



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Prison Reform Programme:
Prison Officers' Association Briefing

6 June 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 Stewart Dickson
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Alban Maginness
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Patsy McGlone

Witnesses:

Mr Paul Hardy	Prison Officers' Association
Ms June Robinson	Prison Officers' Association
Mr Finlay Spratt	Prison Officers' Association

The Chairperson: I formally welcome Mr Finlay Spratt, who is chairman of the Prison Officers' Association (POA); Mr Paul Hardy, who is vice-chairman; and Ms June Robinson, who is the area secretary. Do you have any opening remarks, Mr Spratt, before members ask questions?

Mr Finlay Spratt (Prison Officers' Association): On behalf of the Prison Officers' Association and my colleagues, we thank the Committee for the opportunity to come back to give evidence. I read some of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) submissions to the Committee. I apologise to the Committee because I have just given you some paperwork; unfortunately, the machinery in our office was not working, and we have just produced it. It gives you a flavour of the correspondence between the head of the Prison Service and the Prison Officers' Association since December last year. It gives you the background to what we see going on. I am happy to answer questions.

The Chairperson: One issue that members of staff raised with us when we were in Magilligan prison was the target operating model (TOM) and how it had an impact on the number of staff on the landings and so on. Do you want to comment on the TOM and its impact on the Prison Service?

Mr F Spratt: It is quite obvious that the TOM does not operate correctly. As I said all along, people are trying to impose an English solution on an Irish problem; it just does not work. What is going on is that the TOM is not working. In fact, at Sue McAllister's last appearance before the Justice Committee, she recognised that a lot of overtime was being worked in the establishment because the TOM is not operating. I refer the Committee to the last meeting that it had with the head of the Prison Service and Mr Armour. It gives you a flavour of what is going on in the Prison Service. Mr Armour said:

"When we began the evaluation"—

— he was talking about the TOM —

"— we asked the POA for its views, and it submitted a number of written representations. Two of our own staff are now going round each of the prisons and working with the local central detail office, taking the views of governors. We have the views of the POA. We will build that in over the next number of months to come out with a revised profile."

Let me tell the Committee that Mr Armour is being a bit economical with the truth. We met the Prison Service in October last year to talk about the TOM, and following that meeting, it was decided that we would meet in February 2013. We had four months to review the TOM. Our association was asked to go away. We put in our views on the TOM in writing in November last year. We were to see if we could come up with a better attendance system that delivered everything that we needed and that looked after the needs of prisoners and staff. We did that, and we produced documentation for Prison Service management. We met around 20 February 2013, and all the proposals that the POA put forward were rejected. I asked Mr Armour what the Prison Service had produced to show to us. They had done absolutely nothing. So from October 2012 to February 2013, the management of the Northern Ireland Prison Service did absolutely nothing. Yet and all, they asked us for our ideas: we put forward a list of the problems, and they have done nothing. They are now running around and telling the Justice Committee that they have two people looking at a review of the TOM. What were they doing for four months? They did absolutely nothing.

The Chairperson: Are those two people profilers?

Mr F Spratt: That is another interesting thing, Mr Chairman. They brought in profilers from England because, they said, the Northern Ireland Prison Service did not have the capabilities to profile the Prison Service. They paid them £150,000 of taxpayers' money. If you remember, I raised that issue when I was last here. The two people who are now going round are the two profilers who were employed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service and who are doing the job for which they paid profilers from England £150,000 of taxpayers' money. What is going on?

I have to say this reluctantly: I have never seen such a waste of taxpayers' money as that going on around the Prison Service. The amount of money that is being handed out to people coming in from other jurisdictions to try to tell us how to run a Prison Service — they cannot even run their own service — is just unbelievable.

The Chairperson: Is this the second time that profilers have had to be brought in to deal with —

Mr F Spratt: No, they are not bringing them in. Our own profilers, who are employed by the Prison Service and who should have done the job from day one, are now doing it, after £150,000 had been paid out.

Let me tell you another thing. The permanent secretary was conned about employing profilers from England. The excuse was made that they had to short-circuit the normal tendering process and that there was no one in the Northern Ireland Prison Service who was capable of doing the job. I had a copy of the letter that went to the permanent secretary, and he agreed that they could override the normal tendering process. They handed out £150,000 of taxpayers' money out of the Northern Ireland Budget when it could have been done in-house.

The Chairperson: Is it now being done in-house?

Mr F Spratt: It is now being done in-house. What a disgrace.

The Chairperson: Is the TOM, as it had been established through the profilers who were brought in, reducing the number of lockdowns to which prisoners were being subjected? What was the impact on the staff who had to work on the landings? Were they more confident that they were able to do their job, or were they less confident?

Mr F Spratt: No. The morale of the Northern Ireland Prison Service has been knocked. They brought in profilers from England who told them that they could run the Northern Ireland Prison Service with

200 fewer staff. That is fine. We are all living in difficult economic situations, and even though as a trade unionist, I do not like it, I accept that that is a fact of life. We are all living in a different environment. They told the service that they could run it with 200 fewer staff, yet and all, the Northern Ireland Assembly cut the Prison Service budget by £17.6 million, which equates to 360 staff. Yet and all, their profilers — the professionals — said no, you can reduce it by only 200 staff. We are now trying to reduce staff numbers by 360. In fact, that is what the staff reduction programme is all about.

I have to say this, with respect, to the Justice Committee: it was a great ploy at the time when these people, including Mr McConnell, who was the director general, came up here. As far as I am concerned, he sold you a bum steer because he told you that things would be better. Things are actually worse. I believe that we should do everything that we possibly can, within the restrictions that we have, to support prisoners. However, instead of supporting them, you are locking up prisoners more than has ever happened in the Prison Service. That is the sum total of the reform of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Mr Chairman, ask this question: what has changed for prisoners? The answer is: nothing. Prisoners are now locked up more than they ever were. It is like "Live horse and you'll get oats."

The Chairperson: I have been looking at some of the documentation that you provided. I appreciate that members have just received the documentation. You were in correspondence with the Prison Service on a number of points. You wrote to Sue McAllister on 3 December 2012, and she responded on 17 December 2012. One of the topics was the TOM, but there are a number of other points. Can I ask you about them now? Senior officer promotions is one issue. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr F Spratt: There has not been a senior officer promotion in the Northern Ireland Prison Service since 2000, when the Maze closed. The Northern Ireland Prison Service is being run by people who are temporarily promoted. They are trying to reform the Prison Service, but how can you reform an organisation when the majority of managers do not have a position in that organisation? You are not going anywhere. I have been battling since 2000 for proper promotions. There is a list in the letter that shows that one governor 3 is acting as a governor 2. Those are all acting positions.

Forty-two officers are acting up as senior officers. We have been denied that promotion for years, and that is going on across the organisation. They are bringing people in from other jurisdictions and are denying my members promotion. You have only to look at the governor grade. We have brought in a director of operations, and you will see in one of the letters that I said to the director general that the position should have been filled by somebody from the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

They have even manipulated the ceiling: they have brought in redundancy for those at governor 1 grade. That will leave the way free to bring in somebody from another jurisdiction. That is costing the taxpayer in Northern Ireland.

Do not forget, Mr Chairman, that I have been down this road before: I have been around the Prison Service for 37 years, and I see what is going on. If you get the time to take the correspondence home and read it, you will see facts. I have nothing to hide. The members whom I represent have been denied promotion for years. It is like the old scenario: "Live horse and you'll get oats", and if you get oats, you might collapse. They are telling us that we might get a promotion board in September or October. We have waited since 2000.

