



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Prison Service Reform Programme: Update

17 October 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Mr Mark Adam	Northern Ireland Prison Service
Mr Paul Cawkwell	Northern Ireland Prison Service
Mrs Sue McAllister	Northern Ireland Prison Service
Mr Brian McCaughey	Northern Ireland Prison Service

The Chairperson: I welcome Sue McAllister, the director general of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS); Mark Adam, the strategic change manager; Paul Cawkwell, the director of offender policy and operations; and Brian McCaughey, the director of rehabilitation. I will hand over to you, and I am sure that members will have questions.

Mrs Sue McAllister (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Thank you for your welcome, Mr Chairman. I am conscious that members will have questions on a range of issues, so I do not intend to take up much time with a long presentation. We are grateful for the opportunity to brief you on the progress that we have made on the reform of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

With your permission, I would like to start by briefly responding to recent reports on Hydebank Wood. Although I have been clear that the reports identified some good practice and progress across Hydebank Wood, there are a number of areas in which much more work is still to be done. The appointment of the new governor and deputy governor in April was a significant step forward for Hydebank Wood, and an internal task force has been established to work alongside the governor to deliver the college at Hydebank. The director of offender policy and operations will work closely with the governor and his team to ensure that the actions are implemented and rigorously audited. I assure you that recommendations that have not been addressed since the inspection in February will be addressed. We have ambitious plans for Hydebank Wood, both for the young people in custody and for the female prisoners. As you are aware, the Minister will make a statement to the Assembly on Monday to outline the progress that has been made, and, although I do not want to pre-empt what he will say, I assure you that we are committed to delivering Hydebank college for the young people

and to having a progressive regime, including suitable separate accommodation for the women housed in Hydebank.

I also want to give you a brief overview of the wider reforms in the service. The appointments of Paul as director of offender policy and operations and Brian as director of rehabilitation were a signal of intent for the entire service and my commitment and resolve to deliver on the reform programme. With those appointments, I now have in place the complete senior leadership team that will drive and deliver the reform programme. These are the faces that you will see from now on as we share our progress with you.

We are at the halfway point of the programme and have made good progress, and we have a clear plan for delivery over the next 18 months. Again, I do not want to pre-empt what the Minister will say, but, by Christmas, I am confident that 18 of the 40 recommendations from the Owers report will be signed off by the oversight group. That demonstrates that good progress is being made.

We remain a service in transition; the recent reports are testament to that. We are also reforming at a time when we have the biggest prison population in years. Ten years ago, the population averaged 1,100; five years ago, that had risen to about 1,500; today we have a prisoner population of more than 1,800. That is an increase of more than 60% in 10 years. Although that presents huge challenges for us all, we have plans in place to address it and the reforms at its core. That was never going to happen as quickly as we would like, but we are on course. I remain determined to deliver the reforms that are needed to make our service sustainable for many years to come.

Mr Chairman, thank you for the invitation to speak today. We now welcome your questions on those and on any other issues that you want to discuss.

Mr Wells: Sue, as you know, we attended a very useful meeting — was it yesterday?

Mrs S McAllister: It was yesterday.

Mr Wells: Time flies. Ten of the 40 recommendations deal with health issues. At the meeting yesterday, the lack of progress on the social services end was raised as an issue in that considerable progress has been made on the medical end and the South Eastern Trust is bedding in quite well with its provision of healthcare to all the prisons. However, as we know, the vast majority of prisoners have issues dealing with social services, and, frankly, if they did not, they probably would not be in prison. A concern was expressed that not much progress had been made on that aspect of the reform. Do we know when we are expected to hit the targets that we are meant to hit by April 2015? Do we know where we stand on that?

Mrs S McAllister: On the commissioning of health and social care?

Mr Wells: Yes; particularly the social care end as opposed to the health end. Considerable progress has been made on the health end, and that is evident from your paper and from yesterday, but the concern was expressed that the social services end, which is the social work aspect, is not going anywhere.

Mrs S McAllister: I will hand over to Mark in a second to talk in more detail. We all heard yesterday from Heather, who was at the meeting from the Department. We were, quite properly, reminded at that meeting that the strategy has to look beyond health alone and look at health and social care. It has an understanding that the remit of the joint strategy needs to include all that. Patricia Gordon, who is on the oversight panel, chaired yesterday's meeting, and she is also a non-executive member of our board; she is keen that we include the services that the Health and Social Care Board commissions. We have been trying very hard to get that level of engagement from John Compton and his people as well as from the Department of Health. We understand that some outcomes have to be focused on broader social care; it probably needs to go even wider than that. This week, I met colleagues from the Department for Social Development (DSD) to talk about how we might look for joint initiatives or targets around some of the issues for which they have responsibility. It is broader than just prisons or the Department of Justice; it is about being joined up and looking at better outcomes for the people who pass through our care but who are on a much longer journey of settling back into their communities.

