: As we said earlier, one of the challenges is the distance from home and the effect that has. In the thematic report that we talked about, that is certainly a factor in terms of being able to look after Welsh women who have ended up in English prisons better and in terms of making sure that those contacts are maintained. It is not just family contacts; it is also contact with community services.

It is worth adding on self-harm that we are seeing a gap between the skills, capabilities and training of officers and the needs of the women; it feels to me like there is a considerable gap in many cases. We are also seeing that the causes of self-harm are women being a long way from home; a sense that they are not in touch with their family; concerns about things like finance, benefit and debt that are going on back at their house; and issues with not getting enough time out of their cells. Certainly, we have been critical of Eastwood Park when it comes to time out of cell.

Then I think it is about staff having enough time to interact with women. What we find is that they are so busy dealing with women who are in absolute crisis that for other women who would really appreciate a more day-to-day interaction, that relationship has become almost entirely transactional in many cases.

What that also means is that some women who are not in crisis see that the way to get some attention is to begin to self-harm. Sadly, they are pulled into self-harm like that as well. Finally, just having time out of cell, the number of activities, and having time in the fresh air are also big factors. It is a number of things that go wrong.

What is very interesting is that we inspected one of the prisons in Northern Ireland, Hydebank Wood, which is a female prison that has a very similar population to what you would find in Parc, but the levels of self-harm were much lower. Why was that? There was a very skilful staff team, a very well-trained team, and women with loads of purposeful activity, good family ties and good ties with local communities.

Lots of women who come into prison are already very vulnerable. Many of them have drug addiction issues. Many of them are already prolific self-harmers before they come into prison. It is about getting those factors right, such as fresh air, and even opportunities to get things like clean clothes—which in women's prisons are not always available and women have to wear cut-down versions of men's clothes because there are not enough clothes available. In Eastwood Park, women were not allowed to wash their underwear for some strange reason in the washing machine and they were having to do it in their very small and meagre sinks. All those factors combined lead to some of the issues that we see with self-harm.

Q20 **Ann Davies:** The Swansea residential unit has been talked about for a long time. Do you support that? Is that the way forward?

Elisabeth Davies: This is slightly outside the remit of IMBs, but I visited Hope Street in Southampton, which is a residential unit. It is operated by the charity One Small Thing. I think the benefits of residential centres that are embedded within communities need to be looked at in far more detail than they currently are. I would suggest that if you are planning a future visit, go and visit Southampton, because it is worth having a look around and seeing if that creates the model for Swansea going forward.

Ann Davies: We will leave that with the Chair.

Chair: I am afraid that we have run out of time for today. We have a couple more questions about Welsh language and prison conditions, but we will write to you with those particular questions, if that is okay. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Su McConnel, Hugh McDyer and Gethin Jones.

Q21 **Chair:** Thank you very much to our second panel for joining us in person this afternoon. There are three members before us and I need to highlight the fact that Terry McCarthy, National Executive Committee Representative for North Wales from the Prison Officers Association, is unable to attend this afternoon. It is not his fault that he has not been able to appear; it is a train situation yet again.

We will proceed with the three witnesses we have in front of us. Thank you very much, all three of you, for joining us this afternoon. I will ask you to briefly introduce yourselves and explain the role of your organisation in relation to the Welsh prisons.

Hugh McDyer: I am Hugh McDyer. I am a regional organiser for UNISON and a lead in Wales for police, probation and CAFCASS members.

Su McConnel: I am Su McConnel. I am an executive member of Napo Cymru. That is the Welsh arm of Napo, the professional association and union for probation officers.

Gethin Jones: I am Gethin Jones. I work as a prison offender manager in HMP Prescoed. I have worked in a number of Welsh prisons and I represent the Public and Commercial Services Union, which represents non-operational staff in prisons.

Chair: I should say that if we have any gaps, we will obviously write to Terry McCarthy separately, if we need to.

Q22 **Andrew Ranger:** Thank you all for coming today. What are the most significant challenges facing staff working in the Prison and Probation Service in Wales? I will start with Hugh McDyer.

Hugh McDyer: I will primarily speak in terms of probation because that is where the majority of our membership are in relation to the service. The biggest significant challenge is workload, the stress that causes, and the inability to recruit what is going out—so not retaining and not recruiting. On some of the other biggest challenges that are currently intrinsic in the system, I would go back a bit to some of the pretty disastrous reforms that split a good chunk of the Probation Service into a privatised arm and left the rest in the civil service. What we are finding in all our survey membership information—all our research and work that is done out there—is that the civil service and the Probation Service are in some difficulty in being able to deliver that localised service.