The Chairperson: You said that many people are acting up in positions, including a governor 3 acting up as a governor 2, and that there have been advertisements for senior positions, which have gone to people from other jurisdictions.

Mr F Spratt: That is right. My letter of 4 February to Sue McAllister sets the context. Our managers are not getting a proper opportunity to move up the promotion ladder. People are being brought in from other jurisdictions at additional cost to the taxpayer in Northern Ireland. The governor at the Young Offenders Centre (YOC), for example, is a retired governor who left the English prison service with a big pension and a lump sum. He is now over here working as a governor. The director of operations in the Northern Ireland Prison Service was the governor of Whitemoor prison. He is now here, with his salary, all the allowances and everything else that goes with the job. The recruitment should have been done in Northern Ireland.

I raised that issue when Paul Murphy was the Secretary of State, and a director of operations was being brought in from the English prison service. Paul Murphy stopped the appointment, and Max

Murray was promoted to director of operations. We are now back to bringing in people from other jurisdictions, and it is costing the taxpayer in Northern Ireland additional money. The positions are paid for out of the Northern Ireland block grant, whether you like it or not.

The Chairperson: Is there someone who works in the Prison Service who could have been made the permanent governor of the YOC without there being any need for anybody else?

Mr F Spratt: I will give you an example that I refer to in the letter. Two governors have been penalised and discriminated against in the Northern Ireland Prison Service because they were, unfortunately, the two governors involved at the time of the tragic death of Colin Bell. It is interesting to note that there have been seven deaths in custody in Maghaberry prison since that, and nothing has happened; there have been four deaths in custody at the YOC, and nothing has happened. Those two governors were the sacrificial lambs to cover people higher up in the management structure. There is a governor, to whom I refer in the letter, who is doing mundane tasks, is being paid as a governor 2 and is basically a message boy at headquarters. In Sue McAllister's letter, she tries to make out that the organisation is trying to get more talent in. It is interesting to note that only one governor applied for the job in the YOC, and he got it. How is that opening it up? The deputy governor was offered a temporary appointment. However, the job had been offered to an English person who had applied for the job but then did not take it, so they had to give a temporary promotion to one of our members in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson: What message does that send to rank-and-file officers?

Mr F Spratt: The message is quite clear. I have said it here previously, but nobody wants to listen. The men and women of the Northern Ireland Prison Service have been ignored in the reform of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. I have raised the issue time and time again. You cannot reform the Northern Ireland Prison Service unless the members are part of that reform. Promotional prospects for our governor grade and officer grades have been minimal. All the governor grade posts are being given to people coming in from other jurisdictions.

I have said from the outset that we want reform of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. We fully support that, but we do not support what has been happening. I have to say to members that they come up to the Justice Committee and give you a lot of waffle. I have read the minutes, and it is a lot of waffle. When you talk to the officers, you will hear that it is different on the ground. I have no axe to grind. I am here to tell you how I see it. The letters that I have given you show how I see it. I may be wrong, but that is how I see it. I ask this question again: we have been at this for two years now, but what have we done with the ordinary prisoner on the ground other than waste taxpayers' money?

The Chairperson: I will make a final point and then bring in other members. As an individual MLA, I raised the issue of the environmental allowance relating to the security threat that all members of the Prison Service, including prison officers and custody officers, have to live with. The brutal murder of David Black put that into stark focus for a lot of people. So far, there has not been any movement on the environmental allowance. Finlay, I know that the POA has been pursuing that. Do you want to give us some commentary on that issue?

Mr F Spratt: I do not want prison officers to be paid an environmental allowance. I want to live in an environment in which everyone is happy and content, and we do not need it. However, the reality is that members of the PSNI have been given what is referred to as an environmental allowance. I will give you the wording that the Northern Ireland Prison Service uses to explain:

"The basis for continued payment of the allowance reflects the fact that the security situation in Northern Ireland still imposes substantial environmental and lifestyle challenges for the police officers of the PSNI by comparison with their colleagues in GB forces, who receive the same basic rates of pay."

Can you tell Mrs Black that her husband, who lost his life, is any different? Can you tell the 29 prison officers who lost their lives down through the Troubles that they are any different from PSNI officers? Members of the Prison Service have been treated as second-class citizens throughout the history of our Troubles. We wish to move on from that, but the fact is that becoming a prison officer places additional burdens on you in that you will need security lights and so on. Prison officers are entitled to that as much as PSNI officers.

I want to refer to Ronnie Armour's letter of 1 May.

The Chairperson: He refers to an "emergency allowance".

Mr F Spratt: His letter states:

"In this context we believe that payment of an allowance to reflect the fact that the security situation imposes substantial environmental and lifestyle challenges for the prison staff in NI is not required because the differences in the salary scales already reflect this fact."

What a load of crap. I ask you to read this letter. I will pass copies around for the benefit of the Justice Committee. Would you mind passing those around, Alban?

Mr A Maginness: Not at all.

Mr F Spratt: This letter tries to tell you and everybody who wants to listen that the PSNI gets the allowance because its members have the same basic salary as their counterparts in GB. Right? They try to say in this letter, if you get time to read it, that prison officers in Northern Ireland, particularly our new custody officers, are earning more money than their counterparts in GB; therefore, that additional money would help to pay the money that we are looking for.

Gentlemen and ladies, with the greatest respect, I could use stronger words, but talk about trying to mislead people. I have given you the information and asked you to look at the salary of a custody officer, and I have highlighted it. The fact is that it is £18,180; this is from the Pay Review Body. I have also highlighted for you that a prison officer in England on band 3, which is the equivalent of a custody officer grade, has a salary of £19,906. I challenged Mr Armour on this letter that he put out, and I was right. They are wrong, and the Minister is wrong. Prison officers in Northern Ireland are being paid less money than their counterparts in GB. Those are the facts, taken from the Pay Review Body report.

They are trying to use the excuse that we earn more money and that that will make up for this environmental allowance, but the fact is that the environmental allowance is paid to PSNI officers. My members suffer the same pressures as those in the PSNI do living in a divided community. That is a fact of life, although I wish that it was not. However, prison officers have not had the benefit of the ceasefires. The interesting thing about it is that prison officers, including my colleague Paul Hardy and me, receive an element in our pay that reflects the security situation in Northern Ireland. Yet and all, 59% of prison officers do not now receive anything. What is the difference between them and me? It is not justifiable for Mr Armour, the Minister and their cohorts to come along to the Committee to try to justify what they are doing.

The Chairperson: What is your argument — very quickly, because I am reading Ronnie Armour's letter back to you only now — against his comparing custody officers to officer support grades?

Mr F Spratt: That is where they made the mistake. Whoever drafted that reply for Mr Armour does not know the first thing about the Prison Service, and far less about the English service. Those in an operational support grade (OSG) do not do the job of a prison officer; they do gates and transport. Custody officers here do the full range of duties: they are working on the landings today at 16, and their role was compared to that of someone in an operational support grade in England. The document that I gave shows that band 3 is the new prison officer grade in England, and that is what they should be compared with. I pointed that out to Mr Armour and wrote the letter. You will find that that is all contained in my letter of 7 May. He is wrong. It is simply their way to justify decisions.