Mark will be able to say more about some of the specific recommendations.

Mr Mark Adam (Northern Ireland Prison Service): You made the point that the medical side is fairly well established in what is going forward; the gap for some time has been around social care. We are teasing that through in the development of the strategy around recommendation 13 with the Department. The position that we have agreed with it is that that has to be delivered in stages so that we can see progress soon. Moreover, the trust is looking at how it broadens out the *[Inaudible.]* in the recruitment that it is going through at the moment as someone who has the responsibility for well-being and takes it much broader than looking at purely the primary care side. We have a stage plan. I will come to any other questions that you may have about when the Health Department plans to deliver those recommendations along with us through the ones that we will deliver in March and a further chunk in June. I am more than happy at any point to go into detail about the timeline. Events such as the one yesterday morning are important in starting to bridge some of the gaps with the community and voluntary sector much sooner in custody. Although we do a lot around sentence planning, we need to do much more about resettlement planning to address those issues.

Mr Wells: In case members are worried, I was there wearing my Health Committee hat rather than my Justice Committee hat. I could see people wondering why they were not there. It was a health event.

The other thing that worried me from that presentation was the difficulty in retaining health service staff in prisons, despite the fact that it looks reasonably well resourced at 140 personnel. Is there anything that you can do to retain South Eastern Trust staff in your sites? There is clearly something wrong; the turnover is way above what you would expect.

Mrs S McAllister: Yes. Paul now has responsibility for the health portfolio, which has got much better. In the early stages, the health trust could recruit staff, but it had trouble keeping them. We identified, through the partnership arrangements that we have in place, that some of that was because they did not understand the operational environment when they went in. We have got better at doing joint induction. We are clearer when we interview people about what sort of environment they are going to work in. Some people just cannot cope with the prison environment when they see it and experience it daily. Some of it is about ongoing support through the health management. It now has its own managers in place to support those nurses. The early signs are that people have a much better understanding of what they are coming in to. We are managing to keep them.

Mr Paul Cawkwell (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Delivering health is not prisons' core business; we were not particularly good at it. For that reason, we put it out to the Health Department to deliver. We were unscientific; we had a model that had a doctor and some nurses. When time moved on, we said that we needed a few registered general nurses (RGNs) and registered mental health nurses (RMNs) so that we picked up those with mental health issues.

To attract people to fill those roles, we had to pay over the market rate. If there was a choice between working in a hospital or coming into an old prison, it was difficult to sell the prison as a good working environment because professional development might not always be the priority. We paid over the top. The responsibility has now transferred to the Health Department. It actively seeks to recruit to those positions. However, it has found that many people coming into the roles, who will now all be graduates and will have high expectations about the degree of work that they are involved with, are potentially attracted by the salary and are finding that the work expected of them is perhaps below the level of their training. That has made it difficult to sell as a career option. The solution is to take a fresh look at the grading structures, at introducing new grades and at other models of delivery. I went to look at prisons in England two weeks ago with Health Department colleagues from commissioning and the South Eastern Trust so that they could look specifically at what operates elsewhere and what might be right for our environment. We are taking that forward.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much for your presentation. If I picked it up correctly, you said that a governor and a deputy governor were put in place in Hydebank Wood in April. When the report was produced in February, I understand that no governor or deputy governor was in place. To what extent did a lack of leadership and management in that institution contribute to a very damaging report?

Mrs S McAllister: I have always been clear, including during my time as a governor, that the role of governor is crucial not just in providing leadership for an establishment but in setting the moral tone and the expectation. Not having a permanent governor in post is a significant drawback in running a healthy prison. You can have good interim arrangements, and, sometimes, you have to do that, but it did not help us to move forward with the reform agenda. There were too many faces at the senior management table. We did not have a consistent senior management team in post. We did not always have people who wanted to be at Hydebank Wood. We have appointed a permanent governor

and a deputy governor who applied for the job and wanted to be there. We are now strengthening senior management even more through the task force. We have moved some of our managers around so that some of our good people have been spread more evenly across the three prisons. It has undoubtedly had an impact.

Mr Humphrey: How long did the situation exist in which there was not a permanent governor or deputy governor?

Mrs S McAllister: I think that the governor was taken out of Hydebank in April 2012, and the new governor arrived almost exactly a year later. It was about 12 months.

Mr Humphrey: Was that good enough?

Mrs S McAllister: That was as quickly as we could get somebody in post.

Mr Humphrey: The difficulty is that you have just admitted that that was a huge contributory factor to the report. It was a year before you could get someone permanently in place.

