



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Prison Reform Programme:
Prison Governors Association

27 March 2014

The Chairperson: The reprofiling of the target operating model (TOM) was raised with the Committee on previous occasions. Has that now taken place in each of the establishments? Has it addressed the issues that were raised around reducing the number of lockdowns that had been encountered?

Mr Maguire: The situation with the target operating model is that we are just calling it "reprofiling" now. We have moved on somewhat. We did an initial profiling, bearing in mind that we were trying to manage through, and continue to manage through, those people who hope to leave through the exit package from the Prison Service, of whom there are only a few left. It is important to understand that we are progressing, so much so that, since last autumn, the initial TOM, which our members have taken forward, has begun to reprofile the prison. I would not quite call it TOM 2, but it is reprofiling. It is looking to make what efficiencies we can and to enhance the regime where it is possible to do so. Hydebank Wood has been done, Maghaberry has been done and Magilligan has just been completed. The profiles and shift patterns that have been reviewed are put out to staff associations for consultation for 28 days. Each station is at a different phase of that and will come to a conclusion in the near future. We will begin to implement the recommendations after we have had further discussions.

The Chairperson: Is the fact that the work carried out by the initial profilers has to be looked at again an issue that the Prison Governors Association raised as a concern with Prison Service management? Was the PGA concerned that the initial work carried out was not going to do what it said it would do, or did the outworkings of what had originally been planned show that the work was not delivering what was needed? Did the governors feel that that was something that needed to be addressed?

Mr Maguire: It is fair to say that, in the initial project, which was carried out by people outside this jurisdiction, there were some glitches in and omissions from the profiling that have since been addressed. The PGA had a concern over the comprehensive nature of the profiling being done at the time. A number of anomalies are being addressed through the reprofiling exercise.

There were a number of issues. I can talk with some clarity only around Maghaberry, but some glaring omissions have since been addressed.

The Chairperson: Through addressing those now and the work that is being taken forward, is the association more confident that the reform programme will achieve what it was designed to achieve?

Mr Maguire: Yes. As I understand it, the governor of each relevant establishment has been taking a leading role in linking with the profilers, who are locally based, to get the profile for each of the prisons right. Governors are trying to shed wastage where possible. They are trying to ensure the safety of staff, who are working in very challenging circumstances in our prisons; reduce, if not eliminate, lockdowns for prisoners in regimes; and ensure that we have a safe, secure and decent environment for managing prisoners.

The Chairperson: OK. Does the Prison Governors Association see the overall reform programme as having positively advanced the way in which prisons operate?

Mr Maguire: Absolutely. It is relatively early days. I will get Pat to come in a second, but it is fair to say that the Prison Service, through the reform programme, is on a journey. It is not like flicking on a light switch to automatically change from one state to another; rather, it is an ongoing process.

Is the reform programme making progress? Yes, it is. Everyone involved in the Prison Review Team (PRT) is experiencing a degree of frustration, in the sense that we all want to move quicker. The Prison Governors Association is keen for the progress that is being made to be fully embedded, and we can do that only through our staff. As a member of the PGA, I commend prison staff of all grades for their work and how they have taken this forward, and I include in that other associations involved in the process. There has been significant progress made in partnership in the organisation, and that is to be commended.

The Chairperson: Quite a number of staff have left through the exit scheme, and new recruits have been coming online. How does the association view the way in which the process has been managed and the impact that it is having on what you are trying to do in prisons? There are obviously issues concerning people who are still waiting two years on and staff who thought that they were getting out having to have that delayed, and so on. I understand that. However, how has management having to

deal with the change in personnel impacted operationally on prisons? Where are we currently at with new recruits being able to do the job?

Mr Maguire: OK. I will let Pat talk in a second as a functional manager, which I think will give you a sense of how the process is operating directly on the ground.

We have been very pleased with the new staff coming in. They have integrated extremely well, albeit, across all our prisons, they are on a steep learning curve. However, I have been absolutely amazed and delighted at how the existing, more experienced staff and the new staff have, by and large, integrated well. There has been a sort of mentoring going on between the two groups, and that is to be commended. In the way distant past, that was not always the case. It is good to see the changing dynamic.

There are also issues around managers. In all of this, and you mentioned the voluntary retirement scheme that so many people went through, the changes represented a big opportunity, which the Prison Service has taken. My concern is that the Prison Service ensures that cultural changes are fully embedded and constantly audited so that we achieve the new Prison Service that all prison governors desire.

Pat may wish to say a few words about operational matters on the ground.

Mr Pat Gray (Prison Governors Association): The significance of the change on the staffing front that has taken place over the past 18 months to two years, to which you specifically referred, cannot be overestimated. For example, 50% of staff in post at Maghaberry prison have joined the service in the past 18 months. They have had to get up to speed quickly. As Pat said, the new staff have integrated extremely well with those staff who remained, and the latter have been to the fore in mentoring, coaching and helping the former find their feet fairly quickly. The new custody officers are spread across the establishment in all areas of work. They are in residential and operational areas, as well as in some of the specialisms.