Particularly in Wales, you would want to see, and you could easily see, that being delivered as a much more localised service rather than top-down. I could give you all sorts of examples but I will not at this moment in time. There are some real difficulties, even down to implementing basic terms and conditions, where our members are having diktats from the civil service in terms of dealing with that.

At the moment, the leaders in the Probation Service in Wales would probably admit they are asking way too much of their staff and that is the feedback we get from our membership.

Su McConnel: I would echo much of that. This panel is primarily focused on prisons. Prisons are very nearly full to capacity. Probation is already overflowing and I echo the point my colleague made about caseloads. That makes the work deeply stressful for staff and, in some senses, quite chaotic. Some of that overflow is being dealt with by—well, we had the prisons being nearly full and we had the SDS, so prisoners were released slightly earlier than they would have been previously. The implementation of that has been, members would say, in some cases quite chaotic. People were arriving, primarily men, on release unexpected at probation offices with nowhere to live. That has a rolling effect.

In order to deal with the overflow in probation, probation then has reset. As the prisons are letting people out early, the Probation Service is stopping its active supervision of people on its books early. That is a complete cut-off. They are held, hypothetically, on caseloads but they are

not being seen. That is just a mathematical formula. Staff are finding that quite difficult to manage safely but constructively.

Probation was originally a social work-founded organisation, frequently described as social workers to the courts. Well-trained professional probation officers will hold public protection and rehabilitation in each hand, keeping them in balance. However, the service is now imbalanced. Everyone is so busy trying to deal with just the public protection end of seeing people out of prison and trying to keep them out, that that has been thrown into imbalance.

Gethin Jones: In the immediate foreground, it is the capacity crisis. Wales has long been used as an overflow pipe for the rest of the system anyway, but we are under increasing pressure to take more prisoners from out of area, and we have our own capacity issues. On top of that, the early release schemes, such as SDS40 and HDC365, which is coming in in June, create additional pressures on staff to process and manage. It is a never-ending conveyor belt.

We know that we are going to release a load of prisoners early in June, but we are already talking about what the next emergency measures are going to be. We do not know how much work there is going to be for us to do. Behind the immediate capacity crisis is a broader crisis in the criminal justice system. For prison staff, that means pay, conditions, mental health and the way our sickness is managed.

There are two separate crises going on at the same time. There is the day-to-day running and getting things done and keeping the whole system running, then there are the background structural problems, which go back to well over a decade of undermining pay and conditions.

Q23 **Andrew Ranger:** You touched on some of the differences between Wales and England. Are there more areas where those challenges differ?

Gethin Jones: You asked the previous panel if Welsh prisons perform better, and I think we do. I think we are very good at what we do. If you meet prisoners in England, when they meet officers who are on detached duty, they say, "Oh, you must be from a Welsh prison because you talk to us." We are very good. We are proud that we got threes for safety in Cardiff and other good scoring marks, because they are good staff-run prisons.

Although, yes, we are in crisis—day to day we are in big, big trouble—we are holding our head a bit higher than other people.

Q24 **Andrew Ranger:** Su, do you see the challenges as different in Wales and England?

Su McConnel: The challenges are much the same as experienced across England and Wales. It is notable that contributing to prison overcrowding is the fact that the recall rate—the recall of prisoners who have been released—is higher in Wales. It is very high across the piece, in England

and Wales, but it is higher in Wales. I do not know why that is, other than if you do not have the scope to work constructively with people, so if you cannot plan someone's release and set things in place, recall becomes more likely.

There is also the toll that this pressure is having on staff in terms of their health and mental health. It is awful. The ability of an organisation that is exhausted, frightened and sick to take a balanced view about risk is difficult. There is a turnaround where men, primarily, are released almost willy-nilly from the prison estate in a hurry, which is inevitably leading to more rapid recalls because things are not set in place properly. It is pretty heartbreaking to see.

Q25 **Andrew Ranger:** Hugh, is there a noticeable difference in the challenges in England and Wales, or are they pretty much the same across the board?