Mrs S McAllister: We are a small service. The skills needed to be an in-charge governor are quite specific; it is a demanding role. It was important that we got the right person. I am sorry if I am missing your point.

Mr Humphrey: My point is that you were without the necessary leadership and management for a year. That was a huge contributory factor to a report that was highly damaging for the institution.

Mrs S McAllister: We had in place somebody who was taken from a leadership role in prisoner escort and custody services (PECS) and was put into Hydebank on a temporary basis. I am not for a moment suggesting that Gavin Glendenning, who has now left the service, was not in possession of many of the skills needed to be a governor, but that is not a substitute for having a permanent governor who has a longer-term vision for the prison.

Mr Humphrey: There are indications in the Owers report and in other reports of a drugs problem in the institution. How bad is the drugs problem in Northern Ireland's prisons estate?

Mrs S McAllister: I will hand over to Paul. It is fair that he have the opportunity to share with you some of the things that he has done already. I am on record as saying that a key priority for us is to address the drugs issue. Prisons are part of society. I think that we would all concede that there is a concern about drugs in some parts of our communities, not just in prisons. Prisons are often representative of communities in that way. We have made real strides, particularly since Paul took up post in June of this year. We are now targeting our resources much more smartly to address the issues: reducing supply, reducing demand, and reducing harm are the three key strands of our drugs strategy. As much of that is about Paul's achievement, I will give him the opportunity to share some of that with you.

Mr Cawkwell: It is fair to say that there is an underlying drugs problem in any prison in arguably any jurisdiction; that will hardly come as a shock to anybody. In our institutions, the abuse of prescription medication is probably more refined. Therefore we have specifically strengthened protocols on the dispensing of medicines that are tradable and which could cause harm. That has already been delivered. We have also switched resources away from areas that were expensive to run and were largely ineffective in delivering security — the random searching of prisoners and the volume of random drug testing that took place. A clear sign of that is that governors are now required to redirect those resources towards intelligence-led searching and testing, which gets to the heart of the problem and makes people face up to their actions. Establishments have also been set improvement targets, and we expect to see, if necessary, action plans devised so that prisons have clear objectives for how to reduce the likelihood of contraband coming into the establishment. In essence, that probably covers the work that has already been taken forward to reduce the problem.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you both very much for your responses. However, the question was how bad is the drugs problem, and I am not really sure that either of you answered it.

Mrs S McAllister: OK. We can put a figure on the percentage of randomly tested prisoners who will test positive, but that will not tell us where the drugs are coming in and how big an issue it is. We have more work to do, but we can give you a figure.

Mr Cawkwell: What I want to do is get some research for you. What is clear is that, historically, there was not resilience to the volume of drug testing being done. That has been addressed in recent months to make sure that we test at the same time, because you can distort the figures. If you test people only at a particular time of the week when you are rich with staff, that sends a clear signal to prisoners that they can use substances at other times. So, with your permission, Mr Humphrey, I would like to get some data for you and send it to the Committee.

Mr Humphrey: That is OK. I take your point that prisons are part of society, but you will surely accept that prisons have resources and controls that are not prevalent in everyday life in society, so you should be on top of the problem much more than is the case in the public's perception. That is why it is important that the ongoing work that you are talking about is done. Reassurance that you are winning the battle needs to be given not to just the Committee but the wider population in Northern Ireland.

Mrs S McAllister: That is absolutely right. We have talked in Committee before about the need to make sure that the public are aware of what we can and cannot do. There is often a belief that we can do more in the way of, for example, invasive searching, but we cannot. The best thing that we can do is tackle the demand for drugs. We need to do everything that we can to tackle the supply; above all, however, we need to get to the root of the problem and tackle demand. We are doing that through a pilot where we will run a therapeutic and supportive regime for some prisoners in Maghaberry prison. The idea is that we will run the pilot in Glen House and then roll it out across the service once we have had an opportunity to evaluate it. It is essentially a rehab programme. Relapse prevention and peer support will be provided to allow people to come off drugs, if they are on them when they come into our custody, and stay off them.

Mr Humphrey: Finally, I am sure that you will be aware that Mr Spratt, a representative of the Prison Officers' Association, has been in front of the Committee to give evidence. He suggested to this Committee that there is an issue about Northern Ireland people — Ulster folk — being promoted in your organisation. Is that an issue?

Mrs S McAllister: We are about to hold a number of promotion boards at functional head level, unit manager level and senior officer level. All of those will be internal promotion boards, so people in the Northern Ireland Prison Service will be eligible to apply for the posts. We are in the process of running promotion boards for our own people.