As a matter of interest, I got a letter from Sue McAllister in the post today, which I will give to you. Alban, would you mind passing those round?

Mr A Maginness: Not at all.

Mr F Spratt: That came in just today, so unfortunately I was not able to get it to you until now. She talks about the allowance and states how they can afford it and how they are going to do it. She states that she will ask the Pay Review Body — the same Pay Review Body that abdicated its responsibility when there was funding. That is another thing, Mr Chairman: they talk about money. What are they paying that quango called the Pay Review Body to come over here and determine the pay of prison officers when the Government already set it down? That, again, is money being paid out

of the taxpayers' purse for a quango that has no role to play because all it does is endorse the Government's decision on pay. So what are we paying it for? That is her letter today, and it does not mean anything. They are going back to the Pay Review Body — the same Pay Review Body that said that the matter might be outside its remit. They cannot make up their mind what they are doing.

It is interesting to note that the date at the top of that letter is January 2013. The civil servants must have been asleep since January because I am getting it only now. I did not type that date on it; it was on the letter that I received. It is obvious that it was drafted in January, but we are getting it only now.

The Chairperson: I see from the letter —

Mr F Spratt: Does that not tell you what is going on?

The Chairperson: — that they are going to ask the Pay Review Body to look again at the question of principle.

Mr F Spratt: Exactly. They could not make their mind up the first time, but that will be a lot more taxpayers' money to pay out instead of stepping up to the table. As far as I am concerned, the prison officers whom I represent are entitled to the environmental allowance that their colleagues in the PSNI receive.

In her letter, Sue McAllister is trying to box clever. She thinks that she will con me that they will do something for a certain grade but not for others. I represent all members and I ain't playing her game.

The fact of the matter is this: is it not strange that 41% of us — including Paul Hardy and me — have an element in our pay? Civil servants, who go to work in prisons and all, get the payment, but what about 51% of custody officers, whom the Prison Service recruited? The Prison Service exploited the fellas and girls in Northern Ireland and brought them into the service, and they have paid them less money than their English counterparts. They even added an extra increment to their progression, which is unlawful — I have not got to that one yet, but I will.

I am telling you that I have never seen as much corruption in an organisation, and I have been in it for 37 years. There is a con being played on the public in Northern Ireland. With the greatest respect to the Committee for Justice, the Prison Service has come up here and given you a load of waffle.

The Chairperson: I need to be careful about words like corruption. You are obviously at liberty to use whatever words you want to, but I want to be careful about going too far down the road of talking about corruption.

Mr F Spratt: I appreciate that, but I am sorry; that is my view.

The Chairperson: You are entitled to your view without, obviously, naming any individuals in that regard. Let us be careful on that front.

Mr Easton: I do not know where to start. I will start with the TOM. When we were up at Magilligan prison, we visited one of the sex offender wings. First, the part of the TOM that I found very disturbing was when I spoke to a woman prison officer — I do not know what grade she was — who said that the sex offenders on that wing are given the keys to their own cells. I found that rather bizarre. Why are sex offenders given keys to their own cells?

Secondly, at night, there would be only three officers on duty for that whole block — one in a central position and one on each wing. The officer on duty on that sex offender wing could be a woman prison officer. I found that disturbing, because if something were to happen to her, how can someone get to her in time? It seems to me that the TOM places women prison officers in danger.

Mr F Spratt: I do not manage the Prison Service, Mr Easton. The POA was accused of doing that all the time. Let the powers that be and the experts whom they bring in from England manage it. I am here only to voice my opinion.

The Prison Service has taken on a lot of new recruits, which is all good. Incidentally, they will not stay in the Prison Service once the economic climate picks up, but that is a story for another day.

Unfortunately, to answer your question, that is the way it is; female officers are now treated as equal to male officers. I share your concern, because I know of incidents at Magilligan, for example, in which three female officers have been on duty on landings on their own. I raised that matter at a meeting at the Department some months ago. The Prison Service has been guilty of taking out all the experienced officers and throwing all those young ones onto the landings on their own. So, on occasions in Magilligan, there could be three females who are new to the job managing up to 50 male prisoners. That is what the management of the prison has done. I raised that issue with them, and they have started to put experienced officers back on the landings. That is what the Prison Service was at: new recruits were coming in and being thrown straight on to landings.

Mr Easton, I share your concern about female officers being left on landings with no male presence. I think that it is wrong to place them in that position. However, as Sue McAllister said, they are prison officers and that, unfortunately, is what they have to face. My biggest fear is that, some day, we will wake up to the news that a female officer has been assaulted. That, unfortunately, is the reality of life.

Mr Easton: Yes, I share that concern.

How many prison officers have been given temporary promotions? You talked about that earlier.

Mr F Spratt: I stated how many there were in the letter that I wrote. I think that the number is something like 45.

Mr A Maginness: I think that it was 65.

Mr F Spratt: Sorry, 42 officers and 23 others, so the total is 65. If you look at the letter dated 3 December, you will see the list. All were acting up at that time. I got all the information from the establishments. That demonstrates how the Northern Ireland Prison Service is filling those roles, which is the point that I have been trying to make. They talk about reforming the Northern Ireland Prison Service, but the present staff were not given ownership of it. It is all about people acting up and bringing in people from other jurisdictions, who are making an absolute fortune. Do not forget, as I said before, that I have been around this organisation for 37 years and know what went on the last time. We are being sold a pup, but that is up to you people; it is not up to me.

Mr Easton: You said that there have been no promotions since 2000.

Mr F Spratt: For senior officers. That is correct.

Mr Easton: That is quite astounding. We need to look at why there have been no permanent promotions for 13 years.

Mr F Spratt: Mr Easton, I can assure you that, as the chairman of the association, I have raised that issue time and again, and nobody wants to listen. Ronnie Armour talks about seeking the views of the POA. Since the reform of the Northern Ireland Prison Service began, we have expressed our views on many occasions, but they have not been taken into account. I quoted an example to you: for four months, between October and February, it did absolutely nothing about the TOM.

That is how they run the Northern Ireland Prison Service: on temporary promotions and with nobody owning anything. Why would prison officers step up to the plate and put their head on the line? They are only temporarily promoted and could be a basic rate officer next week. That is what is going on, but they do not tell you people that. I have read all the minutes of your meetings with them. They come up and waffle to you and tell you about all the wonderful things that they are doing. They do not tell you what they are doing to prison officers.

Mr Easton: I agree with the point about consultation with prison officers. When we were up at Magilligan, I asked some of them whether they were ever consulted, and they said that they were not. I agree that there may not have been the consultation that there should have been.

You did not answer the question about prisoners having a key to their cell in a sex offender wing.

Mr F Spratt: That policy was introduced as part of a different system of working. Prisoners can have the key to their cell and move up a progression — it is a progression regime, and management deal with that. As an organisation, we have no input into it. The regime is used to help inmates to progress

and take responsibility for themselves. That is the idea of them having their own keys. That is not our concern, but I certainly share your concern about the female officers.

Mr Easton: Could prisoners having keys to their cells not place women prison officers in more danger?

Mr F Spratt: Not really because prison officers have an overriding key and access to those cells at any time. The way that they run the progression regime means that the better that prisoners behave, the more they progress, and that is to be supported. If prisoners can work their way up and take responsibility, I think that that is to be welcomed. We have no great issue with that.

Mr Easton: I found it a bit bizarre.