Hugh McDyer: I would say they are pretty much the same. When we engage with our membership through our national infrastructure, as unions and joint unions, I think broadly our members are struggling—pretty much as Su articulated. For the reasons that have been articulated, it has been going on for a while. If there is to be a shift naturally towards probation and not custodial sentences, clearly a consideration of that resource and how you structure the delivery of the service in the best possible way to deliver for communities is also in the best interests of our membership who are working there.

Q26 **Andrew Ranger:** Finally, are the current recruitment practices equipping staff in prison and probation services in Wales with the necessary skills to meet the challenges that you have just outlined, or do we need to see changes in those?

Hugh McDyer: Yes, from a Wales perspective. Again, I will talk about probation, because obviously Gethin and Su may have a better or a wider view than me on prisons. I think they are doing their best with what they have and how they can do it. We do enjoy good trade union relations with our colleagues in probation in Wales, but there is that top-down approach, which we find is quite restricting in many ways. In Wales in particular, we could perhaps be looking at a devolved Probation Service and a devolved youth justice service. We are aware of the commitments from the current Government in the manifesto to do that and we are keen to develop that in any way we can. I do think that we would want to be making progress on that.

Q27 **Andrew Ranger:** Yes; that is a question we will come back to. Su McConnel, do you have anything to add on the recruitment side of things?

Su McConnel: We are always told that the troops are coming over the hill, but they never seem to quite land and stay. Recruitment is a problem, but so is retention. The Probation Service has lost, it must be,

thousands of years of experience with people leaving the service, partly by retiring and partly by leaving early because it has become so difficult.

I would like to note that—partly because, from a union point of view, probation is unwillingly tied to the Prison Service, and partly because of circumstances dealing with the immediate emergency that we have in the prison population—people joining the service are not staying for very long. I mean, it is a matter of years—a few years. One of the reasons that a lot of members express, and I think research bears this out as well, is that people join the Probation Service with a set of values that are traditional to probation, because they want to work in a social work-based way with people who are in trouble and help them to lead better lives in a supportive and constructive way. That is the rehabilitation side of probation work.

Partly because of being tied as a oner, if you like, with the Prison Service and partly because of the pressures the whole system is under, the work of the Probation Service has changed. I do not know if it is apocryphal, but it was certainly widely believed that the motto of the Probation Service used to be "Advise, assist and befriend". At that time as I remember it, the joke was that in America—I do not know whether this is apocryphal or not—the unofficial motto of probation was "Surveil 'em, nail 'em and jail 'em". It was very much an enforcement-led punitive extension of prison.

Actually, "Surveil 'em, nail 'em and jail 'em" does feel to a lot of new probation staff like what they are being asked to do, because there is no scope or room for the reasons they joined. That becomes very demoralising.

Andrew Ranger: Mr Jones, do you have anything to add on the recruitment challenges, particularly in Wales?

Gethin Jones: I know if the POA were here they would tell you that 12 weeks is not adequate to recruit and train a prison officer. The entire focus now is just churn and burn—get as many people in as you can to try to fill the gaps. It is like carrying a bucket with holes in it.

Often for my members in administration roles, if you are in Swansea or Cardiff there are other jobs out there. You are under an incredible amount of pressure, dealing with another early release scheme, so you just go. They go to other parts of the civil service or they go to other private ventures. It is very difficult to retain, and pay-wise I think we have been made uncompetitive in the market.

Andrew Ranger: Thank you very much. That is interesting.

Chair: Before I bring Ann Davies in, can I make a plea to the Committee members, as well as the witnesses, for brief questions and brief answers, because we have a lot we want to get in today and we do want to make sure we cover all aspects?

Q28 **Ann Davies:** I will start with you, Mr Jones. You mentioned already the pressure of overcapacity, so can you determine what functions need to be prioritised in the face of significant capacity pressures and increased workloads? Also, how confident are you that the measures introduced by the UK Government will be able to address the challenges of the prison review and the Probation Service?

Gethin Jones: On the early release measures, each one is just a stopgap. It is just day to day. We already know that HDC365 is not going to be enough, so we are going to have to think of something else. They might get us through the next few months, but there is no long-term plan at the moment.

At the moment, the UK Government's focus is on £4.7 billion on private tightened prisons and that is not what we need. We need investment in people; we need investment in staff in prisons and probation. Prisons have been in the press a bit now. We know things are bad—we are only in the paper when things are really bad for us—but I honestly think probation is in a worse position now.