We are also very keen to develop our talent for the senior levels because our vision has to be to identify talent in our organisation, and nurture and develop that talent to bring it on. Therefore, we are doing a number of things. We are running a series of masterclasses for our senior leaders, the first of which will be tomorrow: that is from governor 1 level down to the more junior governor grades. We will be developing those people to take on more senior leadership roles.

Mr Humphrey: So, does all of that work you are doing, which I welcome, suggest that there is a problem?

Mrs S McAllister: Sorry, would you say that again?

Mr Humphrey: Does the work that you are doing to bring forward local people to enhance their skills and so on suggest that there is a problem?

Mrs S McAllister: We are a new team that has just come together and one of the things that we have identified is that more needs to be done to develop people once they get to senior level. We need to do more to invest in the development, and ongoing development, of the people who reached senior levels before we arrived. We would say that there is always more to do, and we think we are investing significant resources now into developing those people. Paul, did you want to say something?

Mr Cawkwell: We alluded to it regarding the challenges of filling the post at Hydebank Wood. There has been a skills gap. We are a small service and are therefore quite insular. It is recognised that there is potential within the management cadre. We will fail if we do not ensure that future positions

are not filled by in-house candidates, but we have a job to do to improve their skills base and knowledge.

Mr Brian McCaughey (Northern Ireland Prison Service): May I come in with a few comments as someone who is six weeks into the job and perhaps with some "Fermanagh-ism" added in?

I have participated in the senior events with the governors. This is about transformational change. It is not about a slight amendment or a bit of a change: this is about transformational change and bringing staff with us. I have seen the senior team do that, and I think that there are people in Northern Ireland for the future.

Mr Humphrey: I am reassured to hear that because, going back to my first question, we simply cannot have what happened at Hydebank Wood repeated.

Mrs S McAllister: Absolutely.

Mr Wells: On that point: we have now filled these gaps and got new people at very strategic positions. Dare I say that the team is relatively youthful? That being the case — I noticed, Mrs McAllister, you did not dispute that fact, so I take it as read — *[Laughter.]* — can we be guaranteed continuity from now on? The Prison Service, like the Fire Service, has been bedevilled by a constant change of senior staff. Is there a commitment now that you, as a team, will see through the reform programme?

Mrs S McAllister: I am always slightly nervous about putting figures on these things, because you never know what will happen in life. However, I can say with all honesty that the senior team now in post is a complete team. We think that we each bring very different things to an effective team. We are having a great time. We are having a very satisfying and gratifying time, because we know what needs to be done and we are exercised, as I said. It is also true that none of us is looking beyond this job. We all have a job to do and are committed to doing it.

The Chairperson: The Hydebank governor was suspended then reinstated. Why was he not reinstated back to Hydebank?

Mrs S McAllister: I am slightly nervous about discussing individual colleagues in this forum. We are keen to offer development to senior colleagues who have been identified as having development needs, and it was felt that that individual would benefit from a different development that would, in the longer term, make him a stronger operator and enable him to make a better contribution to our service. He was fully signed up to that, so it was considered that, for the benefit of the organisation and the individual, it was not appropriate for him to return to that post at that time.

The Chairperson: It strikes me that there is a pattern here because previous governors have been suspended or removed from other prison establishments. They were never sacked. They were brought down to Dundonald; they were put into headquarters and then they were put back out again. It seems strange to me and, I suspect, to the public, when you have governors at governor grade 1 level who are moved, taken into headquarters and put back out. If they did something wrong, they should be sacked. If they did not, they should be put back into the position that they held. Without getting into that particular individual case, this is a theme that recurs in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Mrs S McAllister: Sometimes in organisations as complex as ours, it is not always as simple as saying that if someone has done something wrong, they should be sacked and if they have not, then they should be put back to their other job. I hope that we now have a way of supporting our staff, including, but not exclusively confined to, the code of discipline that will allow us to address areas of performance and misconduct, recognise when the two things are different and address that. We need to support some of our governors and senior managers, identify where they have development gaps and allow them to address those. We are trying to work now in a much more supportive way, including having a succession planning committee chaired by Mark, to identify talent but also to identify what development needs people have got so that we are not putting people into roles before they are ready.

The Chairperson: Once the governor at Hydebank was suspended and removed from his post, how many other governors who were suitably qualified already existed within the Prison Service who could have taken up this post without the need to recruit someone from outside?

Mrs S McAllister: We advertised the in-charge post and we had no applications from within Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson: That strikes me as strange. It tells me that there must have been something wrong with the criteria you used to advertise, because governors who were suitably qualified, who have been governors of other prisons and who indeed are now governors in prisons within Northern Ireland, were there, yet a governor was brought in from outside to do this job. Were the criteria flawed? Was that what prevented people who were already here from applying?

