Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Prison Service Reform Programme: Northern Ireland Prison Service

10 April 2014

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 Tom Elliott
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Alban Maginness
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

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

The Chairperson: I welcome Sue McAllister, director general, Mark Adam, HR and organisational change manager, Paul Cawkwell, director of offender policy and operations, and Brian McCaughey, director of rehabilitation of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. You are all very welcome. As usual, Hansard is recording this and will publish a report in due course. Sue, I hand over to you.

Mrs Sue McAllister (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Thank you for your welcome. I am sure that members will have questions on a range of issues, and I therefore do not intend to make a long opening statement. We are grateful for this opportunity to brief you today. While we are here to discuss the reform of the Prison Service, we are happy to take any questions that you may have.

Members may be aware that the Criminal Justice Inspection (CJINI) today published a report into the work of the prisoner escort and custody services (PECCS). The inspection has highlighted the exceptional work that has been achieved by PECCS since the previous inspection in 2010. I agree with CJINI that this report and the progress in PECCS is a beacon to all parts of our service on what can be achieved through effective local leadership, through partnership between management and staff and through progressive and productive relationships with the trade unions.

We would also like to give you a brief overview of the wider reforms within the service. We are into the final year of the reform programme, and we continue to make good progress. The oversight group chaired by the Minister has signed off 19 of the 40 recommendations from the Owers report. A plan to deliver the remaining recommendations is in place, and I am confident that by this time next year all recommendations will either have been implemented or will be ready for implementation. For

example, recommendation 36 stated that there should be a new custodial facility for women in custody. A newbuild is dependent on funding being made available. However, by the end of this year, we will have upgraded the female facility at Ash House and developed a new step-down facility for women on the Hydebank Wood estate.

On our voluntary early retirement scheme, I am pleased to be able to inform the Committee that we have secured funding to release the final 28 members of staff. Everyone concerned has been written to, and we are working on the finer detail to agree the date when they can leave. This is good news for those waiting to leave, and it will allow us to plan for the future with certainty and confidence. The year ahead is full of opportunity. For the first time in a number of years, we will have a settled workforce with the conclusion of the voluntary early retirement scheme. Training and development of our managers and officers will continue. We will continue to build our relationships across the justice family and the wider community and voluntary sector.

We are discussing with colleagues in the Department for Employment and Learning how we can develop learning and skills in our prisons. Our working relationships with key partners, such as the Probation Board, will further develop, with a firm focus on rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders in our community.

All of that is being delivered against a backdrop of an increasing prisoner population. We have introduced performance measures that demonstrate progress in areas such as drugs seizures, a reduction in the number of assaults and fewer lockdowns. We are happy to take any questions you may have on those and other areas of performance.

Our aim is to help build a safer Northern Ireland. The Prison Service can do that by working with offenders to help them address their offending behaviour.

Thank you for the invitation to speak today. We welcome your questions on those issues or any others that you would like to discuss. Thank you.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you very much. I read the report by CJINI into PECCS, and it was the first time in a long time that I have read such glowing commentary about the Prison Service. That is to be welcomed. I am sure that you are pleased with its content; I was pleased when I read it. It is long overdue for such reports to be published about the Prison Service, and it is worth noting and remarking on that.

In terms of what has been achieved in PECCS, obviously the relationships have been important. You have 19 out of 40 of the Owers recommendations signed off. How is that relationship, which has clearly changed the PECCS, being replicated across the rest of the Prison Service so that the other recommendations can be brought forward?

Mrs S McAllister: The report that was published today says that what is happening in PECCS needs to be seen as an example for the rest of our service. We still have a lot of work to do on our reform programme; we know that, and we are not complacent. However, we are seeing improvement in all three establishments and in PECCS across a range of performance measures. We know that you will want to ask about some of those because I suggested some of them in my opening statement. For example, we are seeing reductions in the number of lockdowns across the three establishments. We have seen a measurable increase in the number of activity places and employment and training opportunities for prisoners in the three establishments. We are doing better in relation to what we find on searches, and we are doing better in relation to drugs. So, we are seeing tangible, measurable outcomes in all three prisons.

We are quite clear that when the chief inspector next visits any of the three establishments, he and his team will see improvement. It is just that this has been an opportunity for us to evidence that improvement in PECCS. The changes in PECCS have been outstanding. In a very short time, the leadership in PECCS has led our staff, working collaboratively with the unions, and has shown what can be done. We are doing it across the service, and we are very clear about that.

The Chairperson: Good. Obviously, the public will judge this when we look at the reoffending rates. When will we start seeing a reduction in reoffending rates?

Mrs S McAllister: I will ask Brian to say something about that in a moment. We all know that reoffending rates have to be measured across a significant period of time. So, we do not expect to be

able to demonstrate that anything that we are currently doing will have a long-term impact on reoffending rates for some time. However, we can do some work to show a correlation between what we do with offenders when they are in custody and what we are able to do with them on release, in terms of employment and accommodation for example, so that they are better able to settle into their communities. If you are asking about the point at which we will be able to show a percentage improvement, for example, realistically, we should be looking at five years down the line. Brian, you may have a view from your current role and your former role.

Mr Brian McCaughey (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Most sentences imposed now involve a period in custody and a period on supervision in the community. That is why the prison review team (PRT) recommendations 29, 30 and 31 are so important. Recommendation 29 is about a comprehensive assessment of risk and need, and we believe that we have the right questions to address from that analysis. The sentence plan and the comprehensive assessment plan coordinate all the providers in prisons, both prison staff and the external providers, of which there are many. Recommendation 31 recommends that the Probation Board and prisons are more joined up, more integrated and have more exchanges. All of those will contribute to a reduction in reoffending.

The Chairperson: How confident are you that the Probation Board will be able to do what is expected of it? I have raised this issue before, because there are specialists in the Prison Service that deal with a number of these issues, and I know that there has been some tension over who is ultimately in control. How will that integration work and who ultimately is in charge?

Mrs S McAllister: We have spoken about this at previous meetings. PRT recommendation 31 clearly requires us to work more collaboratively with our colleagues in the Probation Board. We now meet regularly, most recently this morning, with Cheryl Lamont, who is acting director of probation, to look at how we can share services across the two organisations to get better value for money but, more importantly, to get better outcomes for offenders. We are confident and mature enough in our relationship now to look across organisational boundaries at delivering elements of our service.

For example, where we look at delivering interventions and psychology services, and where we look at the wider offender management agenda, Cheryl and I, and colleagues in NIPS and on the Probation Board, are confident that it is less important to manage a particular bit of the service than to have the good arrangements in place to deliver across community and custody. I think that it is less important who manages it. Probation colleagues are clear that that is the case; it is about what we deliver in relation to outcomes for offenders.