I have people who are lifers, IPPs, who have changed their officer three or four times. You never know where they are going to go or how it is going to happen. That is why I am glad I have colleagues here from probation, so they can tell you what it is like. We need the whole system to be functioning correctly. The prisons can work, with investment, but we need to have a Probation Service that can take people from us.

Su McConnel: How do we deal with the short term? We have an emergency, and I have no quick answers for that. However, I would invite this Committee and policymakers to consider going upstream from the problem. If we go back to before the shambles that was Transforming Rehabilitation, and the subsequent not very satisfactory reforms to probation, probation's job was to be in the courts diverting people away from custodial sentences. It did that very effectively and to no ill-effect.

If you go as close as the Jersey Probation Service, you will find the same thing is happening there. Jersey probation officers are servants of the court and they spend a lot of time nurturing that relationship. They are effectively diverting people away from custody with no ill-effect, if not a good effect. I would end my quick answer at this point by saying let's please, please go upstream and look at getting ahead of the game, rather than reacting at the other end.

Hugh McDyer: I would echo those comments in relation to the Probation Service in Wales and say that it is about looking at the wider picture. There are sticking plasters but they are only sticking plasters. They are not going to last. There needs to be a proper strategy and you need a genuine localised service to deliver it more effectively.

Q29 **Gill German:** The UK Government has commissioned David Gauke to undertake the independent sentencing review. If it was down to you,

what recommendations would you like to see come out of that?

Hugh McDyer: We have responded as a trade union to the independent sentencing review. I think we have been very specific about what we want to see out of that: fewer custodial sentences. Then you need a proper plan in place for probation and you need the resources to follow that, with things like ending post-sentence supervision for those leaving prison after a sentence of less than 12 months. There are some real practical responses in our response.

Looking at how community sentencing works, can that be more effective? Our response is very clear that it can. Can fines replace custodial sentences? We mentioned the plight of women in prison and we firmly believe that a lot of those do not have to be custodial sentences.

While I am at it, they need to get on with building that centre in Swansea. I think they used to have probation day reporting centres years ago, and they were very effective. Again, if resources followed that and, as Gethin and Su have said, if there is a joined-up plan—as clearly there needs to be between sentencing, prisons and probation—it can work, but it needs to be delivered with that local priority.

Su McConnel: I would echo that. I would pray that we get rid of post-sentence supervision. That is trapping primarily quite immature young men in the revolving door of going in and out of custody. It is doing serious damage and adding to the workload. It is doing damage to individuals and increasing their likelihood of reoffending. I would like to see PSS going.

It is also bizarre that we can effectively enforce a recall to prison on someone who has finished their sentence. That is wrong—ethically, it is wrong—so PSS has to go. I would make a plea for us to go upstream and put that accent I was talking about on working with and near the courts. I do not mean by some protocol; I mean by getting good probation officers into courts, making those connections, and doing it with the local community.

The other thing, and we submitted this to the Gauke review, is to lose the punitive rhetoric around sentencing. The best outcome would be, at the end of a community order or a supervision after prison, for the person in question to say, "That was the best thing that ever happened to me," because they are socially invested, they have a job and they have a roof over their head. I would invite everyone to focus on what can be positively achieved.

Gethin Jones: I will keep my answer brief. We have some of the highest imprisonment rates in western Europe in Wales. More non-custodial sentences would be welcome, but who is going to manage them if probation cannot manage the people we are releasing now?

Gill German: That is enlightening. Thank you.

Q30 **Ben Lake:** Thank you all for coming along this afternoon. I will start with Mr Jones and then work down the panel. I am interested to hear your views on how you see the relationship between the UK and Welsh Governments when it comes to the Prison Service and how it is operating day to day, and perhaps more specifically between the devolved public bodies versus those that are directly the responsibility of the UK Government. In particular, do you think the relationship is working well? If not, are there ways that you think it could be improved upon within the current devolution settlement?

Gethin Jones: The lack of devolution justice in Wales impacts the way the criminal justice system works in Wales every day to its detriment. It affects me working in the prisons. As I said, we are effectively used as an overflow pipe for the English system, instead of serving what we need to do in Wales. The Welsh Government could probably answer a bit better about their relationships, but the last time we met with them the Counsel General told us the Lord Chancellor has not spoken to them in seven months after repeated requests to talk to them.