The reform has also significantly impacted on not only the uniformed grade but the management grades, from the new unit manager level through to the functional heads in the establishments. There is significant change at that level, with new unit managers coming on board and recent selection boards identifying new functional heads for key areas in the prisons. A significant amount has been happening in quite a short time, and we would say that prison governors have played a significant role — they been to the fore — in managing the process.

The Chairperson: One of the issues that the Prison Officers' Association (POA) raised with us was a concern about some of the staffing levels. People are being put on to landings or wings, and the ratio of custody officers to prisoners was highlighted as being an issue of concern, certainly when we were on visits to some prisons. I know that the Department has referred to a dynamic risk assessment that can determine those things and that the situation can be fluid. Is that something that your association has been concerned about?

Mr Maguire: I welcome the question. There are two aspects to that. It is obviously about ensuring that the type and category of prisoner in particular areas is formulated. When you do the reprofiling exercise, you look at all of that, including whether, for example, there is sharing of cells. Unfortunately, in Maghaberry, there are in the region of 500 prisoners, and they are doubled up in cells that are meant for one prisoner. The estate strategy hopes to address that over time. You therefore look at a lot of the pressures, such as the population pressure. As you will be aware, over quite a number of years, the prison population has been on the rise, and all the prison populations are slightly up from what they were, particularly Magilligan and Maghaberry.

We carry out work-area risk assessments in great detail, and those, the profiles, the shift patterns and the regime delivery quotas are all part and parcel of the consultation process with the staff associations. How many staff you can have on a landing can also potentially dictate the regime when we conduct the dynamic risk assessment that you mentioned. If a landing is running extremely well and there are no particular issues, why would you not want to have a full regime?

Earlier, you mentioned trying to reduce the number of lockdowns. Governors of prisons at all levels take the issue of safety of everyone — staff and prisoners — very seriously. We work tirelessly to try to ensure that we have a safe, secure and decent regime for prisoners, and we are very mindful of staff safety in what is a very challenging environment. Prisons are not kindergartens, and we have to

be mindful of that. Prison governors and the Prison Governors Association would emphasise and stress that the safety, welfare and care of staff is uppermost in our mind so that they can carry out their roles. By the same token, we want to ensure that we provide decent regimes for prisoners.

The Chairperson: I have one final question before I bring in other members. The independent members of the oversight team have been before the Committee. Last June, they indicated that there was tension between your association and senior management. I know that that was last June, but the indications were that the PGA felt that its views were being ignored and that it was not being fully consulted. How would you describe the relationship today between senior management and your association?

Mr Maguire: You are right to refer back to that period 12 months ago. I think that it is fair to say that there were significant tensions about the direction of travel, particularly that of the consultation. Our members are the ones who have to deliver the reform agenda, and we are committed to doing that. However, that having been said, you cannot do that if you do not know what is going on.

In fairness, there have been a number of significant changes in the past 12 months. There is a new director of rehabilitation, who is dealing with all the prison regimes, and so on, and a new director of offender policy and operations was appointed last June. It is coming up to nine months since he was appointed, and he is the line manager for the governing governors.

Therefore, a number of significant dynamics have changed in that time. There has been significantly more consultation, not just with the PGA but with governing governors and deputy governors, to look at the key issues of the service and how we, as a top team, can begin to take some of them forward. I think that the progress of the past number of months has emphasised that change in direction, which has allowed us all to operate as a team, and generally in the one direction.

Having said all that, I think that it is important to emphasise that the Prison Governors Association has some concerns. Obviously, we all live in financially stricken times, and we understand the necessary budgetary cuts across all Departments, and the Department of Justice is no different. However, we do not want the budgetary cuts to impact too much on a lot of the progress that has been and continues to be made, because that may do damage to regimes and staffing levels, which will lead to issues down the line.

The Prison Governors Association is supportive of the direction of travel, but we issue a bit of concern that we have to keep an eye on how we go forward. We are all for value for money and doing things more efficiently, but we want safe, secure and decent regimes. We cannot have those impacted on; otherwise, we will potentially end up with a reaction from prisoners about the impact on regimes. We are very mindful of that, and we are trying to handle all this very sensitively, knowing, of course, that we need to provide value for money for the taxpayer. We are very mindful of that sort of two-pronged approach with NIPS senior management.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much for your presentation. You touched on the operating model with the Chair. Is there flexibility in it to allow you to make it more flexible as time progresses? Do you think that it is too rigid?

Mr Maguire: At the minute, the operating model is for main grade officers, more experienced officers and custody officers. What you need in running a prison is as much flexibility as you can possibly get. For example, as a functional manager — Pat can perhaps talk about this — you need to be able to say that everybody can do almost any job. If you restrict people to doing certain jobs, you reduce your flexibility, and as you begin to reduce your resource, that flexibility is needed more and more.

Mr Gray: That is a very important part of running the prison. With the progression of the programme, we are certainly aware that there is significant potential for flexibility in the use of uniformed staff. We have a group of staff in the establishment who can carry out the majority of tasks, rather than being specifically role-defined and therefore constrained in what they can do. From the governors' point of view, we are very much in favour of having uniformed staff who are flexible, can be used across the establishment — in residential roles or specialist roles — and can be cross-deployed to meet the need on the day.