I think that we need to get somebody to come in and answer all these accusations.

Mr McCartney: Thank you for your presentation.

Mr F Spratt: Thank you, Raymond.

Mr McCartney: I see that there is still no English solution to an Irish problem. *[Laughter.]*

Mr F Spratt: You should know better than anybody, Raymond. *[Laughter.]* You know more about that than me. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCartney: A lot of information has come before us today —

Mr F Spratt: I apologise for that.

Mr McCartney: No, that is understandable.

Mr F Spratt: If you want to take it home and read it, give me a ring any time, and I will answer any questions for you.

Mr McCartney: I will indeed. In the letter from headquarters, there is a chart on pay scales. I think that you gave this to us today.

Mr F Spratt: Is that in the first part?

Mr McCartney: It is dated 1 May.

Mr F Spratt: That is the point that I was trying to make to you, Raymond.

Mr McCartney: Is there progression to £23,000 or is that inaccurate?

Mr F Spratt: Which one are you looking at?

Mr McCartney: I am looking at the second grade from the bottom, which is custody officer.

Mr F Spratt: Yes, the progression is from £18,180 to £23,000. They make the comparison between a custody officer in Northern Ireland and an OSG in England. All those pay scales — east and west outer London and east and west inner London — are all OSGs.

Mr McCartney: These are OSGs?

Mr F Spratt: Yes, that is what the Pay Review Body uses, so that is wrong. That is why you have to look at the new chart that I gave you. It shows that the officer grade, the equivalent in England, earns £19,906, which rises to £23,499. It is interesting to note that there are five incremental steps on that scale. If you look at the custody officer progression scale, you will see that there are six incremental steps, which is unlawful. Does that explain it?

Mr McCartney: I assume that your point about the higher pay scale for the higher positions of principal officer or senior officer, which make up 41%, is that most of the people who —

Mr F Spratt: Are you talking about the 41% who get the environmental allowance?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mr F Spratt: Yes, those are the old officers from pre-2002.

Mr McCartney: That would, in the main, make up the differential —

Mr F Spratt: Yes, that is why those salaries are so high. Incidentally, Raymond, those salaries are no longer subject to increases. If you look at the latest Pay Review Body report, you see that the salaries for principal officer, senior officer and main grade officer posts will no longer increase because we got what they call an unconsolidated pay increase. The new grades are the custody officer and the offender supervisor.

Mr McCartney: I just wanted that clarified for when, as Alex said, management come back to the Committee.

You said that you submitted a paper on the TOM. May we have a copy of that? I agree that the prison system should aim to get prisoners out of their cells for the optimum time to engage in purposeful activity. We saw that working reasonably well in Magilligan, but one criticism that the staff make is that there are not enough purposeful activities or that the level of activity is well below the rate that it should be.

Mr F Spratt: That has always been —

Mr McCartney: I accept that, but we need that to happen because —

Mr F Spratt: Each branch was asked in October or November to submit a list of what they thought was wrong with the TOM model. When I leave here, I will get those lists and send them to the Chairman of the Committee. You can certainly have them.

Mr McCartney: The advertisement of the governor posts in Hydebank is referred to in the 17 December reply to your letter. I assume that there is a typo, but perhaps I am wrong. Should "My objecting" read "My objective"?

Mr F Spratt: What letter?

Mr McCartney: It is in response to your being opposed to the posts being advertised.

Mr F Spratt: Yes, because we believed that they should have been advertised internally in the Northern Ireland Prison Service to give our members the opportunity of promotion. There was no need to go outside our jurisdiction. People need to wake up to the fact that they are creating vacancies so that they can bring people in from other jurisdictions. I will give you an example. All of a sudden, she came up with the idea that we could make a governor 1 redundant. Is it not strange that the governor 1 at Maghaberry will be made redundant? Watch this space. We have only one governor 1, who is at Magilligan and should not be there. The letter shows that he was put there. There used to be two governor 1 posts, and one of them became the director of operations at headquarters. He has taken redundancy, so we give the role to someone from another jurisdiction.

Mr McCartney: On the appointment in Hydebank, you say that he was retired, so should the abatement kick in?

Mr F Spratt: No, apparently it does not. I have asked that question. Apparently, you can leave the English service with a full pension and lump sum and keep all that, but, if you leave the Northern Ireland Prison Service and re-join the Civil Service, you suffer abatement.

Mr McCartney: We need to clarify that.

We welcomed the wider reform package. I accept that we are only in prisons for short periods when on visits. I do not want to sound as though I am an expert, but there seems to be a movement towards getting prisoners out of their cells more.

Mr F Spratt: Raymond, it is no secret. I have talked about this often, from as far back as the 1980s. I do not know whether you remember, but prisoners in Magilligan in the 1980s used to sew shoes and jumpers. As chairman of the local branch of the association at the time, I argued that prison should be more oriented towards education. Nobody listened to me because I am only the chairman of the Prison Officers' Association. However, when Criminal Justice Inspection made the point about education, you all jumped on it. I have been arguing for that for some time.

We fully support the reform of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, but you have to take the staff with you. My charge to the Prison Service management is that it has not taken the staff of the Northern Ireland Prison Service with it. We have become demoralised, and I have watched good governors being demoralised so that other people could come in from other jurisdictions and take their position. These positions should be their promotional prospects. I fully support reform of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, and I fully support prisoners being usefully engaged. For years, in Magilligan, prisoners were lying about doing nothing. That is wrong, but nobody wanted to listen.

When I was last here, I told you that I do not believe that we need to spend the millions of pounds that we are spending on consultants and so on. We all know that we should have stepped up to the plate and made the Northern Ireland prison officers part of that reform, but, unfortunately, they have been sidelined. The governor 5 and principal officer grades have gone, and senior officers have been loaded with so much work that they will have no time to supervise prisoners and staff. Raymond, it is an English solution to an Irish problem, and it will not work.

Mr McCartney: Criminal Justice Inspection was very consistent in its view that the previous shift pattern did not lend itself to prisoners being out of their cells for the optimum time.

Mr F Spratt: No.

Mr McCartney: Therefore, that is a welcome move forward in how that is managed.

Mr F Spratt: Absolutely. We have no issue with that.

Mr McCartney: You represent staff, and your position is understandable. When we visited a prison in Milton Keynes, we were struck by the ratio of prisoners to staff. One block had something like 240 prisoners and was staffed by maybe five or six people.

Mr F Spratt: I am not disputing the point that you make, but many people fail to realise that the English system has 140 prisons, so they are able to select. We have three prisons, so we cannot select. You know that Magilligan tries to categorise the type of prisoner, but that is not always possible.

They came in and told us that we could run with 200 fewer staff. Fine, I accept that because we are living in difficult economic times, but our staffing levels are being cut by 360. With the greatest of respect, when something happens in the prisons, such as drugs and so on being found, do not blame prison officers — the members whom I represent. Magilligan is just a powder keg because people lie about doing nothing. I agree 100% with you that we need to get them out of their cells and working. The point that I am trying to make is that we did not need to waste that vast amount of taxpayers' money, and certain people are making empires for themselves.

We are not concentrating on the real issue, which is the Prison Service bringing staff along with it as part of the reform package and ensuring that prisoners have better outcomes. What the Justice Committee and everybody else did by signing up to the reform was to have prisoners closed up in their cells more than ever. You tell them that they will be locked in their cells on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 5.30 pm. I would not like to be locked away in my cell at 5.30 pm on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but that is how it is.