Mrs S McAllister: I would not like to guess why people did not apply, but it is important that we get the right person for the right job at the right stage in their career. We advertised that post and we had no applicants from Northern Ireland. Nobody wished to take on the job at that time.

Mr Dickson: Mrs McAllister, employment relations forms a major part in the ongoing reform programme. How would you describe relationships with the trade union partners that you have to deal with? How would you describe employment and industrial relations in the Prison Service?

Mrs S McAllister: First, we have reaffirmed our commitment to working with all of the staff associations and we have also identified the need to be clearer about what that engagement should look like. All of us go through a process of educating ourselves about what requires negotiation, what requires consultation, what requires neither and what it is good practice to discuss. We are determined to have a more mature working relationship with all of the staff associations.

Paul met with the POA committee for around two and a half hours while we were in the Assembly earlier this week. Ironically, while we were here talking about industrial relations, Paul was at that very moment speaking with Finlay and his colleagues, so it might be helpful to get a sense of what the tone was at that meeting.

Mr Cawkwell: Industrial relations are challenging. However, they are challenging because of the direction that the POA committee has come from. When the head of the POA came before the Justice Committee last June, he said that he would be happy to talk to the Prison Service if we wanted to come to him and talk about whatever it was that we wanted to talk about and if there was money in it for his members. I do not have any money, so that is a real challenge as my starting point.

I met with the full committee of the POA for two and half hours. That is the third meeting that I have had with Mr Spratt since I arrived here and, in the wake of that meeting, I have written to him suggesting 10 areas about which we should have further consultations, three areas in which there might be an advantage entering into negotiations and to suggest that we might submit joint evidence to the Prison Service pay review body. There is an absolute openness and commitment on our part to work hard at this.

Mr Dickson: I am sure that Sue McAllister and Paul are very clear about their roles and on the difference between negotiation and consultation. Are you satisfied that the appropriate staff associations and unions are wholly clear on the difference between negotiation and consultation and where those lines lie in your discussions?

Mrs S McAllister: I suspect that there is more work to do in this area. There has perhaps been a blurring of those things in the past. We have come in and are very determined to do business properly and in a way that recognises and respects the role of the trade unions. Perhaps, sometimes, we do not have a shared understanding of what requires consultation and what requires negotiation. However, that does not mean that we should not continue to try to be clear about that and share that knowledge.

Mr Dickson: Do you think that you have the appropriate internal resources to take the ongoing processes forward? Do you — perhaps you do — use external resources to assist you in that regard? Is that something that you need to use more of?

Mrs S McAllister: It is both of those things. As I have just said, we are doing a series of masterclasses with the senior leaders. The theme of one of those will be managing employee relations and the relationship with the staff associations. Julie Anderson, our head of training and development who is organising those, is certainly working with other Departments to see where they are doing that well. We have also been speaking to the organisation in the South that is the equivalent of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), although I cannot remember its name, and we have contacted the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to see whether there is anything that it can offer us. That all has to be done within the constraints of our finances. We do not have lots of money to go out and buy external consultation. We are very keen to look for good practice elsewhere, and if anybody else can help us to identify that we are very open to looking at it.

We think that we have the resources internally in so far as Mark, who comes from a HR background, has taken on some of the HR portfolio, some of us have worked with the POA in other jurisdictions for many years and Brian obviously brings a very different approach to working with the unions. I think that we just have to look at what we can bring to the table. The important thing is to keep those lines of communication open and keep having those conversations and meetings.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much for the presentation. Are you satisfied that the required change management team is in place to take the programme forward and that all positions have been filled?

Mrs S McAllister: Do you mean in the change team?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mrs S McAllister: Mark may want to say a bit about that in a minute. However, I think we have been clear that we are undertaking a significant review of our headquarters structure, which will include making it a different shape and size, reconfiguring it to suit the needs of the business and moving people into establishments where they will be working at the front line with prisoners. We will have a headquarters that looks different.

We continue to move people into and out of the change team to meet the variations in need. We have not got a standing army of change people, and they are often multitasking, doing different roles and supporting the other directors. We are certainly not suggesting that we bring in additional resource. Essentially, we have stopped filling vacancies until we are clearer about our financial situation. I am not sure whether Mark feels that he has enough people. I hope that he is about to say that he does.

Mr Adam: We have the right people around us to deliver this. I think it is worth saying that we are all part of the change team. It is not just the four of us here but each of the governors and many of the staff. A number of prisoners are also working with us, particularly on some initiatives that we have been driving forward recently to get a good understating of what that looked like, how it will feel and whether we have the right end of our understanding about what is going to make the most effective difference.