Mr McCartney: Is it understood by all managers that they have that degree of flexibility?

Mr Gray: I think that that is right. I think that another significant part of the change has been the move to what is referred to as the central detailing office. That is a central point in the prison that details and allocates all the staff across the establishment. The department works on the basis of need, so it is flexible and reactionary. Tonight, for example, if staff shortages in certain areas of the prison were likely to impact on the regime, those would be addressed during the day by the central detailing office, and staff would be evenly distributed to give us a good outcome in the evening. Therefore, the central detailing function is working very well.

Mr McCartney: As the change rolls out, it should become more efficient and appropriate in its impact. Is there flexibility around the core day as well? Is the core day too fixed?

Mr Maguire: It never used to be called the "core day"; it used to be called the "daily routine". People have a sense that things are fixed in concrete, but the reality is somewhat different.

With the reprofiling for 2014 into 2015, the times for unlock and lock-up — the routine of the day — do not change. Having said all that, I refer obviously to resources, budget cuts and potential efficiencies to be made. Nothing can ever stay the same, so there is a limit to what you can do in non-uniform budget areas, such as cutting down on amenities for prisoners, and so on. There could, at some stage down the line, be an impact on the core day. We would want to try to avoid that if at all possible, but there are no guarantees as to the requirement of efficiencies. That means, if it were deemed appropriate at some stage down the line that there should be some percentage efficiencies requirement on the staffing side, it would potentially impact on the regime. Such an impact is not guaranteed. There are lots of areas in prisons that are not on the front line — on the landings — so nothing can ever be ruled out, but you would want to try to retain the core day. If that change ever happened, you would have to be in a position to communicate it and the reasons for it properly and explain to people why it is happening. As we all know, we are in a critical financial position, which we manage as best we can.

Mr McCartney: When you were answering one of the Chair's questions, you referred to the process of integration for new staff. Pat said that 50% had been recruited in the past 18 months, so there is obviously a big turnover. What are your measurements for change? You have welcomed the process under the strategic efficiency and effectiveness (SEE) programme. How do you measure that in the short or long term?

Mr Maguire: Take the number of visitors that we get at, for example, Maghaberry. Visitors make various comments about the place. We know that it is a very challenging environment and not the perfect article by any stretch of the imagination. However, the endeavours of prison staff, at all levels and across all disciplines, to do a very professional job is very evident. You have only to walk around the landing to see that. A few weeks ago, the director general went down to the shop floor and spent a day with a senior officer in Lagan House. That was a good yardstick: the director general coming down and being able to see, warts and all, a daily routine. I think that she was very impressed, particularly with the senior officer. She spent the full day with him, and it was, I gather, quite a long day.

The key bit of this is culture change. We want to ensure that that is delivered. As I said earlier, it will not be delivered overnight, but are we on the right path? Absolutely. Are people committed to changing in the right way? Yes, they are. I will not over-egg the pudding when it comes to the culture change. Suffice it to say, I have been in Maghaberry now for almost four years, and it is a very different place from when I first went in there in 2010. On the security side, we now concentrate on intelligence-led rather than defensive searching. We have free flow of movement, with prisoners out and about. We manage the prison in a different way. Everything is about proportionality and reasonableness. It is a prison, and you have to have a secure, but you also have to have it safe and provide constructive activities and good, positive outcomes for prisoners. That is what we are about. Without being clichéd about the safer communities aspect, I have to say that all that we do helps contribute to that. That gets into the mindset. There are monthly staff meetings where those things are discussed. What is fascinating is the maturity of staff, both new and more experienced staff, and the work that they now do together; for example, the family matters landing. People have been down to see that, and it is quite extraordinary. We will expand that in the next few months.

Those are big-ticket issues where you can see where the culture changes. On a day-to-day basis, Pat, you see that movement in your functional areas, and it moves at a particular pace.

Mr Gray: Yes, that is right. I would labour one point that Pat made: it will not happen overnight, but it has made considerable progress. A diverse group of new staff has come into the service over the past 18 months or so. There is youth among them and a significant number of women officers among them, which was a new sight on prison landings and in residential areas. That is now embedding among prisoners and has significant positives.

There is a diverse range of abilities and educational ability among those new staff. There are clearly people there who will be the future middle and senior managers of the Prison Service. From the PGA point of view, however, we remind that that process requires investment in people and in the training and development of senior and middle managers and those new staff to ensure that things continue to progress and the culture change continues to evolve.

Mr McCartney: You were discussing with the Chair that the oversight committee mentioned the tension over, I suppose, a bit of change going on. Did you feel left out of the process of change? Was there communication?

Mr Maguire: You can always have better communication and involvement. The major transformation of the Prison Service cannot be done in isolation. It cannot be done from Prison Service headquarters. It has to be done on the ground. Therefore, you need the involvement of everyone — all the associations — and buy-in from staff, managers and our members. That has improved immeasurably, which is to be applauded and must be maintained.