Mr McCaughey: We have done much work on PRT recommendation 31 in clarifying roles and responsibilities. My job is to develop the professional prison officer of the future who will take on a significant amount of the engagement with and assessment of prisoners during the main years of their sentence. We are reaching agreement, or are at the point of agreement, that the Probation Board will major on the last 12 months — on resettlement as prisoners are beginning to edge towards the gate and reintegration into the community.

We are developing a suite of programmes and interventions that can be delivered in a multi-faceted manner, and I also need to look at what is provided by the voluntary and community sector in prisons to ensure that everybody's contribution delivers against the sentence plan that I referred to earlier. I also need to ensure that we are complementing, not duplicating, one and other and that we are using our limited resources to the best effect. I believe that the delivery of that best practice model will allow us to influence the reconviction rates when people return to the community.

The Chairperson: Just so that I am clear, is it the Prison Service commissioning the Probation Board to do work for it, or for you? Is that going to be the contractual way that it will operate?

Mrs S McAllister: Not necessarily. We have two things. First, we have seconded probation staff working in prisons under a service level agreement, so that is a purchaser/provider relationship. We buy that service from the Probation Board. We ought to be able to be intelligent customers in how we purchase that, so we listen to what the Probation Board tells us about where it can add value, what its unique selling point is and what we need it to do rather than things that our own staff can do, so we have that relationship. Secondly, there is the seamless management of offenders from custody, through release and into supervision and beyond, so that is the bit where we work collaboratively as equal partners in making sure that we offer the best service to offenders.

The Chairperson: I think that the concept is the right one, but I just know that, with any merger — that is maybe not a good word to use, but where you are collaborating — ultimately, because there will always be issues with personnel in any organisation, someone needs to be able to say, "This is where we're going". So collaboration and equal partnership is all good in theory, but I think you and I both know that, in personal relationships when people are involved, there ultimately needs to be someone saying, "Well, I am actually the person paying the bills here, so this is where we're going".

Mr McCaughey: I would say that the Prison Service is in charge. The Prison Service is buying the service against the assessment of risk and need, which I will have carried out under PRT recommendation 29. That involves the Probation Board and every other provider in prisons. It is a mosaic of providers at present, and it is my task over the next years to bring some order to that to ensure that we are all contributing what is uniquely our contribution and that we are not duplicating what others are doing.

The Chairperson: Finally, I just want to touch on the invest-to-save scheme. I think it was on Tuesday that I asked the Minister, and he was able to update the House that it was 14 and there were still 12 remaining. Are you telling the Committee that those 12 remaining have now moved to the letter 2 stage?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes.

The Chairperson: That is good news indeed. Obviously people can get out, having got the letter 2, but, for a number of people, the fact that they had been on the letter 3 for so long without knowing if they were even accepted on to the scheme had been a problem, so I think they will take some comfort from that. Nevertheless, I am sure they will still ask when they can actually go.

Mrs S McAllister: Absolutely. We are hopeful that that will be fairly soon.

The Chairperson: How many, in total, have left under the invest-to-save scheme?

Mr Mark Adam (Northern Ireland Prison Service): I think it is around 530 all in all, give or take one or two. I would just need to check that, but I think it is around 530.

The Chairperson: Obviously, part of the rationale for it was financial, and the other aspect was to allow people to leave with dignity. A lot of them had served during the darkest times of their career in the Prison Service, and it is quite right that they would be recognised in that respect. However, the repeating theme has been that the cost of prisons in Northern Ireland is way above what it is in the rest of the United Kingdom. When should we anticipate seeing the costs of running our Prison Service reduce as a result of the scheme having now been implemented?

Mrs S McAllister: I will ask Paul to give you some figures, because I have seen some figures only today in Paul's most recent report from his visit to Maghaberry. We are already seeing a significant reduction in our cost per prisoner place. We ought to say that in recent years we have seen a 30% increase in the prison population, with no additional resources, and that inevitably makes our cost per prisoner place much lower. You will want to share the most recent figure with us, Paul, because it is very good news.

Mr Paul Cawkwell (Northern Ireland Prison Service): I will keep it short and sweet. If you use Maghaberry prison as your barometer — it is our biggest jail and does most of our business — the cost of keeping a prisoner there today is half the price it was in 2007. So, I think we are already seeing the dividend, and, as each year passes, you will see greater reductions.

Mrs S McAllister: So it is 43 —

Mr Cawkwell: The cost of keeping a prisoner at Maghaberry each day is around £113, and back in 2007 it was £243·50 per day.

The Chairperson: OK. Had you worked that out to save me doing it by the year? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Cawkwell: It would mean that, if you were to work out the budget today, it would be about £45 million.

Mrs S McAllister: It is £45,000.

Mr Cawkwell: Sorry, yes, I am looking at the cost of the prisons. It would be about £42,000 a prisoner, which takes you to the ballpark figure of running a high-security prison in other jurisdictions. That was not previously the case.

The Chairperson: OK. That is good.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much for your presentation. You are very welcome. The cost in Maghaberry has halved. That is excellent news, and I am delighted to hear that. Can similar progress in savings be made in the other prisons in the estate? Is it a difficulty with Magilligan, for example, because of the age of the building?

Mrs S McAllister: No; we are still making significant savings at all three prisons. We have just done a re-profiling exercise, which will bring in new working arrangements from the beginning of June. In all three prisons, we have made reductions to cost while improving operational performance. We are seeing evidence of that in all three prisons. We may do slightly different things in Hydebank because, obviously, we have slightly different priorities.

Mr Humphrey: I also welcome the progress that has been made with regard to learning and skills. It is very important for people's self-worth. I welcome that progress. I also welcome the joined-up nature of your working with DEL and the regional colleges, such as the Belfast Metropolitan College. I know that that is probably an obvious statement to make. However, all too often, those who sit in these Committees do not necessarily see that joined-up approach actually happening, which is quite extraordinary. However, in this case, it is clearly happening. I welcome that.

Obviously, there is a societal problem with drugs. That then manifests itself in prisons. I know that there is a pilot scheme in one of the prisons. Has that been rolled out to other prisons?

Mrs S McAllister: Let me ask Paul to tell you some of the things that are happening with our drugs strategy because, while there is that pilot in Maghaberry, there are some other very exciting things happening, and I think that you will want us to share that.