Mr McCartney: How do we shift that forward? Is it solely down to the TOM?

Mr F Spratt: That is what was brought in here from England. They told us that that was what we needed. You paid them £150,000 to do it. They did not even make up shift patterns; they lifted the shift patterns from an English prison and imposed them in Northern Ireland. That is what they did, and they took £150,000 of our taxpayers' money, but sure.

Mr McCartney: Right, we have to examine that. If that is what happened, we —

Mr F Spratt: The facts speak for themselves, Raymond.

Mr McCartney: Fine. You have laid them out; now we have to interrogate them.

Is there an acceptance that prisons are overstuffed?

Mr F Spratt: No. At present, Raymond, we have had to accept that there was a necessity for cutbacks in the Prison Service because of the economic climate. If we want to deliver, prisons are not overstuffed. If they cut much further, there will be difficulties. Your colleague Mr Easton raised the question of female officers, and they are being exposed in the jails. I hope that we do not wake up to bad news one morning, but that is how far the numbers have been cut.

I acknowledge — it is very difficult as a trade union leader to do this — that we live in difficult economic times. I accept that there was a need for some cutbacks, but we have gone over the top. I read what Sue McAllister said about using officers in different ways. That is fine, and you probably could do that, providing that officers feel that they are part of the reform. At present, they do not. The Prison Service is being reformed for the benefit of a lot of other people. I notice, for example, that the Probation Board is trying to take over the role of prison officers. That is the next thing coming. Psychology services in the Prison Service have been totally isolated, and it now appears that the Probation Board is taking those over. We have our own psychology services, but do you ever talk to them? No, you do not — I do not know why.

Mr McCartney: I think that the Chair, in fairness to him, has raised the issue on a number of occasions, including at Magilligan. I accept the argument that England has more prisons and so has more scope for open prisons and so on. The move to re-categorise Maghaberry into three mini-prisons should allow the regime to have less of a lockdown mentality. There is a debate about a newbuild for Magilligan. There are issues around location, and you can see the steps taken by the forum to build up community links, but the design of the building should also have an impact. That was the one thing about the Milton Keynes model — it seemed designed differently. It is designed for observation, and that design means that there are fewer staff, but people are still out of their cells more often.

Mr F Spratt: There is no doubt, Raymond, that the design of accommodation plays a big part in staffing levels. In fact, the design that they had come up with for Magilligan was brilliant. During the debate about what the accommodation should be, I proposed that, as we were having in-cell sanitation, we should include a shower because it would not take up much room and stop the carry-on of everybody having to try to get a shower. That was not taken on board, but I think that we should think about it. There is no doubt that as we get new accommodation, the staffing levels will reduce. A lot of people forget that we are working in a lot of old accommodation with high staffing levels. In the report, the chairman refers to when he was in H2 at the Maze and saw different things.

Based on the accommodation that we have now and the already implemented reduction in staff, I do not believe that the Prison Service is overmanned. I think that, if we go any further, we will run a risk of something happening, and the Assembly will shout about that, and people will try to blame prison officers. I want to place on the record that it will not be the fault of prison officers if something goes wrong. I think that we are bordering on the impossible because prisoners are frustrated, which is understandable because they are locked up and have no jobs. We should be trying to alleviate that pressure and getting them out of their cell to do something. We would fully support that. We have no difficulty with that.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much for your presentation and for your frankness and candour, if I may call it that. To be honest, I think that some of what you have said here today raises potentially grave concerns for the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Given the promotion situation that you outlined, and assuming that local people are equally qualified, upskilled and have as much experience as those coming in from other jurisdictions —

Mr F Spratt: Absolutely.

Mr Humphrey: Apart from the cost, what is the morale of the Northern Ireland Prison Service at present, both at the senior level and among rank and file?

Mr F Spratt: It destroys people's morale. The governor who I spoke to you about is running about like a gypsy from one place to another. They are paying him a good salary, but he is not allowed to do the job because certain individuals in the organisation have their own particular axe to grind. It certainly does not do any good for morale. I see that Raymond and Patsy are having a wee talk to themselves about it. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCartney: I feel suitably chastised.

Mr Humphrey: What is the effect of lowering their morale?

Mr F Spratt: They are not pleased about the situation, but it is like everything else. All they can do is, through the organisation that I represent, make that case when we can, and I have made it time and time again. I wrote that letter to Sue McAllister, and all I got back, with the greatest respect, was waffle. It was like, "Live horse and you'll get oats." I am now told that there will probably be a promotion board around October, but that is the first since 2000. Yet they knew — I put this case to Ronnie Armour some time ago — how many people wanted that. Those boards could have been held, but they prefer to hold people back because that keeps them upset. They do not know what is happening or what the future holds. It allows them to manipulate staff much better because they think that they may get promotion if they do this or that.

The Chairperson: To be politically correct, it is members of the Travelling community.

Mr Elliott: Thanks very much for your presentation. I want clarification on a couple of points. The letter from Sue McAllister on 17 December states:

"I agreed to evaluate the TOM by February 2013."

Is that the current review?

Mr F Spratt: *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Elliott: In that paragraph, she goes on to state:

"it is important that we all understand that we cannot compromise on efficiency".

Compromise on efficiency by doing what?

Mr F Spratt: I do not know. You would need to need to ask her. I could not make head nor tail of it. That is what I said earlier.

Mr Elliott: I was just wondering what your understanding of it is.

Mr F Spratt: I am a Paddy, so I am not very good at understanding what this means.

Mr Elliott: She continues:

"there is no question of our staffing levels increasing. Indeed, as you know, we need to make further significant reductions."

Mr F Spratt: This is the point that I have been making. I acknowledge that the Prison Service needed to be reformed and accept that we are living in a difficult economic climate. However, although you read all this paraphernalia about what they will do for prisoners, the real agenda here is cutting the cost of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. They are tinkering around the edges, but all that they are driving for is efficiency, efficiency.

People seem to forget that we are dealing with human beings. Our hospitals and education system are, unfortunately, also suffering cutbacks. However, prisoners are not machines; you cannot switch them off. They are active, and their minds are going 24 hours a day. There is only so far that you can go, and I believe that that point has been reached.

Mr Elliott: That answers my point. I am trying to get a direct answer, and I could not get anyone more direct than you, Finlay. Your opinion is that there are no opportunities for "further significant staffing reductions", and that is the vital point. It is clear from the letter that they are not talking about wanting a little more efficiency; they are talking about taking a wave of people out of the Prison Service.

Mr F Spratt: My difficulty is that they brought in profilers from the English Prison Service, who tried to tell us how we needed to run the Northern Ireland Prison Service. They told us that we could run with 200 fewer staff, which is fine. The Northern Ireland Executive cut the Prison Service budget by £17.6 million, which equates to 360 staff, so management must reduce staff by 360, but you cannot expect us to deliver a Rolls Royce service if there are not enough staff to do so. The whole process is about cutting cost.

Tom, you asked me whether I saw any opportunities for more efficiency. If you come across something that enables us to do things better and more efficiently, I have no issue with that, but the prison officers whom I represent were not taken along as part of the reform. I have made this case time and time again. What was imposed on us was people coming in from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in England. They knew best, and they based the Northern Ireland Prison Service on the English system, which has 140 prisons, so they can categorise their prisoners. We have only three establishments. We are hopeful of getting the working-out unit in Belfast again, which will be helpful, but we still have only three prisons and all types of prisoner. Take Maghaberry or Magilligan, for example. Mr Easton talked about sex offenders. We have to handle all that. The Northern Ireland Prison Service was looked at by NOMS, which has a far bigger budget and has to deal with 140 establishments. It found an English solution for an Irish problem, and it is not working. It is as simple as that.