This is a team approach to transformational change. If one part of the team is not involved, it will not work. A key part of that for us at the time was our members, at all levels, so that there was not a block in communication about what was happening. We are now much better informed and more included. Governing governors attend prison reform programme board meetings and a series of other offshoots. The estate development project boards are all involved. It is done in the right way of involvement, and we feel a part of it now, because you cannot have reform without feeling involved.

Mr McCartney: You said in your lead-in that your function as the Prison Governors' Association was trade union terms and conditions but obviously on the professional level. Do you have a view on the perception that sometimes senior leadership in the Prison Service changes too often? What impact has that had on positive communication and all that comes from that? How do you build into your structures continuity of leadership for the future?

Mr Maguire: I accept the point that, for too many years, there has been too much change. I think that it is fair to say that, sometimes, that was change for change's sake or because someone's face did not fit or whatever. In the change programme that we are going through, we need stability. You need to ensure that everyone is on message, as far as they can be, so that everyone is going in the right direction and nobody is pulling away for a particular reason. We are, hopefully, emerging from that.

The Prison Governors' Association emphasises that, to achieve success in the reform programme for NIPS, the key things needed are continuity, stability and ensuring that the people making the decisions are going to be there to live by the decisions. That is not a slight on people coming across from other jurisdictions. Clearly there is, from time to time, a need for that to happen, and it is useful to try to refresh. That said, prison governors and the Prison Governors' Association know their business. I would not let anyone tell us any different. We know our business, and we know Northern Ireland. We are a small community. We want to do the best by the criminal justice system and the prison system, delivering, as we said, good outcomes for prisoners, because that hopefully leads to reducing the risk of reoffending, which everyone would agree is the right thing to do. We think that there should be, over time, more home-grown talent. That builds a little on what Pat said earlier about training and development, which, for many years — I make no bones about it — did not happen. I hope that, in going forward, all the new unit managers, functional managers and governors will address that deficit, which is a crying shame. We should have our own talent. We, in Northern Ireland, are a very talented people, and we know our business. I think that more home-grown talent should be brought through. That is critical, because then you can take ownership. You live here. It is OK making decisions, but decisions — sometimes strange decisions — are easy made if you are not there to live with the consequences. It is very important that we make that point on behalf of the Prison Governors' Association.

Mr McCartney: I have just one final point. You say that training and development is now built in. Was it voluntary in the past? Is that why it was maybe a bit haphazard?

Mr Maguire: It has changed over the past 20 or 30 years. When you were promoted, you were automatically told the training that you had to do to fulfil your role. It is very unfair to ask you to do a role that you have not been trained and developed to do; then, you would be maligned because you made a mistake. Hopefully, the days of a blame culture and so forth are behind us, because a blame culture does not help anybody in an organisation.

We met the Prison Service last Friday. On the agenda was training and development for prison governors at all levels. There is a commitment to deliver that. We look forward to seeing the delivery of that. We do not believe that that is just a promise. We believe that it is an actuality that will take place in the fullness of time, along with a grading review to see how jobs are weighted, which is the other aspect that we want. We want to ensure that we have the right number of prison governors and that we are not trying to operate in too tight an environment in very challenging circumstances. It is about trying to get that balance right. The Prison Governors' Association, as the professional body, is very much prepared to work hand in glove with the Department of Justice and the Prison Service to achieve that.

Mr McCartney: I think that what you are saying is that, in the past, as you were promoted, you did the training that suited. Is a training process in place for new people coming into the service, so that they can be ready, not necessarily when they are promoted but when the opportunity presents itself?

Mr Maguire: It is a mixed economy, in the sense that there is the wherewithal for people to self-develop outside; for example, to do an Open University degree or that sort of stuff. There is some funding in the Prison Service to help with that, which is good. People can request to do various courses, which you have to look at and ask, "What benefit will that provide to the Prison Service?". We have to ask that so that we are not wasting money on basket weaving and are funding something that will contribute to the Prison Service. That is well and good.

Over the next number of months, we want to see the training that is provided for new unit managers who are coming in and people who have recently been promoted to functional manager level, which is quite a high senior manager level in the prisons. We want to ensure that those people are given every opportunity to develop themselves. Also, there is mandatory training that they must do, because there are certain issues. The key things for us are good leadership and good management skills so that we can take the service forward a bit more.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Did the Prison Governors' Association ever have cause to complain about criteria that were set for the appointment of governors within the last number of years?

Mr Maguire: I think that I know to what you are alluding. It is fair to say that we have enough talented individuals within the Northern Ireland Prison Service to do any role. It is also fair to say that we frowned upon certain processes that were put in place without consultation, which we felt were not for the best benefit of NIPS and were, in some instances, demotivating for some of our members.

I hope that those days are long behind us. I believe that they are, and, as I mentioned to Mr McCartney, we want to move to a position where we are able to fill the positions. So, there is an aspiration in the organisation to get up to the various levels of governor grade and perhaps beyond.

The Chairperson: I make that point, because I raised it with the director general when she was last with the Committee. What brought it particularly to my attention was the Hydebank Wood scenario, with a retired governor coming over to take up the post and only lasting a year. We have now had to find a replacement.