To pick up on Sue's point, we tried to keep the core element of the team as lean as we can and bring in specialists as appropriate. So, for example, we have someone working with us at the moment from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), who is looking at some of the population trend data for need and things like that. Once that piece of work is going, we will look at other specialisms that will work with us. That is why events such as the one yesterday with the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) and the regular events that we have been running with the community and voluntary sector have been so important. We want to be able to bring them in and work as elements of our change delivery. There are an awful lot of very good ideas out there.

Mr McCaughey: I appreciate that I am only six weeks in, but I want to tell you about my first impressions. I have been wholly impressed by the determination of the senior team who lead on the change, and I have no doubt about its resolve and commitment despite the hiccups and challenges along the way. I want the Committee to be absolutely assured of the commitment, resolve and determination of the people at this table.

Mr McCartney: OK. I am not here to question that. One of the criticisms made by the independent oversight group was that the management change was perhaps slow. I realise that that is a historical document and I wanted to be reassured today.

Does the change management team have a clear sense of the plan? Is there an implementation plan in front of you, or being formulated, which gives you the map and the timescales under which it should be implemented?

Mr Adam: We have a clear plan that takes us all the way through to April 2015, which is our delivery date, and the milestones that we need to hit along the way. When the Minister's independent committee challenges us on that plan, as you say, it has that visibility and it is able to say that we should have something done by a specific date and ask us where we are against those elements. I am not going to say that that has not always moved as quickly as we would like or that the finances that we need to be behind that are readily available. We are not in that position. However, we do have a clear plan to delivery, and I would be more than content if people want to talk to me individually in a lot more detail about some of those dates and deliverables.

Mr McCartney: I suppose the reason I asked that is because, if you have a clear sense of your change management programme and a plan, it means that individuals will always fit easily into it. Again, that is without any judgement. In the past, there has been a criticism that, when individuals leave posts, the gap was not filled as quickly or as qualitatively as it could have been, and that creates its own problems. If it is known that there is a team in place and a plan that you work to, I think that makes it relatively easier to bring it to a conclusion.

My next question is about the reports that we spoke about in the Assembly. The Minister is going to make a statement on Monday and I know that there is a document about the estates strategy. However, it is difficult to see how you will address the problems of Ash House while the women prisoners remain in Hydebank Wood. Do you have any sense of a timeline for tackling that issue, which obviously presents a massive challenge?

Mrs S McAllister: Obviously, we do not want to pre-empt what the Minister will say next week. However, we are clear that there needs to be, and will be, a separate women's facility. We also have plans to do some things more quickly. The new women's prison obviously depends on the finances being available and they are not available in this spending review period. We are being very creative and imaginative about what we might be able to do more quickly to get some of the women out of Ash House, even for some of the time. We are also looking to do some things within Ash House that will reduce the need for women and young people to mix in some of the activity areas. So, we have some plans. Some of them will cost less money and, therefore, will be deliverable more quickly to address the issue of mixing the two populations.

Mr McCartney: All the pressure is on one particular person. The key to this — the big qualitative difference — is the emphasis on rehabilitation. I am sure that you are aware of the challenges, but are you satisfied that the proper resource is in place to allow that to flow in the way that is intended?

Mr McCaughey: I am satisfied that the concept of rehabilitation has primacy on the agenda now, and my presence in my position will ensure that it remains there. There are limitations to what Ash House can deliver, but I have personally been in to meet women three times about that in the past six weeks for very lengthy consultations and discussions. I want to use those ideas and initiatives to seek to deliver, through the governor and the staff, things that they will feel are beneficial and will assist them in rehabilitation. I will also seek to build on what I did in my previous world on the Inspire project, which was available to women in the community. I will seek to deliver that in the prison establishment also.

Mr McCartney: Do you have some concept of the closed college idea, and a timeline for it?

Mrs S McAllister: Again, David Ford will say something about that early next week. We have mentioned a task force that we are setting up, because we think that this is so important that we need to put a team of people in to work on and land that project for us in order to have the college working fairly soon. It will not be the finished article, but we need to start to develop that. We have always been clear that it is not about bricks and mortar but about the ethos, the regime and what we can deliver. Subject to what the Minister will announce on Monday, we will be able to move forward on that from next week.

Mr McCartney: There will be a number of other questions, but we will perhaps take up Mark's offer.

Mr Lynch: It is in and around the same issue that Raymond covered — the task force. We were in last month talking to the prisoners and the governor — I think it was 4 September — and he told us that there are major difficulties with staffing. If six staff were down, the whole thing came to a standstill, and prisoners were locked in their cells longer. That was in the CJI report. Education was stopped at the last minute. You said that there is work to be done, Sue, but there is a huge amount of work to be done, from what we saw.