I cannot say often enough that the union that I represent fully supports reform and making things better for prisoners. I have argued about the way the system was for years. I argued that prisoners were sewing shoes and jumpers when they should have been involved in education, and nobody listened. However, as soon as an organisation like Criminal Justice Inspection made that argument, the response was, "Oh, that's wonderful." When I, as head of the trade union, said it, the response was "No, it does not matter." I argued that the remission system was wrong. People should have been working with the prison officers. In that way, they could earn remission and work their way out. It was a better system, because people would have then felt that they belonged. Down through the years, the NIPS has been underfunded when it comes to the ordinary criminal, who has been set aside.

Mr Elliott: I want to touch briefly on the integration of new prison officers with those who have been there long term. There was a suggestion at a Committee meeting here some time ago — and I will put it no more strongly than that, because you can read Hansard yourself — that new prison officers coming out with a new ethos would learn bad habits from the existing prison officers.

Mr F Spratt: They would be contaminated.

Mr Elliott: I challenge the view very strongly. How are the new prison officers integrating, and is there a good relationship between all prison officers, both new recruits and the longer-serving officers?

Mr F Spratt: I read that, and it made me really angry, because the people making comments such as that were from another jurisdiction. Let me be clear: new custody officers coming into the Prison Service are being intermingled with existing officers. They have worked very well together, and Sue McAllister recognises that. The same comment was made previously that we, the old officers, would contaminate the new ones. She has had to recognise the professionalism of the existing officers who have incorporated the new officers, because the new officers are young fellas and girls and they need the old hands.

The NIPS has to be commended for how it has done its job over the years. I was really angry that people would come here from another jurisdiction, without having a clue about the NIPS, and make

comments such as that. I took offence at the comments too. The new prison officers and the old hands are working very closely and get on very well. There has been no difficulty.

Mr McGlone: Thank you very much for being with us today, Finlay. I just wish you would not beat about the bush so much. *[Laughter.]*

Mr F Spratt: Like yourself, Patsy.

Mr McGlone: That is right. Raymond mentioned this earlier, but could you refresh us on the £140,000 that was spent on bringing people over to review the target operating model? They came over and did the work. Are you telling us that £140,000 was spent and that the work had to be done again?

Mr F Spratt: Yes, they are gone. Ronnie Armour told the Justice Committee that he has two people going around reviewing the TOM; so they are doing it again.

Mr McGlone: OK. That is grand.

Mr McCartney: You said that the permanent secretary set aside the tendering process for that as well.

Mr F Spratt: They put a letter up. I had a copy of it, but unfortunately I lost it.

Mr McCartney: That was a key point.

Mr F Spratt: They set aside the proper tendering process and argued that they had to do that because they had nobody in the NIPS to do the job. What are these two boys doing, then? By the way, they worked alongside the profilers from England.

Mr McGlone: Are the two boys who are running around with the clipboards from outside the NIPS?

Mr F Spratt: No, they are members of the NIPS. They went along with the profilers that were here from England. So, they had a double team, but they had to pay the boys from England so many thousand pounds.

Mr McGlone: Your view is that they are doing the exact same work all over again.

Mr F Spratt: Exactly.

Mr McGlone: You said that more prisoners are spending more time being locked up. Have you any estimation from your members as to how much more time prisoners are being locked up for?

Mr F Spratt: I do not have the figures, Patsy. You only have to look at the TOM: the regime finishes at 5.30 pm on a Friday night, a Saturday night and a Sunday night. So, those prisoners are locked up from then. The regime used to run on to 8.00 pm or 8.30 pm. That has been curtailed, so on Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday night, they are locked in the cell. That is a practice that was developed in England called a "core day". Prisoners are spending more time in their cells locked behind doors than they were. That is a fact: it is there, staring you straight in the face. That is a consequence of the reform and of having an English solution to an Irish problem imposed on you.

Mr McCartney: I understood that it was Sunday night only that it was 5.30 pm.

Mr F Spratt: It is Saturday night and Sunday night, Raymond, not Friday night.

Mr McCartney: That is OK. I just wanted clarity.

Mr McGlone: I want a bit more detail about the Probation Board taking over the role of prison officers. What activities are involved?

Mr F Spratt: It is getting involved in the offender supervisor role. From memory, I know that it delivers some programmes in Magilligan. I read the submission made by the Probation Board to the

Committee when it was here making representation. You only have to look at that submission and ask yourself questions. When the Prison Service talked about reform, it introduced two new grades: one was the custody prison officer and the other was the offender supervisor, which is our prisoner development unit (PDU). New recruits were told that they could come in at £18,000 and could eventually become an offender supervisor when their salary would rise to £27,000. The reality is that they will never become an offender supervisor. When Sue McAllister gave evidence to the Committee in May, she said that they were going to have to look at what the offender supervisors will do. They did not even know.

I will give you an example. When new recruits joined, they were told that, after they had completed their 51 weeks' training, their salary would go up from £18,000 to £21,000 when they got a certificate of competence. They do not even know how they are going to get certificates of competence. People were also told that they could become an offender supervisor when they had a licence to practice. They do not even know the first thing about it or when it is going to happen. The training offered to our members who have joined the NIPS is non-existent. People are coming up to the time when they should be jumping from £18,000 to £21,000, and I know that the Department is starting to waltz on that. Our members are being told, "Oh, no, you cannot jump until your certificate comes." They should have been in a position to provide our members with a certificate, but they have not done so.

Mr McGlone: I did not get to Magilligan that day due to commitments here. Forgive me if I missed the issue around the psychology services being isolated. Can you expand a wee bit on that for me, please?

Mr F Spratt: I have been around a long time, Patsy, and you can sniff a few things in the air when you read about some of the things that are going on. When I read the report of what Sue McAllister said about the probation issue to the Committee, I was in no doubt that the Probation Board is in there battling to take over the job of prison officers. We have our own psychology services. I do not see the board playing a great role in the reform of the NIPS. I thought that it would have been at the forefront, but it is not: it is the Probation Board and its psychologists. So, what are we paying all the psychologists in the Prison Service for? I do not know: it just seems strange. It is an interesting thing to watch, and just remember that I told you, Patsy.

Mr McGlone: I got it direct from you. We have a different way of saying things down our way — live horse and you will get grass, instead of oats.

Mr F Spratt: We get oats down in Derry.

Mr McGlone: I am at the lower end of it down at the lough shore.

Mr F Spratt: Oats is better stuff.

Mr McGlone: With regard to the environmental allowance, it seems to me that it is making fish of one and flesh of another.

Mr F Spratt: Exactly.

Mr McGlone: Everybody should be treated the same.

Mr F Spratt: Exactly my point, Patsy.

Mr McGlone: If there is a level of risk, granted, that is why it is paid. If there is no risk or if it is reduced, you are, hopefully, into different territory.

Mr F Spratt: Exactly.