You touched on the blame game in the past, and I know of governors at that grade who could have done the job. However, in the past, the thinking if something went wrong seemed to be, "Let's take them down to Dundonald into headquarters, keep them there for a period of time and then maybe bring them back out again". I made the point that surely if a governor makes a fundamental mistake you would sack them rather than circulate them within the system, tick a box to say that the issue has been dealt with and have them come back out again and take over a job. Has that changed? Are you confident that there has been a change so that that will not be the case?

Mr Maguire: Running the Prison Service is very much a team game, so we have to emphasise the team. Obviously, the team is made up of individuals, and the Prison Governors' Association contends that the governor grade cadre that we have in NIPS is of a high calibre at all levels.

I do not want to go into any particular details, but obviously the governor of Hydebank Wood has resigned, and his position is being filled, as you will be aware, by the deputy governor of Maghaberry. That is an indication of the value of the current members of the Prison Governors' Association and their ability to do those jobs, which, let us be honest, have been done before.

Mr Lynch: Thanks for the presentation. Has Austin Treacy moved to Hydebank Wood?

Mr Maguire: He has not moved yet, possession being nine tenths of the law. He is still deputy governor, but the intention is that he will move there as soon as is operationally possible.

Mr Lynch: We were there in September, and there were difficulties around impacts, lock-ups and education etc. One of the reasons that was given was that no permanent governor was in place. There was a lack of continuity, so we hope that there will be changes when Austin goes in.

Mr Maguire: I cannot talk in any detail about Hydebank. As part of the overall change programme, including the exit scheme and so forth and new recruits coming in, it is fair to say that all prisons, to a greater or lesser extent during this very difficult and challenging transition period, have been affected. Hopefully, as we come up to our target staffing levels over the next period, we will have seen a significant reduction in lock-ups.

Mr Gray: It is also important to emphasise that not only a new governor but a new senior management team has been appointed to Hydebank Wood. It is a very competent team with a mix of significant experience and newly promoted functional managers. We are very pleased to see that, and we think that that will make a significant impact at Hydebank.

Mr McGlone: Gentlemen, thanks very much for today and for your cooperation in the past. I am looking particularly at healthcare issues in prison, and I see that a number of protocols have been signed off with RQIA for independent assessment. Can you give me any indication of how that is progressing, please, and maybe your overall evaluation of how things are slotting into place on the scheme? In particular, the exchanges of information between, if you like, medical management in the prison and externally has been a bit of an issue. That is obviously there to help to resolve that. Also, some people are currently in prison with mental health problems. Clearly, we want to move that situation forward and see what can be done for people to ensure that they do not wind up in prison again because of some other issue that they might have and which affects them. So, can you give us a bit of an overview of that, please?

Mr Maguire: As part of the prison review team (PRT) recommendations, there are quite a number of recommendations for the South Eastern Trust. For a couple of months now, we have had an individual, whose name escapes me at the minute, from the Health Department's side who is dedicated to taking forward those recommendations in the document. In addition to that, there is a joint strategic partnership between the two organisations, and there is a strategic policy that is in the final stages of development, as I understand it. We are beginning to take forward a lot of the issues to which you refer, and I think that that is very positive.

The PGA is very aware of the issues that are involved, particularly, as you say, mental health issues, personality disorder issues and some very damaged and very vulnerable individuals who also present challenges to healthcare and to prison management. So, I look on this as a positive move in beginning to take forward these recommendations, and I think that it is fair to say that, as the Prison Service has begun to achieve and complete quite a number of the PRT recommendations, ever more emphasis will be placed naturally on the health ones as we get down to closing down. As I understand it, there is a great determination on the health side to deliver on these. They are not easy, but I think that it is fair to say that we will do everything that we can to encourage and support the delivery of these so that we have the complete package as addressed in the PRT programme. You cannot leave some of them undone. That would be a bit of a disaster. The emphasis has to be on making sure that the PRT recommendations as they apply to the healthcare side are achieved. If we do that, it will help in the delivery of better regimes for prisoners and better outcomes for those people who suffer with personality disorders, mental health issues and so forth. There needs to be a lot more done, particularly on that side, but obviously on the general health of prisoners. Health needs assessments have been carried out by the South Eastern Trust to get a handle on things; that is the

only way in which, in fairness to the trust, it can identify what resources it needs to put in at the delivery end.

Mr McGlone: You mentioned that it is imperative to have all the pieces of the jigsaw in place, especially where there are issues such as personality disorders or mental health issues that could benefit from a more collaborative approach. Those provisions would obviously be a priority, and they can be put in place, if they are not in place already. I note that a lot of the PRT recommendations have been signed off and are with the RQIA for independent assessment. Do you have a time frame for the delivery or implementation of those recommendations that are not already in place?

Mr Maguire: The Prison Governors' Association is not aware of exact timescales at this point. Nevertheless, our members are very keen to get all the recommendations in place sooner rather than later. I realise that some are more long-term, but getting a lot of them in place will assist individuals first and foremost and will also make running prisons a bit more progressive and allow officers on the landings to deal with people.