Mrs S McAllister: There is, and that is why Hydebank is the first of our three establishments to be reprofiled. Paul, do you want to say a bit about some of the things that you will be doing with the performance measures? We are identifying performance measures that will address the exact things that we think are absolutely crucial.

Mr Cawkwell: Two significant changes are already taking place. The first is what we call a reprofiling exercise, which is a recognition that things change in prisons, delivery models change in prisons and new priorities come online, and so you must regularly review how you deploy your staff to deliver your work. Hydebank Wood is undergoing that process to make sure that, in the future, it has resilience and can continue to deliver. September was particularly difficult. It was the end of the summer leave period, and we had been through a phase when goodwill had been withdrawn by trade unions. That is no longer the case.

The other significant change is that each prison governor has now been set a series of performance measures, and the same 18 performance measures exist for all three prisons. They cover a wide range of areas, all of them linked to prison reform. One of them specifically targets resources towards ensuring that lockdowns do not take place and that, if they do, they are kept to a minimal level. There is also another target that specifically measures the number of prisoners who are engaged in education or in vocational training on a daily basis. The genesis of my conversation with governors that it is on their performance against these measures that I will assess their end-of-year performance that will determine how we rate them as an individual. On the basis of what gets measured gets done, I am fairly confident that that will focus the attention that is required locally to ensure that lockdowns do not happen and that, if they do, it is because that was unavoidable, they did everything to avoid them and a real emphasis goes into ensuring that prisoners get to work and get to education, and that that is meaningful rather than mundane.

Mr Lynch: We found that the education was a bit disjointed, limited etc. Can you answer on that, Brian? You said that you were talking to the women in Ash House. Have you been in with the young offenders?

Mr McCaughey: I have been around the young offenders. I have not had a focus group with them yet, but I intend to. Not to pre-empt what the Minister might say, I have been working hard in my first weeks around the interim contract for the provision of learning and skills, and I hope that announcements about the interim contract will be made in the very near future.

Mr McGlone: I listened to your recent interview on 'Sunday Sequence'. Will you take the opportunity to clarify whether it is an institutional or a personal reluctance or aversion to have the Prison Service under scrutiny by, in this instance, an acknowledged expert who has made a name for himself for laudable and good reasons? That is what I took from that interview. You may wish to use this opportunity to clarify your position on that, because, given the information that we hear from the Prison Service about lockups and all of those sorts of things, I do not think that there can be enough spotlight on how prisons are being run currently. Do you want to take the opportunity to clarify your position on that? Because, in the interview, it was not that clear. I heard reluctance, at least.

Mrs S McAllister: I am more than happy to say a bit about what we are doing in inviting researchers and academics into our prisons, because we are doing quite a lot. We are working very closely with Queen's University and the University of Ulster in a number of areas to professionalise our staff by giving them professional qualifications. We are looking at our organisational development and at how our new staffing models are contributing to our reform programme, and at what we have been doing for quite a long time around desistance, which involves rehabilitation and reducing reoffending. We are meeting colleagues from Queen's on 7 November. Professor Scraton, who was part of that interview, will be at that meeting. Shadd Maruna, who is probably the key person of the Queen's personnel who we work with, is also working closely with us, and we were speaking with Shadd as recently as this week.

So there is no reluctance to have researchers come into our prisons and carry out scrutiny. We have a significant amount of scrutiny and are extremely well scrutinised, so I do not think that we could ever be said to be lacking in scrutiny. However, we also have a reform programme to deliver and a prison service to run, so, as leader of this organisation, it is about getting a balance between that and the numbers of people and the frequency of people coming in. There is absolutely no reluctance, and we are continuing to have those conversations. At this time, we probably want to focus on research and academics coming in with a view to helping us to deliver on this, because all of you continue to hold us to account, quite rightly, for delivering the reform programme. Really, everything that we do has to be focused on that programme.

Mr McGlone: You will accept that it has taken a bit of a while to deliver that programme.

Mrs S McAllister: Well, this was always a four-year programme of reform.

Mr McGlone: Just to clarify, then, you have no reluctance in dealing with acknowledged experts to help you in what you are doing.

Mrs S McAllister: I am absolutely willing and eager to have the right people come in to do the right things at the right time, and we recognise that that will be across the whole range of people. We think that the best way to do that at the moment is by engaging with Queen's and UJJ.

Mr McGlone: So what I heard on the radio was not reluctance. Are you clarifying your position now that that was not reluctance, either institutional or professional?

Mrs S McAllister: I have absolutely never been reluctant. Since the moment I arrived here, one of the things that I have tried to do is open up our prisons to enhance public and community understanding. They, after all, are our masters and —

Mr McGlone: OK. I am glad that that has been clarified, because it was not what I heard on 'Sunday Sequence', so thank you for that.