Mr Cawkwell: The fact is that work has been ongoing in all three of the establishments. Last year, we made changes to move away from rigid prescription about what we need to do with regard to security, and we followed an intelligence-led agenda. That freed up resources and allowed us to do things differently. That has had a significant impact. From randomly testing prisoners each month, we know roughly how much misuse is around and about. If you are looking at Maghaberry Prison and you compare quarter 1 to quarter 4, you will notice a 10 percentage point reduction at that prison. If you take Hydebank, it is to a similar margin. If you look at Magilligan, you will see that when we tested prisoners last summer, 21% would routinely test positive. Now, it is around 6%. So, over the course of the year, since we changed our policies and tactics, we have noticed significant improvements. If you look specifically at the pilot that was launched at Maghaberry, which was an initiative with PSNI that sought to educate staff, visitors and prisoners, you will see that there was an element of education and an element of deterrent and detection. We are running at a rate of around 30 drug seizures a month and, importantly, around 25 referrals to the public prosecutor each month at that prison. I deem all of that to be successful. Maghaberry drew the headlines but not necessarily all of the success; that was shared.

Mr Humphrey: I think that that is something that needs to be highlighted, with respect. Certainly, in my estimation, people are aware of the work that is being done at Maghaberry but not necessarily the work at the other two institutions. That is another good-news story. The problem is largely prescription drugs, is it not?

Mrs S McAllister: There is an issue with prescription medication. We have done a number of things in conjunction with our South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust colleagues. We have changed — when I say, "we", I mean Health colleagues in discussion with us — have changed the type of drugs that are prescribed in prison to make them less attractive to people to buy. So, they are drugs that are less addictive. We have seen instances in which some prisoners who have been on medication for a long time have actually told the healthcare staff, "I do not want those drugs any more". So, it has been clear that those people have not been taking their own drugs; they have been selling them, have been bullied for them or have been moving them on to other prisoners. We have seen a reduction in that.

We are also looking at how we can require some prisoners who cannot really be required to hold their own drugs in their possession to take their medication under supervision. We call that "supervised swallow". So, that removes the opportunity for them to sell those drugs or not take them. As we look at the drug-testing figures, we will certainly see that the number of prisoners testing positive for prescription medication that is not their prescription medication has reduced.

Mr Humphrey: I welcome the figures that we have in front of us and the testimony that you are giving us, but, obviously, there is room for further improvement. You said that the drugs of some prisoners will be retained and given daily. Why can that not happen with all prisoners?

Mrs S McAllister: There are two bits to it. First, we try to normalise the environment in prisons so that the way in which people are institutionalised or not given responsibility for their own daily life is reduced as much as possible. Most people in communities are allowed and expected to retain and take their own medication. It is absolutely proper that, where prisoners can be trusted and allowed to do that, they do that.

Secondly, because it takes a number of healthcare staff to supervise the medication, that slows down the regime a significant amount. That means that those healthcare staff are not available to do the things that they are qualified to do, and which they are more appropriately employed to do, such as holding clinics, supporting prisoners and delivering therapeutic interventions. From conversations with our healthcare colleagues, we know that some highly qualified nurses are frustrated that they are being required to stand over people when they take tablets. It is about using quite an expensive healthcare resource to best effect.

Mr Cawkwell: I will elaborate, if I may. If you are vulnerable and serving a sentence in a Northern Ireland prison, the dispensing of your medicine will be supervised. If we think you trade your medication, the dispensing of it will be supervised. In two of our prisons, the dispensing of the six most tradable medicines is supervised. Interestingly, we are seeing the demand for some of those drugs ease off as a consequence. At Maghaberry, two of those six drugs have been rolled out so far. The sheer scale of the exercise in a prison as large as that has meant that they have had to take gradual steps towards full roll-out. In a prison where nine out of 10 people will be taking some form of medicine, the prospect of asking nurses to dispense and see consumed every tablet and every dot of medicine would be quite frightening and would kill the regime.

Mr Humphrey: So, 90% of prisoners are taking some form of medication.

Mr Cawkwell: Yes, 90% of them will take some form of medication, ranging from a paracetamol to something heavy duty.

Mr Humphrey: I welcome the news that you are on top of this. I am keen to drive down the figures even more. We had a drugs problem in our prisons, and I think that we probably still have, to an extent, but it is good and welcome news that you are on top of that.

I move on now to the estate management. I see that the business cases for the step-down facility and the new women's prison have been submitted. Can you give us any information on when you feel those two facilities might be open and ready for use?

Mrs S McAllister: The step-down facility for women will allow us to have a different facility in place quite quickly. The step-down facility is a domestic-type house. It is a six-bedroom house, where six women will be able to live in a small, supportive community and where they will be responsible for their own daily living. We have come up with that idea ourselves, in consultation with some of the long-term women prisoners in Ash House. We think that it will be an appropriate facility for women who are coming to the end of a longer sentence or deemed to be low-risk.

The provision of the replacement for Ash House will take significantly longer because that is a much bigger project. We are starting to finalise the design for that. Again, we have designed that in consultation with the women prisoners, some of the groups that represent the interests of women prisoners, the Prison Reform Trust, Health colleagues and criminal justice colleagues. Obviously, that remains subject to the funding being available, and we do not envisage being in a position to open our new women's prison before 2020.

Mr Humphrey: Is the Justice Minister's budget not ring-fenced?

Mrs S McAllister: The capital expenditure for the new women's facility will come from the next spending round, so it is subject to funding being granted. It is a long-term project, as is the redevelopment of Magilligan. We are improving the facilities in Ash House, where we are redeveloping the ground floor to provide activity for the women, and we are already introducing improvements to the regime, within the constraints of Hydebank.

Mr Cawkwell: I want to echo those sentiments. The work taking place in Ash House is not insignificant. The infill area will provide a great deal of activity, and that facility is coming.

Mrs S McAllister: I spent time with the women in Ash House on Monday evening with the new governor, Austin Treacy, in an informal setting. We had a meal together and a discussion about the improvements to the regime. The women to whom I spoke were absolutely clear that the quality of activities on offer for training and employment and the number of opportunities offered have improved. So even in the unsuitable physical environment, it is better than it was.

Mr Cawkwell: The big change concerns lockdowns. We were often criticised — quite rightly — because of the high number of lockdowns at Hydebank. On a typical day last April, one in eight individuals might have expected to be locked down, and now it is one in 50. There are more improvements to be made, but it has improved significantly.

Mrs S McAllister: The other thing is that —

Mr Humphrey: Am I right in saying that the Justice Minister's budget is ring-fenced, so all three of these will happen?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes. While we are on the subject of women — we may have mentioned this before — it is worth saying that we now have a risk- and intelligence-led approach to searching. We no longer carry out full routine searching of women, other than when there is specific intelligence to suggest that we need to. That is even on initial reception and on discharge from prison. I have spoken to the women, and that has been a significant development for them. It has not impacted on safety or put prisoners and staff at any more risk; it is just a more proportionate approach.