In fairness, the South Eastern Trust has done quite a lot; I can talk about Maghaberry with a bit of knowledge about personality disorder nurses and the Donard centre and that joint approach to working with consultant psychiatrists and so forth. There is a lot to be done. Is there more that needs to be done? Absolutely; there is a three-level structure of collaborative working between the South Eastern Trust and the prisons at operational level in the prison on a monthly basis, and we have an operational forum and a strategic forum. A lot of collaboration is currently under way, but clearly, from the PRT point of view, we have to ensure that there is delivery on the key outcomes.

Mr McGlone: Is there a time frame?

Mr Maguire: I do not have a time frame for that. The PGA is not involved at that level.

Mr McGlone: OK, thank you.

Mr Anderson: Thank you, gentlemen. Mention has often been made of how quickly the changes have taken place in the service in the past 18 months to two years. Any organisation or business that goes through 50% change is bound to be affected in some way. I am interested in the speed at which, from the outset, that number of staff left and people who came in to take their places were upskilled to fit into the organisation. Where is that at present? I know that an accreditation has been developed to get round that. Do they have to get that accreditation within a certain timescale and, if they do not, what happens?

Mr Maguire: I will let Pat talk about the operational side in a minute. There are a number of facets to this. We lost a lot of very experienced and knowledgeable staff over a relatively short time. As Pat said, Maghaberry took on around 50% new staff, which meant that people were regraded and there were brand new recruits who were trained at the college in Millisle and are receiving ongoing training through workbooks and the completion of portfolios of evidence etc. They will go forward for accreditation, which is now in place. Training for the experienced staff who remain in the service has been just as important. The initial training is about two weeks, and that is ongoing as we speak. Each establishment is providing x number of officers for training each week. It complements the training that the new recruits and the regraded staff have received.

So there is a push for the development of everyone at every level. In addition, there will be senior officer promotion boards, for example, in the first couple of weeks of April. The successful candidates will embark on a three-week training course at the college in Millisle, and that will be followed by other accredited management training. So there is a lot going on.

We are trying to make this work. Are we trying to do too much too soon? No, we are not. We are trying, in very difficult operating circumstances, to upskill staff at all levels. We emphasise that the training and development of our remit group, the prison governors, is critical, not just as a one-off but as an ongoing process of continuous learning and development.

Pat, have you anything to say on the impact?

Mr Gray: We want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the hundreds of staff who have left the Prison Service over the past two years and wish all of them well. We keep in contact with a number of

our ex-colleagues who are still very much focused on and interested in how we are progressing. You make a good point: you cannot go through such significant change without it impacting on the establishment and management. That is a tribute to the governor grades and others who have managed the change programme over the past two years. The outcome is that a very small number of staff, several of whom are very senior, have yet to depart. In a short time, the operational side of NIPS will be left with a very small number of individuals who have lengthy experience and competence in managing prisons. That is why Pat's point is all the more important, as is a similar point that I made earlier about the focus on development and bringing through the new competent individuals to manage in the short to medium term.

Mr Anderson: I was asking about training on the job and outside the job. When do you see the new officers, and all officers, getting that certificate? Is there a timescale for that?

Mr Gray: It is being done according to entry date. A sample of the portfolios of evidence of the first tranche of officers is going to the University of Ulster for verification, if they have completed them in time and been given the support by our trainers. Internally, we check through them, and then a sample goes to the university. Upon successful completion, the officers get the additional pay rise.

Mr Anderson: Is it the case that, if they do not complete successfully, they do not get a pay rise but still have a job, or do you expect all of them to complete?

Mr Maguire: The Prison Governors' Association does not know of any officers who have not completed their portfolio of evidence. Clearly, that will have to be looked at because you cannot have some people being accredited and others not. The most likely and sensible approach to that is that they would be given a number of opportunities to complete.

Mr Anderson: With such an influx of new staff, did you find that there was any extra pressure on existing staff? Did existing staff have any added pressure placed on them in adapting?

Mr Maguire: Pat could probably put more meat on the bones of this. I can talk with some knowledge about Maghaberry. It had the biggest influx of new staff — both regraded staff and new recruits. As we moved other experienced staff out, we constantly had to look at the balance of the various work groups and house groups around the prison in order to balance out experienced staff to help to mentor new staff coming in.

A number of staff whom I know personally, for example, probably had four or five group changes in as many months. It is a tribute to their professionalism that they did not moan — or did not moan too much — because they were helping the Maghaberry team to get the new people in. All I will say is that I have been amazed at the level of integration and teamwork between the two grades. If you go into any group or house block in Maghaberry, you will begin to see that joint working. There is a steep learning curve for a lot of the new staff. Are they playing out of their skin? Yes, by and large, they are.

Mr Anderson: Finally, how would you rate staff morale during the change process and up to the present day?