The Welsh Government are providing the substance abuse support and the education support. In Berwyn, they are giving Novus Cambria a lot of money, and we were concerned at one point that they were using some of that money from the Welsh Government for schemes in England. Because the way that justice works in Wales is so murky and disjointed, we do not really know. On the ground it impacts, but you would have to ask the Welsh Government about their relationships.

Ben Lake: That is very useful.

Su McConnel: It is referred to as the jagged edge, isn't it, which is very difficult to navigate. From staff on the ground, they just feel everything comes from the centre. That is the impression that everybody has.

A probation officer will work with a person under their supervision with local services. Certainly, those contracts are all supplied—those are all done under contract, which is done at the centre, primarily to huge organisations that, as I said in the submission I think, deliver line by line the terms of their contracts to very little effect at all.

Probation staff in Wales are compelled—they are required—to use those services. They refer to those services and then they go down the road and refer to the person who they know works well in their community, and that will depend on each community.

On that sense of central and devolved and the relationships, I would say that all the expert advice—the experts on the ground, but also academics and the inspectorate—is all saying the same thing, which is that probation needs to be very locally based and embedded in its communities. That is not happening.

In terms of the relationship between the two Governments, I would leave it for people higher than my pay grade to talk about the actual arrangements for things, but it is notable that on the Welsh Government side, they are talking actively about devolution and locality, but the instincts on the UK side seem to be to centralise. All the advice is to go the other way.

Hugh McDyer: I think we have been very frank about how we see that in our response to this inquiry. We have general concerns about the relationship between the UK and Welsh Governments across Cabinet responsibilities. There does appear to be, I think we put a lack of respect in our response, but I would say in many cases it is a lack of understanding of what the issues are in Wales, respective to the local population and to the people working in probation and prisons in Wales.

I think we have been very frank about that. That is very evident and, if I may say, that has perhaps come to light in the last few weeks a bit more illuminatingly. I do not think that the specific needs and population considerations are fully considered at a Westminster level.

Q31 **Ben Lake:** Thank you to all three of you. Very briefly, all your organisations are on record as pushing for the devolution of probation, and I think it is very clear from all your answers that it would bring about an improvement to outcomes. Can I also ask your views on the devolution of youth justice? That is sometimes discussed, but would you be supportive of it? I will start with Mr McDyer.

Hugh McDyer: Absolutely.

Ben Lake: For similar reasons—because operationally it would improve things?

Hugh McDyer: Yes, with a localised service and how you manage that work, particularly for young people in communities who are having to go to court. A lot of our discussions with Senedd colleagues are very much about how the first step would perhaps be the devolution of youth justice.

Su McConnel: Sadly, many people graduate from youth justice into adult justice so, clearly, the obvious thing is to keep the two joined up. I should note that there has been some excellent work done by the Welsh Centre for Crime and Social Justice and other colleagues about youth justice and maturity and the arguments for applying the same principles to people up to the age of 25. It would be great to see that lesson being rolled into adult justice. As we are talking about comparisons, I believe that youth justice in Wales has seen an absolute turnaround with plummeting figures going into any custodial estate.

Gethin Jones: The youth custody service in Wales has become more centralised. It is the opposite of devolved. We were all expecting it to be the first step along with probation, but we would support it being devolved as well.

Q32 **Ann Davies:** This is a question to Mr Jones. Your organisation's submission highlights concerns about the management of HMP Parc and the call for the prison to be brought back into public ownership. Could you justify your position and explain how it would improve the outcomes for Parc?

Gethin Jones: One of the reasons Parc is in such crisis is because of the pay and conditions for staff there. Because it is becoming the employer of last resort in the area, they are under increasing pressure to leave, like they do in all prisons. That accountability is not there in the same way as it would be for a public prison.

Parc is operating for profit. It is not there to serve the community or to serve Wales. For a long time it was stable and had a very good leadership team that came from Cardiff Prison. Janet Wallsgrove took a lot of good administrators from Cardiff and I think that kept a lid on it and kept things running relatively well for a while, but with the state it is in now, it is very hard to know how anything other than a big structural change will pull it back up.

We are seeing some advances. The POA is now in talks about recognition. For us, for a long time Parc has been a black hole because we have had no union recognition—not the POA, not PCS, no one. G4S had its own little company union, but it looks like it has now agreed to recognise the POA, which is a big step forward for us.