Mr Anderson: Thank you, Sue and your team, for your presentation. Getting back to the relationship between management and staff, one of the big issues at present is the payment of an environmental allowance. Quite a lot of staff in the Prison Service today do not get that allowance. For the purpose of that relationship, do you not think that more should be done? I realise that a review is taking place, but should more not be done, and quickly, to resolve that issue?

Mrs S McAllister: We are keen to get a resolution. Paul mentioned his offer to the POA to submit a joint statement to the pay review body, which will be back in Northern Ireland next month to take oral evidence. It hopes to complete its review and report to the Minister by mid-December, so it would be quite proper to wait for the outcome of that. Any recommendations must then go to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for final approval. We have been clear that anything that we do must be affordable, and we will be open in our oral evidence to the pay review body.

Mr Anderson: You say that it should be "affordable", but surely it is a right and should be paid. The issue that I am getting at is whether it is fair to equate its payment or non-payment with the level of pay of officers in GB, because there have been some such efforts by the Prison Service. Some may say, "Look, this is the pay that certain grades get". I have been inundated with concerns by constituents who work in the service. They are not happy and very concerned that their pay levels are in some way being equated to maybe stop them getting this payment, which, after all, is paid to the PSNI, and they work in similar conditions of being under threat from the terrorism that still goes on here. They have a case.

Mrs S McAllister: We have been clear that we fully recognise the anxieties of the staff. However, we have tried to be clear about unpicking the different elements of our staff salaries and how they equate to salaries in other jurisdictions where the same threats do not apply. That is why we have used a comparator. Mark, do you want to say a bit about how we have started to do some of those calculations?

Mr Adam: Yes. To pick up on your point, it is wrong to suggest that there should be, at any of those grading levels, a higher level of pay for the same job within another jurisdiction to what we have here. We have to recognise that there are demands here on all of our officers that do not exist for those in

those roles. We would expect to see a differential, and I think that we should see a differential. It is a case of how we start working through what makes up that differential. Do we start drawing comparisons with the police, where we could say that role is slightly different, again, to the role performed by our officers? This is where it is so key to the work that we can do with the pay review body, and the opportunity for it to consider all of that evidence in its understanding of what the rates of pay are in other jurisdictions, our rates of pay and the evidence that will be presented by the POA and the PGA on this. We really welcome the fact that the pay review body is willing to step outside its normal process to actually give us something quickly. Although it feels like some way away in December, that is quick in getting that to consider and will actually help with our evidence going forward.

Mr Anderson: The view that I am getting is that it should be considered as a stand-alone payment instead of being looked upon as part of their salary. That needs to be considered.

Just to finish; Paul, you have met the POA and Finlay Spratt a few times. Sue, have you met Finlay Spratt since you came here?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes. I have met him several times.

Mr Anderson: That is good.

Mrs S McAllister: I met him very early on. I have continued to meet him and to offer him a number of meetings. Sometimes he has been able to take them up. Other times, he has not, for legitimate reasons. Much of the business is done through Paul, and that is absolutely right and proper, but I continue to meet Finlay.

Mr Anderson: I am pleased to hear that the director general is meeting the POA chairman.

The Chairperson: Just a few final points to wrap it up. Is there currently an issue with your new custody officers with regard to their salary and a grievance about the way in which their progression is meant to take place?

Mrs S McAllister: It may be about accreditation. A few months ago, there was concern that we would not be in a position to award the contract for the accreditation. In fact, we have now awarded the contract to UJJ. There was some concern about that because gaining that accreditation is linked to their salary progression. That has now been done and shared with them. They have all had individual notification of how that will impact on them.

The Chairperson: OK. In terms of the final number of officers who are set to retire under the retirement scheme, there are currently around 65 to 70 for whom the business case has been approved and the money is there. Will they be out within this financial year?

Mrs S McAllister: We have notified the most recent tranche.

Mr Adam: A further 34.

Mrs S McAllister: A further 34. We have 28 staff for whom no funding is currently available. We cannot make any predictions about when we will be able to let them go.

The Chairperson: So, the 34 are out of the group of 60-odd?

Mrs S McAllister: There were 69.

Mr Adam: By the end of October, 457 will have gone. There are 34 going at the end of October. That leaves 35 for which we have funding, and yes, we will look at that by the end of this financial year, given that we have that funding. We are pursuing funding for the final 28.

The Chairperson: That is good. People who signed up to it left the service mentally a number of years ago. It is important that they can leave.

Mr Adam: It is long overdue.

Mr McCartney: I have a final question. Will the Minister address the estate strategy on Monday?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes.

The Chairperson: There are no other questions. Sue and your team, thank you very much for coming to the Committee. It is much appreciated.