Mr McCartney: Thank you for the presentation. The Criminal Justice Inspection follow-up review of inspection recommendations for PECCS is very welcome. I notice that the conclusion includes the insight:

> *"These developments have been made possible by clearly defined objectives, determined leadership and enthusiastic teamwork".*

That is a good template for improvements in other places, if that is required.

When you were last here in October, Brian spoke about rehabilitation having primacy on the agenda. How is that being rolled out now that you have been in post a bit longer?

Mr McCaughey: I have been in post for seven months. I reiterate that my colleagues and I give primacy to rehabilitation, and repeat that my work around PRT recommendations 29, 30, 31 and 37 will ensure that the needs and risks presented by prisoners are captured at committal and translated into a sentence plan that everybody working in the prison will have to contribute to. That work will be overseen by a prison officer who will coordinate and ensure the delivery of that sentence plan and its review and then pass on the baton, as it were, to a probation officer in the last 12 months of the sentence in preparation for a prisoner's eventual resettlement, which will include home leaves and testing out in the community or in facilities provided by partner organisations. That is a much more joined-up approach than existed in previous years, and I think that it will translate into a Prison Service that places rehabilitation at the centre of all it does. It will also grasp the opportunity that a period in prison provides to bring about effective and positive change to those sentenced by the courts to imprisonment and lead to a reduction in reoffending.

Mr McCartney: At the previous meeting, it was also said that Hydebank's re-profiling had just concluded but that the other two were in progress. What impact has re-profiling had on the day-to-day measurement —

Mrs S McAllister: On the regime that is delivered?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mrs S McAllister: As we said, the re-profiling has put staff in the right place at the right time in the right numbers doing the right things. Paul, do you want to say something about the day-to-day impact?

Mr Cawkwell: It has certainly helped with predictability. That is probably best measured by lockdowns, which were unpredictable and disruptive to prisoners. Lockdowns have all but been eradicated at Magilligan prison. Hydebank is not yet where I would want it to be, but there has been a significant improvement: previously, one in eight was locked up, and now one in 50 might expect to be locked up daily.

We have not lost anything with supervision. Our capacity to supervise has been enhanced, and that is evidenced through assault rates. Despite the population going up and the task becoming harder — the rise last year was almost 7%, and, this year, it is almost 5% — the assault rate at Hydebank has halved since the first quarter to the current quarter. We have seen similar reductions at Maghaberry, where it is down one quarter, and it is pretty even at Magilligan.

We are still supervising well. We are getting more prisoners into daily activity, and there are fewer lockdowns. That has been pleasing, but the job is not done. Re-profiling will need to be done annually because things change in prisons, and we need to keep improving.

Mr McCartney: You said that more people are into activity. How is that measured? Are there more courses or vocational training?

Mr Cawkwell: Brian may want to come in on that in a moment, but I look at the hard numbers daily. In a prison such as Hydebank, where everything should be about activity, we now have 60 additional work spaces. That means, typically, around 190 activity spaces, with some 220 people competing for them. Far from it being an establishment in which activity was a rarity and there was paucity, it now has the basis of a proper curriculum and regime.

Mr McCaughey: I was going to cite Hydebank Wood as an example. I will try to wrap up some of the questions. If we can reach a point at which all the youngsters leaving Hydebank Wood have learned to read and write as a result of our learning and skills provision, that is a tremendous contribution by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to their rehabilitation. Although that might be a small measure, it is critical.

In answer to your earlier question, Mr McCartney, a sentence is a period in custody and in supervision. They are the same individuals. The Prison Service and the Probation Board are working at particular points. I must ensure a flow of information across those organisations so that the assessment of risk and need is managed in prison and passed out into the community. I must also ensure that the programmes and interventions delivered in the community can also be delivered in prison, so that if somebody gets three quarters of the way through a programme or intervention, I can pass that individual out into the community where they can finish that programme.

It is a joined-up approach to the management of offenders that offers them positive change. It is a joined-up approach to the rehabilitation of offenders and the reduction of reoffending rates in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCartney: Are the number of curriculum places at Magilligan and Maghaberry lower or higher than at Hydebank?

Mr Cawkwell: Magilligan is not too badly placed with the number of regime places, and, by virtue of its design, you cannot crowd it out too much. There is a limit to how many can stay there, so the levels of activity have never really been problematic at Magilligan.

Maghaberry is a challenge because it is facing the consequences of a growing prison population. Although we have added beds, the plant has not gone in to increase the number of activity spaces. We are in the process of moving to a different model there: if there are not enough jobs for everybody, we will do our best to make sure that everybody has part of a job. We are splitting the employment to ensure that every sentenced prisoner and those who are unsentenced and want to work has the opportunity to work for part of the day. That has increased the number of people who are in work, but not quite to the levels at Hydebank.

Mr McCartney: What is the pick-up rate in Hydebank? The assault rate is one indicator, and it is impressive. Are the prisoners responding to the new purpose and new sense of rehabilitation?

Mr Cawkwell: It is improving, but the job is not done. Nothing that we have said is a job done, but the situation is improving. The most noticeable difference at Hydebank is the fact that the prison allows free flow. Previously, we would not have trusted prisoners to move from A to B without a prison officer taking them there, but there is now a free-flow operation running across the establishment, and that makes a difference.

Mr McCaughey: I would not want to give the impression that the job is finished; the job has started. At the previous evidence session, I said that our task is to bring prisons closer to the community and the community closer to prisons. I want more opportunities for prisoners to be tested in the community in order to make amends and pay back for what they have done, through working in the community and particularly in relation to victims. Those are developments and opportunities. The job has been started, and we are determined to finish it.

Mr McCartney: Is there a measurement of achievement in literacy by the end of a prison sentence?

Mrs S McAllister: Absolutely. In putting together the specification for learning and skills, basic literacy and numeracy are the priority. The Belfast Met will deliver that in Hydebank before it delivers anything else on vocational training and additional education. We assess all people coming into custody on their levels of literacy and numeracy, and we then measure them when they leave custody to make sure that everybody has reached a certain standard. That standard is being able to function normally, so people need to be able to read newspapers, fill in forms, and so on. Some people will require more, but that will be our priority.

Mr McCaughey: The model that we are adopting means that our new providers will major on the curriculum. They are the experts in learning and development. We will also appoint activities managers in each establishment, who will ensure that we get individuals into classrooms. It has always been difficult to motivate the unmotivated, who have not had good classroom experiences. Those managers will have to ensure that people are filling the places, and the experts will be leading curriculum delivery.

Mrs S McAllister: That is quite significant. We have already had conversations with the Belfast Met and the North West Regional College, which are our primary providers. If we have a young man who stopped going to school when he was eight or nine years of age, there is little point in putting him in a classroom and expecting him to sit there for two hours learning to read. That just will not work. What we can do is embed those literacy and numeracy lessons in things that people are more minded to do.