Mr Gray: There was probably a fair drop in staff morale a couple of years ago. There was a lot of uncertainty and a lack of clarity on much of what was to happen in the future. Nothing at that time, which was almost two years ago, was very tangible. People could not see a clear picture. In fairness, a certainty has been established about the future and about the change and reform. The staff who stayed and have significant service behind them are very committed to the future. I reiterate that the gelling that Pat talked about is very obvious. In some cases now, when you go into residential areas in the prisons or on to prison wings or landings, it is very difficult to discern who the new staff are and who the old staff are. Those new staff have been there for a maximum of only 18 months.

Mr Anderson: I am not really talking about the gelling of new staff with existing staff. What I am trying to get at is how you rate the morale of the staff as a whole at present compared with, say, when the change started and as it progressed. How do you find morale at present? Is it good, very good or bad?

Mr Gray: I think that it is good. I think it reasonable to describe how staff relate to managers locally, how they relate in forums that we have with staff and at management and staff meetings et cetera as

good. The level of commitment among staff is good. At a number of recent meetings, I saw an obvious commitment to the future from the staff, which is always a good sign. At this point, there are also equally good industrial relations within the prisons, which lead to a general good feeling all round. On the scale of bad to very good, I would say that they are good.

Mr Maguire: Given the monumental change programme that we are going through, you have to expect that, at various parts of the cycle, people will be a little unsure about this or that, and we mentioned that that applied to our members. There will be times when we do not get everything perfect. However, being realistic — we held full staff meetings at the beginning of March, for example — people are generally happy-ish. No one will ever be perfectly happy. Bearing in mind the challenging environment in which they work, prison officers do a fantastic job. They are very professional and get on with the job in a way that delivers outcomes that are great for prisoners, such as the delivery of regimes, programmes, interventions etc. That brings us back to the trite phrase, "reducing the risk of reoffending", which is what we are about.

Part of improving morale is achieving a better understanding of your role and contribution to the team. We are getting better at that, but we are not perfect and never will be. Communication is never perfect. We try all the time, however, to improve that message by walking the landings, talking to staff, having good meetings and, as Pat said, maintaining good staff relations, employee relations and industrial relations with the unions. Generally speaking, I think that industrial relations are good.

Ms McCorley: I want to follow up on morale and how staff are given particular duties: do you move people about or are they located in a particular place? How does it work?

Mr Maguire: When we profile a prison, and we have just re-profiled a prison, we have staff groups of, for the sake of argument, 40. That will produce 18, 20 or 25 staff through the gate each day. An officer in Lagan House or H1 in Magilligan, or Ash House in Hydebank, will be, by and large, dedicated to a house and do a lot of work there. However, they may also be cross-employed to do other things, such as visits. Most, if not all, staff have a dedicated group.

Staff can request to move groups. Although I have not had to do it much in the past few years because there has been so much rotation, I also like to try to rotate and refresh staff. That helps to improve the skills mix. As Maghaberry progresses and staffing stabilises, we will want to rotate perhaps 10% or 20% of the staff maybe once a year. It must be borne in mind that we have to make sure that we keep the business of the prison going, and it is critical that we have a proper succession plan for some specialist skills.

Ms McCorley: Do you measure morale by location? Do you find differences or trends depending on where staff have their duties?

Mr Maguire: We analyse an awful lot of data in many areas. We look monthly, for example, at the number of prisoner complaints and at whether there is a particular issue. Particularly challenging individuals can impact on staff morale. In some areas, people with personality disorders can cause disruption, which can grind down staff and have an impact on morale. We are conscious of that, but, by the same token, we try to get managers out and about. There is no substitute for walking the floors and landings, being visible and being told directly by staff what is happening.

Working in Maghaberry or Magilligan is challenging, but I think that staff are reasonably content. However, at any given time, external or internal factors will impact on people's mood. A straw poll would find staff saying that they do not like this or that. If I have heard the phrase, "Morale has never been as bad", once, I have heard it 100 times. However, through speaking to staff, we can try to drill down into the reasons. So it is important that we survey staff as well as prisoners.

Quite a number of months ago, there were issues with the environmental allowance and the portfolio. At that time, staff were saying that morale had never been so bad and that nobody cared about them. When you break that down and try to rationalise and explain it, people will, sometimes, understand better. They may not necessarily accept it, but they understand it because you have given them a reason. That helps to improve morale a bit. The Prison Service is no different from any other big organisation: you will get peaks and troughs from time to time.

Ms McCorley: Do you see any connection between morale and the level of sick leave?

Mr Maguire: It can be a clear indicator. I am the first to admit that, on occasion, sick leave in the Prison Service has not been what people would like. We are making serious inroads into trying to manage that compassionately and fairly, but also robustly and within the rules. Current statistics show some improvement, but we are not where we would like to be. On the basis that all sick absence is genuine, we want to get people back to work when they are fit and ready. We will do anything we can from the occupational health side or staff welfare side. Line managers have a big role to play by keeping in contact, encouraging people to come back, meeting them and so forth. Trying to keep the morale of an organisation at a particular level is a complex business. That is why we need to ensure that we better communicate how we manage our various processes and that interactions with staff are as finely tuned as they can be.

Ms McCorley: On a different issue, will you talk about the particular challenges that arise in trying to manage a women's prison in the circumstances in which it has to be managed currently?