We have to subsidise Parc, in effect. Every time there is a crisis, the public prisons in Wales have to step in to help it. A safer custody governor from Swansea went in to help out because of all the deaths, so it puts a drain on us. We don't want to get to the point where we were with Birmingham in 2016, where a lot of Welsh prison officers had to put on helmets, grab their shields and go and retake that prison that G4S ran into the ground. We are hoping it does not come to that.

We think there is some progress. We would like Will Styles to speak to the other unions as well. We think public accountability and public funding would help.

Q33 **Ann Davies:** Following on briefly, it does not sound to me that you are very confident about HMP Parc's ability to increase in size. The HMPPS wants to increase it to have 345 extra inmates there. Do you think that can be done safely?

Gethin Jones: I do not think it could be done safely now. The larger prisons are, the harder they are to manage effectively and the harder it is to get better outcomes. Parc is huge.

Q34 **Ann Davies:** With your probation hat on, how do you feel about the increase of 345 inmates coming into HMP Parc?

Su McConnel: I do not think I am qualified to make a comment about Parc. On increasing prison capacity, prisons are just like roads. If you

build them, they just clog up and fill up. In any approach to increasing prison capacity, I hope that we would look at the long term and say, "We might have to do this now, and maybe we will have to do this now, but let's plan a recovery position," rather than just keep on this endless escalation of prison capacity and use.

Hugh McDyer: We opposed Group 4 and supported our trade union colleagues in the TUC in opposing any privatisation of prisons. That has not changed. The sooner you get them back in-house under proper control, and not for profit, the better.

Q35 **Llinos Medi:** I think you have all touched a bit on this issue, which is about the Welsh language. You have just said go upstream and have a relationship. Gethin, you have said about how prisoners know you are from Wales because you talk to them, and I think you just mentioned being locally based and embedded in the community. If the Welsh language is your first language, you are able to create that relationship in prison or in probation. How confident are you in the Welsh language provision in your services at the moment?

Hugh McDyer: I do not think I have a great deal of confidence in the provision of that. For me, that looks at addressing the local needs and the needs of the population and I do not think that is currently being addressed adequately. That is where I am at.

Su McConnel: It is not my area of expertise. I had the privilege to attend an eisteddfod in Usk Prison recently, which was absolutely joyous. There were men there who were learning Welsh and reciting and composing, and it was fabulous. I understand that it is staff-generated. It is just something that emerges, rather than being led or there being a real investment in it.

I know that my union in Wales had a bit of a time just getting basic health and safety notices in Welsh into prisons, things like "fire exit", which are quite important, or "hot water". Nourishing the Welsh language—and this is just a basic requirement for people for whom that is their first language—I do not think has a head of steam or is being led as an initiative, and that is unsurprising from a centrally organised organisation.

Gethin Jones: The Welsh language scheme for HMPPS is meant to make an annual submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner. The only one I can find is from 2023. They might have made a submission in 2024-25 but I can't find it. In my experience, it is entirely dependent on individual members of staff. There are lots of members of staff who are passionate about the Welsh language and they have driven through a number of local initiatives, but strategically it does not feel like there is anything there except on paper.

Q36 **Llinos Medi:** Do you agree about being able to speak your first language and creating that relationship, especially in probation? You just said that

you are social work-based, so if you cannot create that relationship, how will you get the best outcome? Do you agree with me about that?

Su McConnel: Yes.

Q37 **Chair:** I have a final question. If you had a magic wand and you could fix one thing in your particular area in prisons and probation, what would it be? I will start with Mr McDyer.

Hugh McDyer: If I had a magic wand, I would want to fix a few things, but one thing, speaking from a membership point of view, is that we would want to take the workload and stress off our members right now, because it is grim.

Chair: There is an immediacy to that. Thank you very much.

Su McConnel: I have that one in my bag and I will add that I would want a commitment to a root and branch review of probation, with a view to separating it from the Prison Service—as much as we respect our colleagues—to be a stand-alone organisation in its own right.

Chair: That is very helpful. Mr Jones, I assume you will have those two in your bag as well, but is there anything else?

Gethin Jones: We need to be paid properly. Any pay settlement that is below inflation is a pay cut. Pay us properly and devolve justice to Wales.

Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you to all three of you for coming this afternoon. It has been very useful to have you here in person.