Mr McGlone: It sounds a wee bit —

Mr F Spratt: Well, I think that it is a bit rich, and it makes me angry, Patsy, as I sit here talking to you. I get an allowance in my pay, and, as I said, I would rather not get an allowance; I would rather things were normal. However, we have to face reality: things are not normal. What they are doing is wrong, and you need to tell the Minister that he needs to get a grip of himself. When you read the contents of

the letter from Sue McAllister, who does she think she is talking to? They are going to the pay review body, which could not make a decision in the first instance, and they passed the buck back to Ronnie Armour. That is just prolonging it.

It is no secret: prison officers have said that they are not going to work overtime. OK, there is a certain amount that they will do. Contracts were brought in to sign up for the G8. When they decided not to work overtime, it was nothing to do with the G8. However, that is happening. Some people are going to work overtime during the G8, but that is not the point. The point that I am trying to make is this: I am in the trade union and I represent our members. They should not have to do things such as this to achieve fair play and justice. As you rightly said, if PSNI officers receive it, surely is it is only right and fitting that the members I represent should get it. Some 41% of us get it and civil servants who come to work in prisons get it. Why should that 51% of fellas and girls not get it? I do not think that what is being done is justified, and I welcome any support that I can get.

It is sad that we have to go down that route. I have often been criticised in the past — in fact, Alban has been good at it — because we took action and, unfortunately, prisoners suffered as a result. That is a reality of life. However, we do not want to be there; there is no need to be there.

It is like the reform of the Prison Service. Everybody thought that the POA was going to jump up and down, but the POA is not going to do anything. We fully agree with and support the reform of the Prison Service.

The POA has been blamed for many things that have happened across the Prison Service down through the years. I can tell you that, in the 28 years that I have been the chairman of the POA, that has not been the case. I play a straight bat. It does not matter what side of the fence you come from or whether you jump right, left or centre. I make no difference, and I treat everybody the same.

I think that it is only right and proper that the members who I represent should be treated the same with the payment of the environmental allowance. I thank you for that, Patsy.

Mr McGlone: Thanks, Finlay.

Mr A Maginness: He has stolen all my questions.

Mr F Spratt: Alban, do not be asking too hard a question.

Mr A Maginness: Certainly not. He has made all the comments that I wanted to make, save this one: the freeze on promotions and acting up seems to be absolutely excessive.

Mr F Spratt: It is a big bone of contention.

Mr A Maginness: I do not understand that in a period during which the system is being reformed. I would have thought that the grades that you are talking about are central to the administration of the Prison Service.

Mr F Spratt: Absolutely.

Mr A Maginness: That is an important question that we should ask the Prison Service management. We should ask them why there is an embargo on promotions. It seems to be an extraordinary excessive delay in any promotions.

Mr F Spratt: If I could just answer you on something that Paul brought to my attention. I had an agreement. In fact, in 2010, Ronnie Armour came to my house, because I was off work getting a knee replacement. He asked me whether we would support centralised detailing and make it easier. I took that forward and the association eventually supported it on the basis of agreement and understanding that we would get promotion boards. Colin blocked that. Do you remember that boy who was here before; the boy who went back to Scotland? He blocked it.

Mr A Maginness: I recollect Mr McConnell.

It is disturbing that the TOM really is not working as the Committee would like it to work. I know that you have made representations to the management and so forth. We will have to talk to management about this, but, from your point of view, your consultations with them do not seem to be working. Is there any way of breaking through that and entering into new dialogue that will improve the TOM? It would not have to change the TOM completely.

Mr F Spratt: I think that it is only fair that I tell the Committee that I have said that I will not enter into any dialogue on any future reform of the Prison Service because of the refusal to pay my members the environmental allowance.

We played a very active part in the reform, even to the extent that the POA brought it to the stage it is at. A lot of people said that the POA would do this or that, but they were far off the mark. All that we needed was leadership, although we have not got any leadership. It is only fair that I tell the Committee that I have said that I will not take part in any more discussions.

We had the opportunity in October last year. Management asked us to go away and think about what the problems were with the TOM — I will get that information to you, Raymond — and then they sat and did nothing for four months. When we went back to them with our proposals they rejected them all. Do you know why they rejected them? It was because we would not agree to change our leave into hours. If we had agreed to change our leave into hours, they would have talked to us differently. They actually had the cheek to say that to me.

Mr McCartney: What does that mean?

Mr F Spratt: At the minute, I am an officer, and my leave is in days. The leave of new officers who come in is in hours. In other words, if they have 28 days' leave, they multiply that by 7.8, because there are 7.8 hours in a day, to give them their leave in hours. So, if they take a day's leave, 7.8 hours is taken off them, or four hours' leave or two hours' leave, if they take that. I am an officer; if I take a day's leave, it is a full day. My shift that day could be from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm, so I am maybe getting 12 hours. This is the point that we are at. That was part of the negotiations. There are not that many left in the Prison Service now.

Mr McCartney: That was one of the inspection's criticisms about the leave. In the rest of the public sector, it is in hours rather than days, is it not?

Mr F Spratt: No, it is not. Quite a lot of them still use days; even the English service uses days. However, the leave of new entries is in hours, and there is nothing anybody can do about that.

Mr A Maginness: In relation to talking to management, I know that you have this problem over the environmental payment, and I sympathise with and support you on that.

Mr F Spratt: I may as well tell you, Alban, that I will not talk to them.

Mr A Maginness: You will not talk to them?

Mr F Spratt: No; absolutely not. In fact, I might put a spanner in the works. I have not done so yet, but you never know.

Mr A Maginness: I do not think that that is particularly helpful.

Mr F Spratt: There is no point in thinking it; you might as well say it.

Mr A Maginness: I certainly encourage you to talk to management, because they could come back and say, "Look at these guys: they are taking a hard line and are not talking to us".

Mr F Spratt: It is strange that you should say that, Alban, because what do you think Prison Service management has done since it reformed the NIPS? It talks to us only when it can do nothing else. I can assure you that it does not come to my door every whip-about. It is only when it can do nothing else or needs our help to get it over the hurdle. So, do not worry about it.

Mr McGlone: You have weathered worse storms.

Mr F Spratt: I have weathered worse storms than this.

Mr A Maginness: I do not think that I will lose much sleep over it tonight.

Mr Dickson: Thank you for coming to us, Finlay. I would like to talk to you about two areas. I have a lot of sympathy with all the things that have been said today. There was a bit of a shaky start in getting the Prison Service to produce change management control of the whole exercise. Can you give us a flavour of how you relate to the change management personnel in place? Is that an effective mechanism for bringing about change?

Mr F Spratt: Well, Stewart, do not ask me. Ask yourself what has changed in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Mr Dickson: But have you engaged with them?

Mr F Spratt: Why would I engage with a crowd that does not know what it is doing? I do not engage, because they do not come and talk to me. Do you know how much that whole change management programme cost, bearing in mind that it cut the Prison Service budget by £17.6 million? Do you know how much it cost to set up the change programme? It cost £8 million to £10 million, because they brought in a change manager from the English jurisdiction. Remember the first boy who got it? He did not stay too long, because he found out what was going on; he got offside. So, the next person got it. You asked me a question. I have not engaged with the change management programme because I see no reason to do so and because I see that it has done nothing. I see that there was a comment from it. Did you notice in those letters that the person appointed as a change manager was then made a director of the Northern Ireland Prison Service by Sue McAllister? I wrote to complain about that. You can read between the lines to see what is going on. I do not need to say any more.