The Belfast Met is very good at this. It is already working with very hard-to-reach young people in communities. If young men are interested in cars, computers or gaming, for example, it can embed literacy and numeracy in those things so that those young men are learning to read and write without anybody being required to sit down quietly in a classroom for two hours. We are realistic about what we can achieve with such young people who have largely been turned off education at quite an early age.

Mr McCartney: Are you happy that the structure that is in place is robust enough to withstand any change in personnel or circumstances?

Finally, if people from the review team went into your establishments now, are you confident that they would say that they can see change?

Mrs S McAllister: In answer to your first question, we need to put structures in place that do not depend on individuals. We are doing that through our succession planning strategy, and we include ourselves in that. We need robust structures at every level, from the very top of the organisation downwards.

Two members of the review team sit on our Prison Service management board as non-executive directors. They are in the prisons quite regularly and give us feedback about how they see progress. The feedback that we get reflects what we have said, which is that much has been achieved but that there is still quite a lot left to do.

Mr Dickson: Thank you for what is clearly an emerging good news story about our prisons. You admitted that there is a long way to go and that it is work in progress. Perhaps it is only the start of the work. There is a lot more to achieve, but at least we are starting to hear an improving story from the Prison Service.

I want to concentrate on a couple of areas. In the PRT progress update, I note that a significant number of recommendations are described as either complete or signed off. Will they be reviewed and refreshed?

Mrs S McAllister: We had our regular programme board meeting this morning, and we talked about this issue. We mentioned that some things will be signed off but not yet delivered because they are subject to funding. We need to be clear on the role of the oversight group that is appointed by the Minister to oversee progress; when recommendations become business as usual; and, after that, how we assess our continuing progress. Our view is that there is a continuing role for the inspection, but it is about how we manage the transition. Mark, do you want to pick this up as it is your area?

Mr Adam: With the oversight group, we have been looking at the benefits realisation plan for some months. Some things feel and look different in two to three months, and other things will feel and look different in two to three years. We are now having conversations about how we embed that as a business-as-usual product, whether it is part of what the inspection does as business as usual or whether there are, when we hit those points, other accountability mechanisms that show that some of the process changes and interventions that we put in place are yielding differences in increased numeracy and literacy and reduced reoffending. It is about all those kind of things. We can start to say, over time, whether the tweaks and changes that we made to the system were the right kind of tweaks and changes.

Mr Dickson: Where does that fit in? Do you have an existing continuous improvement programme, or does it feed into continuous improvement? Is that where the future of delivering an Investors in People-type concept of continuous improvement lies?

Mr Adam: It is a little bit of both. A lot of the stats and figures that Paul mentioned are for things that we now track regularly. They give us indications of whether we are going in the right or the wrong direction and whether the temperature checks that we get from reviews, such as the CJINI review, give us a feel for what is happening now. A combination of all those things starts to pull together.

Mr Dickson: I will turn to one of the changes that have occurred. You referred to a number of external providers, one of which concerns education. For me, however, the most significant external change is probably the contribution of health professionals in prisons. To what extent is that part of the success story? What are the barriers and difficulties that you still perceive in the delivery of healthcare?

Mrs S McAllister: You are right. It is absolutely proper that health professionals deliver healthcare in prisons. We have seen significant commitment from our trust colleagues to delivering an excellent service that is equivalent to that delivered outside. Obviously, there were some teething issues. The trust, for example, recruited nurses to work in our prisons who had perhaps not thought through whether it was the environment for them, so we had quite a high turnover of healthcare staff at the beginning of the new arrangements. We addressed that in partnership by putting better induction arrangements in place. We supported people through those early weeks and months, and we have seen a reduction in turnover. We now have a more static health workforce.

We have clinical managers in the three establishments, so somebody is in charge of healthcare, which has really made a difference. The daily partnership working is excellent. I have seen it for myself, and I know that colleagues have. We have multidisciplinary groups supporting prisoners and patients and helping them to work through crises, and so on.

We know, however, that offender health might not be as high on their priority list as it is on ours because it is our core business. We know that the South Eastern Trust delivers healthcare not only to offenders in prisons but to a range of groups in the community. We know that we have to compete with those other groups for resources and attention. What we do have is a really robust governance arrangement. We have a regular strategic partnership meeting that is attended by me, the chief executive of the South Eastern Trust, Hugh McCaughey, and senior people from the Public Health Agency and the RQIA to make sure that we have the right strategic model . A number of meetings also happen further down the organisation at an operational level.

We continue to explore how we might be more effective. We talk about prescription medication, for example. However, I am absolutely clear that, if we can have more and better activity in prisons that tires people out during the day, the demand for prescription medication to help people to sleep will reduce; that is pretty obvious. We have just introduced an activity, for example, by taking women from Ash House swimming every week. We take a minibus of women from Ash House, and they go swimming, and they tell me that it is a great activity. It builds confidence, and there are real health and emotional well-being benefits. However, it also makes the women quite tired, and they say that they sleep better on days that they have been swimming.

We need to engage with our health colleagues and ask how we can frame that as a health initiative so that people can understand the benefits, and it is seen not only as something that is nice to do but as the right thing to do for clear health reasons. Similarly, we need to think about health in a more holistic way. It is not just physical health. What are the mental health and emotional health benefits of some of the things that we are doing? We know that there are colleagues in the health sector who are just as excited as we are about some of these issues. The challenge is how we embed them in the strategic priorities for health.

Mr Dickson: Finally, the prison environment is very different from the community. Although delivering healthcare that is as good as the community receives is clearly a good objective, how it is delivered in a prison setting is very different to how it is delivered in the community. The same number of support mechanisms are not available inside a prison as are available in the community, where people can knock on their neighbour's door and say, "I have a headache. What do you think I should do about it?" How are those concepts being understood by the health trust, which is working in an environment that it has never been in before?

Mrs S McAllister: The trust is learning. You are absolutely right, Stewart. If you have a raging toothache, for example, and are at home, there are lots of things that you can do to distract yourself. However, if you are sitting in your cell with a raging toothache, the idea of waiting for a week to see a dentist is less bearable. We need to take account of that.

The only way that we can do it is through joint learning and giving the trust time to get used to that environment. It is not an exact science. It is about giving the trust a better understanding through good induction and communication. I recently attended a meeting on the review of a prisoner who was subject to SPAR procedures. The meeting was attended by the prisoner/patient, the senior officer, the nurse and the mental health professional. They were all able to talk and share their views on how that person could best be supported. All that multidisciplinary work and good communication will help.