Mr Maguire: It has been quite a few years since I had a women's prison on my patch. The Prison Governors' Association understands that various types of offenders, such as young prisoners and female offenders, have particular needs. I am pleased that there is a real emphasis in the reform programme on trying to improve the female estate, female regimes and the programmes and interventions available to them. There can be gender-specific requirements. Certainly, we would want staff to be particularly well trained, not just generally but specifically in dealing with female offenders. Research clearly shows that they can be very damaged and vulnerable individuals who need particularly sensitive handling. That is critical. That is being addressed by looking at the provision of a new facility, trying to have more diversions from custody, which is critical, and looking at how best we can manage those who have to come into custody, given some of the gender-specific differences and needs.

Ms McCorley: Do you think that the programme for the new women's prison is good enough? It is really on the long finger. It seems that women prisoners suffer because of their small number. There is a real argument that the women's facilities should have been built before now.

Mr Maguire: Talking as a Prison Governors' Association, we understand the issue with capital moneys and how difficult everything is. There is a balance to be struck in what can be achieved in a particular time. Generally speaking, we would like to do it all, but we cannot. The question is this: how do we go about prioritising? I accept your point, and I have heard it quite a few times, that the relatively small number of female prisoners means that they get the crumbs from the table. I do not sense that from the head or management board of the Prison Service. If anything, there is a real desire, from the Minister down, to try to take a very holistic view of the prison estate. I emphasise that a lot of people are batting for the female estate, and we want to try to take that forward when it can be done. The estate strategy, which you will be fully aware of, covers many facets: the potential for a new Magilligan, and there are other developments in Maghaberry, given the population pressures and so forth. I do not know where it sits in people's mind priority-wise, but my sense, and I think that Pat would agree, is that it is well up there as something to be done sooner rather than later. What that means in concrete terms I am not quite sure, but the association senses a clear desire to take forward the female estate based at Hydebank Wood. As Pat said earlier, there is a whole new senior management team in there now that can begin to take those matters forward, both for young offenders and, in particular, for the women.

The Chairperson: Just before you go, I have a question on the situation at Maghaberry. Is the Prison Governors' Association concerned about the increasing tension that there seems to be among dissidents in Roe House?

Mr Maguire: It is fair to say that the Prison Governors' Association has concerns about a rise in tension in any prison. In Maghaberry, we want to ensure that the management of the Prison Service does all that it can to deal progressively with all prisoners. The tensions there are unnecessary, in the sense that, as I said quite a few times today, we want to deliver positive outcomes for all prisoners. That includes maintaining a good, fair and sustainable regime and being in a position in which it is possible to develop all the regimes. Within the prison and across the prison estate, we fully support Prison Service management in delivering that.

The Chairperson: Clearly, the two letter bombs — one in Londonderry and one in my constituency, which the Royal Mail detected in Lisburn — both of which were addressed to your prison, are having a negative impact on staff morale. How is that situation being dealt with?

Mr Maguire: We deplore what happened. Prison staff come to work to do a professional job of managing prisoners and providing positive outcomes. It does not do anything to help the situation when prison staff are subject to such events, and those were particularly distressing events. The Prison Governors' Association does not accept that that is any way to treat prison staff, inside or outside the prison, and it abhors such actions. They are unnecessary, and we wish that they would cease completely.

Mr Gray: Such acts impact on morale and on individuals, and I reiterate that they cannot be justified. The association's view is one of total condemnation. The reasoning behind such acts is beyond us. It is our job as prison governors to support the staff and to manage the situation in the prisons. To that end, staff working in certain areas of the prisons regularly meet prison managers and the governor. Open discussions can take place, and advice and support can be given. They continue to do their job, which is their contribution, as it is for all prison staff, to Northern Ireland's safer society. We will continue to provide that support to them.

The Chairperson: Is the association getting the support from the senior management of the Prison Service to ensure that staff are being supported? Ultimately, the objective of dissident republicans is to control their own affairs, as they used to do. How assured are you that the demands being sought by the prisoners — the unreasonable demands, in my view — will not be met as a result of the ongoing attempts to target prison officers?

Mr Maguire: As you will understand, the situation is very complex. That said, Prison Service headquarters and the Minister have supported prison management in trying to manage what is a very difficult situation. As Pat rightly said, we tirelessly want to continue to support all staff, but particularly those who work in very difficult circumstances. The regimes on offer are among the best around, and we constantly look at ways in which we can impact on and improve all regimes because nothing ever stands still, particularly in a prison environment, and we are very mindful of all that.

There are issues that we have to think through and try to address. The Prison Governors' Association supports the approach being taken by Prison Service management to try to deal with that situation. I hope that the staff believe that they are being supported by prison management. It is a complex and changing issue, but, by the same token, there are clear limits to what can be achieved in respect of a progressive regime. At present, from what we can discern, there is very clear support up and down the structure for the current approach, which is trying to manage the situation in very difficult circumstances, given some of the recent external events to which you referred.

The Chairperson: Governor Maguire and Governor Gray, thank you both for coming on behalf of your association to the Committee. It has been very beneficial for members. I appreciate your time.