The Chairperson: Sorry, Stewart. On that point, Finlay; was that a temporary appointment?

Mr F Spratt: It was a two-year appointment.

The Chairperson: Did that director's post then morph into a permanent post?

Mr F Spratt: I do not know; you would need to ask her. I wrote to her complaining about it: I asked her why she was making him a director when he was only appointed as a change manager?

The Chairperson: Was it advertised?

Mr F Spratt: No.

The Chairperson: And it is a permanent post?

Mr F Spratt: Sure that is nothing new for the Prison Service.

The Chairperson: Right; OK. Sorry, for cutting across you, Stewart.

Mr Dickson: That is fine.

The second area that I want to talk to you about is how lock-up times are managed in the service. How could they be better managed? I wholly support your concern about idle hands and people not having the opportunity for education or meaningful work that leads to work outside prison.

Is the Prison Service — and I include your members in that — fit for purpose to deliver those types of programmes or should we look externally more to have education and work programmes delivered through a private service?

Mr F Spratt: In the Prison Service, we used to run occasional training whereby prisoners were taught bricklaying, and all of those skills. With regard to pure education: to be fair, that should be delivered by true educationalists, teachers. I have no issue with that. However, what many people forget is that although education may be provided by an outside body, prison officers have to be very much

involved because they have to organise and supervise classes. We have a big role to play in it. There is no reason why prison officers cannot work alongside educationalists. Sue McAllister discussed the idea that education is not the core function of the Prison Service. I disagree with her. I would have thought that the Prison Service's function was to try to return a person to society much better than when he or she came into prison. Surely, education should be a core function. It may be delivered by others. However, it has to be the Prison Service's responsibility to see that it happens. Perhaps, it is not a core function for me as an officer, but it still has to be a core function. I have no difficulty with education being delivered.

What is going on in the organisation — and you can watch it if you are still about — is privatisation. That is why they are talking about three units at Maghaberry prison. Watch the Magilligan prison redevelopment. Watch the private contractors, PFIs and so forth. Watch what is going on, Stewart. That is what it is all about. It is not about delivering what is best for prisoners.

To come back to your question; qualified teachers should be the people who deliver education. However, we need to be more flexible than to just say from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. There was talk about Saturday and Sunday. We work seven days a week. The life of the offender should be seven days a week; not Monday to Friday or cut off on a Friday. At present, that is what is happening throughout the system. When it comes to 5.00 pm on a Friday, prisoners are locked up.

Mr Dickson: I think, Chair, that Mr Spratt must have listened to what I said on a recent prison visit, which was exactly that. I am extremely concerned that education and other vocational delivery is seen very much as being from Monday to Friday, from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. As you say, it is a seven-day-a-week service, 24 hours a day.

Mr F Spratt: That is right. We work seven days a week.

Mr Dickson: So, why should people not do their literacy, numeracy and vocational training on Saturdays and Sundays, in order to benefit from them, as part of their overall —

Mr F Spratt: Then, Stewart, you have to look at the overall picture. Why did they introduce a core day? Do not forget that the English service was the forerunner to that. It was to save money, so that there were fewer people working over the weekends. That costs money. They have to pay for what they call "unsocial hours". It is all about saving money. That is why I sometimes wonder when I read all of that stuff, whether the offender is really at the heart of this, or whether it is all about money. Look at the money that the reform programme has cost taxpayers in Northern Ireland. It is phenomenal. I often wonder whether we are getting value for money. They tried to plump that at the door of prison officers, who I represent. They have done so quite successfully for years. They blamed me. Even Alban was at that carry on, too — blaming me at times. *[Laughter.]* It was not my fault.

Mr A Maginness: Perish the thought.

Mr F Spratt: It was the management.

Mr Dickson: Although you say that Saturday and Sunday are premium days, you could become involved in negotiations to provide seven plain days of pay, whereby each day is paid for identically and, therefore, those things could be achieved. It does not actually cost any more money.

Mr F Spratt: Stewart, surely I am no different from you. If you had to come up here on a Saturday or Sunday, would you not look for more money for doing so, too, and, probably, mileage along with it?

Mr Dickson: Well, it depends. The negotiations on seven equal days could be achieved. I am not saying that you refuse the bill; I am saying that there should be seven equal days. That is all that I am saying.

Mr F Spratt: Let me tell you, Stewart: I have an open door. If the Prison Service wants to come and talk to me about whatever it wants to talk to me about, and there is money in it for the members I represent, I am up for it. I can do no more than that.

The Chairperson: OK. Nobody else has indicated —

Mr F Spratt: Could I just raise one point when I have you here?

The Chairperson: Yes.

Mr F Spratt: I am sorry that I am taking up your time.

It is an ongoing issue. It has been very close to the hearts of Jim and me for quite a number of years. It is a garden of remembrance for prison officers.

Back in 2002, I raised the issue with the then Secretary of State, Paul Murphy. He agreed that there should be a garden of remembrance for prison officers in Northern Ireland. I do not know whether any of you remember Douglas Bain. He used to be director of services in the NIPS. In those days, they were talking about building a new Prison Service headquarters. He said, "Wait, and we will incorporate a garden of remembrance." I wanted to use the walled garden at the young offenders' centre, which has grown derelict. In fact, it is overgrown. I said, "Fine. I am quite happy. I will wait." Four years later, they decided that they were not going to build the new Prison Service headquarters. It was a load of nonsense, anyway. Where were they going to get the money for it? So, I went back to them. I have been arguing ever since about the walled garden at the young offenders' centre. All that I get is excuses from the Minister and everybody I speak to.

Unfortunately, during the Troubles, 29 prison officers lost their lives. Are they and their families not entitled to have a garden of remembrance in their memory? All that I get is excuses. Down through the years, I have gotten excuses, such as, "We could not use the walled garden because we are considering a female facility at the young offenders' centre." The issue is still ongoing.

We made a submission to the latest estate review. They wanted to know about remembering the past. I suggested that we should have that garden of remembrance at the walled garden. I have had no response from the NIPS. The submission mentions the museum at the college. In actual fact, it contains all of the artefacts from the Maze days. They are lying in boxes. In fact, I think that some of them have been given away. They closed the museum down. I suggested that we should build a museum at the walled garden that could be open to the public. In fact, we have a charity called the Prison Service Trust, which looks after the widows of our murdered colleagues, officers who died in service, and those officers who have been medically retired. I suggested that we build the museum there and that the trust could look after it. We could open the museum and garden of remembrance to the public. I might as well run at that wall, because I am getting nowhere. The way in which prison officers have been treated is unfair. Some widows will be dead — in fact, some of them are — before a fitting tribute can be raised to the men and women who lost their lives.

I just wanted to tell the Committee for Justice that I think that the way in which the widows and families of members of the Prison Service have been treated is wrong. I believe that we should have a garden of remembrance. The fact is that they will not build in the walled garden. That is just a delaying tactic by the Prison Service. I just wanted to seek the views of the Committee. What are your thoughts on it?

The Chairperson: If it is helpful, and I am sure that the rest of the Committee will agree, we will raise the issue with the Prison Service to find out where it currently is in progressing the areas that you have outlined with regard to the garden of remembrance and the museum. If that is helpful, I am sure that the Committee is happy to do that.

Mr F Spratt: It is helpful. I appreciate that. I think that it is only right and proper. Those widows and families have nowhere to go. Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.

The Chairperson: Thank you all for coming.