Mr Cawkwell: We should highlight the ongoing work as part of the PRT, whereby the health sector and prisons have been working together. A draft strategy has emerged about how we manage health in the future not only in custody but before custody and post-release. A lot of work and investment has gone into that. My understanding is that it is likely to go to full public consultation around June, but people have clearly been on a listening exercise.

Mr Dickson: That is very helpful. Thank you.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you very much. I think that the questions have almost been exhausted.

Mrs S McAllister: Good.

Mr McCartney: Make one up. *[Laughter.]*

Mr A Maginness: I suppose that, in many ways, that it is a good sign. Congratulations, first of all, on PECCS. It is a great report. Congratulations, also, on the report that you have given to the Committee. Very significant progress has been made, and we should be affirmative when we hear good things, which we have heard today.

My main focus is on educational opportunities, particularly for young people and young prisoners. You covered most of that, but is there anything else that can be said about it? I know that, at present, it is only an interim contract with the Belfast Met, but presumably that will be made permanent. I know that it is early days, but how is that going?

Mrs S McAllister: I will invite colleagues to speak. We know that it has been slow in starting in some places, not least because the organisations delivering education — the colleges — needed to know that they had an interim contract before they could recruit teachers. That is obvious. Once they knew that they had been awarded a contract, they could start putting people in place. It felt a bit slow at first because of that. We now have Belfast Met people in place. People are also in place in Magilligan from the North West Regional College, but they have been there for quite a long time, so that felt like less of a big change.

Where the Belfast Met is working in Hydebank and Maghaberry, it is just fantastic. We have examples of really enthusiastic, inspirational individuals coming in and making a real difference quite quickly, so all the signs are very good. As Brian said, we just need to get the management arrangements in place. The Belfast Met, for example, has just appointed someone in the past couple of weeks to lead for it on prison education. The North West Regional College has had someone in post for longer because it has been doing this work for longer. It is important to have one go-to person who leads on that. We also have our own managers to support that.

Mr McCaughey: We are engaged with DEL on transferring the delivery of learning skills to the experts. That is what we seek to do. The new providers have individuals who model the way and who enthuse. When we see umpteen young men queuing up to get involved in a catering class, I think we know that we are properly motivating individuals to get involved.

I will make one final comment. I want to bring about a change so that sentence plan delivery dictates the prison regime, no matter what prison it is, and life in prison is about delivering that plan so that the person is less likely to reoffend on release. *[Inaudible.]*

Mrs S McAllister: We should also mention, Alban, that we are not doing any of this other than to build safer communities. We know that everything that we do in prison will have an impact and make prisoners more likely to get employment or training on release and to stay away from offending. All the things we know about desistance tell us that, if we can help people to form relationships that are not based around criminality, that helps them to settle successfully back into communities.

We have some really good projects. We have a project with young men in Hydebank working with the Lyric Theatre. The lads from Hydebank have been going out to the Lyric, but they will also be working inside the prison on building theatre sets. The Lyric is keen to look at whether it can offer internships to young men as theatre technicians, lighting technicians or set builders, and we are looking at front-of-house opportunities. All those things are realistic opportunities for employment on release. Also, they introduce those young men to a world that is not about crime and offending but is about how you use your skills and leisure time in a more productive way and form relationships that are good, healthy and law-abiding. It is about all those things, we think, but it is also about reducing offending and building safer communities.

Mr McCaughey: Another initiative we delivered, and which I was very enthused about, was with young men and sport. We brought in the sports of rugby, soccer and GAA and, on a full afternoon, all the young men involved in that exercise participated in all those sports. I thought that that was a great learning exercise, and a positive cross-community event. It was one that we can build on.

Mr A Maginness: I wish you well. I have just one point to raise on the drug test issue. This came up at the tail end of our Committee meeting last week. Correct me if I am wrong, but let me put the proposition to you that most abuse of drugs in prisons is of prescription drugs. However the capacity that you have at the moment seems to be for the detection of illicit drugs. I think that I am right in making that assertion; if I am wrong, you can correct me. Do you think that you need a wider or additional capacity in order to determine the excess use of prescription drugs?

Mrs S McAllister: OK. I will ask Paul to take that. Is this about the capacity of our current drug-testing contracts?

Mr A Maginness: Yes.

Mrs S McAllister: We have talked about this a lot, because we are aware of the concerns.

Mr Cawkwell: The fact is that there is some capacity to test for medication. Where our health partners think it is wise to do so, we have the capacity to go back and say, "We would now like to test for this", and our service provider has to act accordingly, and give us that capacity.

However, this is an area where you need to be careful what you wish for. If we know that 90% of the men at Maghaberry are on some form of medication, then 90% of the tests will register as positive for something. Prison officers are not given access to medical records, and neither should they have that access. So, you are requiring a clinician to stop what they are doing, cross-reference the test results against the prescribed medicines and check to see whether anything could give a false positive or whether it is in line with the expected results. That is laborious and time-consuming, and it will stop nurses and doctors from treating patients, so it is not an area that you can walk into without proper foresight, and hence we have taken the view that we should be led by our health partner.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much for the presentation. I will follow on from Mr Maginness's questions on drug testing. It is quite a significant issue. I refer to the table that you presented us with today. Do you believe that there is a drug problem in the prisons?

Mr Cawkwell: Absolutely there is, because 55 committals to Maghaberry every month come in with some form of substance dependency. So, if that is the case, there is a drug problem in prisons. Our job is to treat that problem, encourage people to move away from that lifestyle and give them routes through. So the problem will be enduring. Our challenge is to try to address it, and I hope that the figures I gave earlier give some assurance that there are improvements.

Mrs S McAllister: It is probably worth saying, Tom, that later this month we will open Glen House as a drug recovery unit in Maghaberry, where prisoners who indicate that they want to leave that lifestyle behind will be supported, on a 24-hour basis, by prison staff and staff from external organisations, to address their addictions. We will then put in place relapse prevention support to stop them going back to drugs. So, it is the first unit of its type for us, but the idea is to roll it out more widely. The governors of Hydebank Wood and Magilligan are already quite interested in whether they can do something similar.

Mr Elliott: That is interesting. I appreciate the problems, because it is really difficult when that number of people come in with substance abuse problems and the difficulties that come with them. You are left to deal with that in a prison situation.

I understand the figures you gave earlier, and I am pleased to hear about the new exercise proposal. Are there any other new incentives or initiatives to try to deal with those aspects? I do not know whether trying to isolate those who come in with drug problems from other prisoners is feasible. Are there just too many? It is because I do not know that I am asking the questions.

Mrs S McAllister: Of course, you are right: there is a sense that makes you want to keep people away from those who might sell them drugs or discourage them from moving away from drugs. Part of the principle of Glen House, which will be the drug recovery unit, will be that those prisoners will be separate from the general population. However, they will obviously be in a large group so that they can offer one another support, and they will be supported by staff.

There is a tension between needing to treat people decently and recognising that the early days in custody are when people are often at their most vulnerable — so that is the time when you might least want to isolate somebody — and the need to address problems around addiction. That is why this is a tricky business. We are dealing with some people who have very challenging needs and behaviours. The provision of support services, some of those being residential for prisoners, is the way forward.

Mr Elliott: When you look at a table with figures in it, you do not get the entire story. It might be useful if we got a separate briefing — not necessarily an oral briefing, but at least a briefing paper — on the management of drugs and rehabilitation of prisoners. That might be helpful to us.

Mrs S McAllister: We could do that.

Mr Elliott: I want to ask about the voluntary retirement scheme, namely the filling of those places and new officers coming in. I am aware of the recruitment process that went on. Candidates had a time span of one year in which to be appointed. When will that be complete?

Mrs S McAllister: To bring in new officers?

Mr Elliott: Yes.

Mrs S McAllister: We have finished our recruitment.

Mr Adam: Our last lot of staff have gone to PECCS. We have a merit list that is still open for another few months. So, if we needed to call on that, we would be able to do so without running a new campaign. We have that open as a window of opportunity, but that will come to an end at the end of June.

Mr Elliott: You stated earlier that in 2007 it cost £234 per day to keep a prisoner in Maghaberry and that now the cost is £113.

Mr Adam: Yes.

Mr Elliott: Why is there such a difference? Where were the efficiencies and savings made?

Mrs S McAllister: Most of our costs are staff costs, so we have a significant number of staff who cost us less than some of the staff who have left the service. We also have different staffing levels in some areas. So, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, as we have talked about, we have more proportionate staffing arrangements. So, much of the difference is because the staffing arrangements are different.

Some of it is down to us accommodating a 30% rise in the prisoner population with no additional resources. So, the cost is spread across a larger group of prisoners. There is also more accommodation: we have opened new accommodation. That accounts for the difference.

Mr Elliott: Do you not believe that that reduction in resources, compared to the prisoner population, reduces the level of management you have in the prisons?

Mrs S McAllister: Some of it is that we have flattened our management structure and changed the gradings of our managers. So, in some cases, there will be managers in different grades and there will be fewer managers. The span of control for some managers will also have changed. If you ask whether it has lessened our ability to supervise and manage, we would say that it has not done so, because, at the same time, we have invested significant resource in training and developing our managers. They have told us that they feel we are investing in their development. We might have fewer managers, but they are more effective, and we now have more proportionate spans of control for our managers and more realistic staffing levels.

Mr Elliott: In fairness, Sue, my question was about the management on the ground; not so much the management here, but the management of prisoners on the ground. Is that compromised in any way?

Mrs S McAllister: So, we are talking about first line managers.

We would argue that that is not the case. Paul has already mentioned the reduction in the level of assaults, which is usually a good indicator of staff control and good relationships.

Mr Cawkwell: I think it is twofold. First, our introduction of performance measures allows us to gauge whether situations are improving or whether there is any erosion in those areas. That is a help, and all that evidence points to an encouraging picture. The second part is PRT, and that has changed the way that we do our business. People now understand that there has to be a greater amount of attention spent on prisoners who are at risk of harm. Processes have been built in to ensure that that works properly. It is just one example of the way in which we do our business differently now, to make sure that we compensate for the fact that, though prisoner population has risen, staff numbers have not.

Mrs S McAllister: It is probably worth sharing this brief anecdote. Recently, I did a 12-hour shift in Maghaberry, during which I shadowed a senior officer, a first line manager, precisely to see some of the things you have been talking about. A number of things struck me. I did that shift in one of the square houses in Lagan House, which is currently more crowded than we would want it to be; it has

more prisoners in it than we would like. Notwithstanding that, I shadowed the senior officer and was hugely impressed by the way he ran that house. His management grip of the staff, prisoners and regime was impressive.

The other bit that you will be particularly interested in, in the context of earlier conversations that we have had, is that I spent the day with a team of staff in that house. Some of them were new custody officers, new CPOs, and some were main grade officers who had chosen not to exit the service. I could not tell which were which, because both the authority and confidence displayed by the new officers and the responsiveness to the newer way of working shown by the main grade officers belied the length of time that they had been in the service. It was a genuinely integrated group.

Also really impressive was the authority that those members of staff had over prisoners. It was really good to see excellent staff/prisoner relationships; prisoners and staff were using first names but there was mutual respect and appropriate authority. All the prisoners were unlocked for the whole of the day, doing various activities. So it gave me confidence that we have not eroded the supervision of staff by first line managers, or the supervision of prisoners by prison officers. It also encouraged me in that it shows the way that our new staff have been assimilated into the service.

Mr Elliott: That has broadly answered my final question, except for just one part. How are the new prison custody officers getting on with the old ones? *[Laughter.]* Sorry, I mean the more experienced ones. I am sure that they were all on their best behaviour when you were there, but, in general terms, and we talked about this before, there has been friction. I sensed that. How is it now?

Mrs S McAllister: I am not sure that the officers on that shift were on their best behaviour. Maybe they were, but they would have had to sustain best behaviour for 12 hours. However, I take your point. We are getting very good feedback with respect to how the two are getting on.

The other thing that we have just started is the training for the main grade officers. There was a sense that we had brought in new staff and given them really good quality training at the college. We have now started to give some of the main grade officers training to bring them into the new ways of working, so that they feel valued and feel that we are investing in their development. More than any of us, Paul goes round the prisons, drilling down, and looking at the way the staff work. Paul, do you want to give your sense of it?

Mr Cawkwell: I am not sure that there are two groups of staff any more. If we sit in this room and say that the new grade of officers has been successful, then I want to give a lot of the credit for that to their experienced colleagues, who have worked alongside them, brought them along and helped to make that transition seamless.

Mr Elliott: Thank you.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Thank you for the presentation. I just want to ask a couple of specific questions for clarity. When you talked about activities that people were involved in, you said that there were more people waiting for places than there were places. Are those work places or does that include every activity type? What I want to know is whether there are prisoners who are sitting with nothing to do at all.

Mr Cawkwell: What we said earlier was that we highlighted particular activities that generate high demand. For those activities, demand exceeds supply. There are waiting lists for them. That does not apply across the piece. If you take, for example, an institution like Hydebank, we know that we have up to 190 activity places and around 220 people actively pursuing those activities daily. That gives you a feel for the level of activity.

Ms McCorley: So, there are people who would like to take part in an activity, but there are not enough spaces. Are they doing something else?

Mr Cawkwell: Yes. Fortunately, we take a timetabling-style approach. That is how it works. So, it is not as hard and fast as saying that 85% of you can feast and 15% of you are in famine: it is about spreading it across the population as best you can. There are some who will try to avoid engaging in activities. Our challenge is to engage them. Some cannot be compelled to do so. They are unsentenced and it is a matter of choice. Generally speaking, it is shared as evenly as it possibly can be.

Ms McCorley: So, what percentage of prisoners would you say were not engaged in anything at all?

Mr Cawkwell: It varies across the establishments. I would say that at Hydebank, looking forward, there is very little excuse for anybody to not have some form of activity. If you go to Maghaberry, it will be a much higher figure —

Ms McCorley: Because of demand?

Mr Cawkwell: Well, no; it is because the population in Maghaberry is very close to 1,100 prisoners now. We have not been able to keep pace with regard to putting in plants, workshops and education facilities in the prison to match growth. The population is up 30% since Dame Anne Owers produced her report. That was not predicted.

Mrs S McAllister: I think that it is important to say that that does not necessarily mean that people are locked in their cells. In fact, it is really only in certain areas, such as the CSU, that you would have that at all. So, even where prisoners are not in employment or activity, unlocked would be the default position, so that they would be able to engage in their domestic activities, have some level of association, have time in the fresh air, and so on. It is not as though people are locked up. In fact, we do not accept lockdowns now other than in exceptional circumstances.

Ms McCorley: Is it your intention that every prisoner would have at least one activity?

Mr Cawkwell: Yes. Certainly, the initiative at Maghaberry that I discussed, which is the greatest challenge, identifies that that is exactly what we want to do. We recognise that there is not enough activity or jobs per se to go round, so the default position is that sentenced prisoners should have half a job — a part-time job — and those who are unsentenced and who want to engage can also have an opportunity for activity. The expectation now is that, rather than allowing some to feast and others to fast, we will give everybody a bit of activity.

Ms McCorley: Are there any female prisoners who are not involved in some activity?

Mrs S McAllister: Again, it would be a very small number. For example, we have one woman who has a very small baby, so she does not work — well, of course she works; she looks after her very small baby. There may be women who are over retirement age who choose not to work. There may also sometimes be women who are vulnerable and need a different type of support, so would not be fit, healthy or well enough to work at that time.

The numbers are high at the moment with respect to the population of Ash House. When the number gets to 70 it is difficult to find full-time or even part-time employment for everybody, but, again, we are looking at how we can expand that. We have a number of ideas about how we can create more opportunities outside Ash House for women who are suitable to go outside. The infill on the ground floor that we were talking about, which we are currently doing, will provide a number of classrooms, a beauty salon and a hairdressing salon, which will provide training places as well as activities. The vision is that everybody will have not just something but something appropriate.

Ms McCorley: Do you work on, and accept, the principle that purposeful activity is one of the main things that needs to be in place in prisons?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes, absolutely.

Ms McCorley: I might have missed the detail of it but when will the step-down facility for women be operational?

Mrs S McAllister: We expect to have it up and running by the end of this calendar year, so by December.

Ms McCorley: OK; and it will be six women at a time?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes, partly because of the design of the house. Six is about as many bedrooms as you can build without it starting to feel like an institution, and the hope is that it will not feel like an institution but will feel like a small supportive community. There is no reason why we should not look

to build a second house if that is successful and we need six more places, because that can happen more quickly.

Ms McCorley: Is that a purpose-built facility?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes.

Ms McCorley: Is it on-site? Where exactly is it located?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes, it is on the Hydebank site, but it is where the women's prison will be eventually, so it is outside of the perimeter but on the Hydebank site.

Ms McCorley: So, you would consider building another one?

Mrs S McAllister: Yes.

Mr Wells: I assume that the beauty salon is to train prisoners rather than to look after their own appearance.

Mrs S McAllister: It is both of those things, actually. It is primarily a training facility because we know that that is a realistic opportunity for women to get employment when they are released. If we are talking about women building confidence and a sense of well-being —

Mr Wells: Criminals.

Mrs S McAllister: Sorry?

Mr Wells: We are talking about criminals here, not staff.

Mrs S McAllister: We are talking about prisoners. It is primarily a training opportunity. We are doing it because women can realistically hope to get employment in that field, contribute to the economy and be less likely to turn to crime and end up back in the criminal justice system.

Mr Wells: I am showing my age here, but I think the public would react quite badly if prisoners were spending taxpayers' money to look like Twiggy. That is the only model I can think of. I am being serious about it. It is a deterrent and punishment as well as a training opportunity.

Mrs S McAllister: There are a number of things, Jim. First of all, we have not invented the idea. We have harvested the idea from other jurisdictions where it genuinely provides women with marketable skills. We are not doing it because it is a nice thing to do. We are doing it because it is realistic and it provides appropriate training.

Mr Wells: I feel an Assembly question coming on to the Minister about the cost of all of that, but I will move on. In an oral answer this week, the Minister indicated that 155 prisoners a year are brought in for evading TV licences. You mentioned earlier that Maghaberry is almost at capacity and, although you have brought the average cost of dealing with a prisoner down considerably, no doubt all of your savings were gobbled up by legal aid anyhow, but it is good to see that at least one aspect of justice is saving money. What would be the impact if we were to decriminalise all fines and debts in Northern Ireland? Would that relieve the pressure on Maghaberry?

Mrs S McAllister: Interestingly, we have no fine defaulters in prison — sorry, we have two. You will know that the practice of sending fine defaulters to prison has been suspended temporarily pending changes to the arrangements. Although we do talk about fine defaulters being a drain on the prison system, they are only ever in fairly small numbers at any one time, so we do not think that would have a huge impact on the population.

Mr Wells: I am told that it is not so much the amount of time they spend but they all have to be processed in and processed out, sometimes within 48 hours and less, which is a huge administrative cost.

Mrs S McAllister: Yes, it is.

Mr Wells: I presume you would welcome not having to do that in the long term.

Mrs S McAllister: Absolutely, yes we would, and we are obviously part of the discussions about new fine collection and enforcement arrangements, supervised activity orders and other disposals. It is not only a drain on administrative resources, as you say, but we have little or no opportunity to do anything with those prisoners by way of interventions.

Mr Wells: It seems a bit archaic that someone can go to prison for watching the 'Nolan' show without a licence. That seems very odd; watching the show is punishment enough. It strikes me as archaic that we are still doing that.

The Chairperson: Mr Wells has touched on an issue that the public will talk about, which is prison being punishment versus rehabilitation. It is about how much of this rehabilitation deals with their offending behaviour and that they are there because they have committed a crime.

Mrs S McAllister: Absolutely. David Ford is always clear about this, as are we, that people are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment. We know that we have to give the public confidence in the service that we deliver on behalf of society. We are mindful of the need to demonstrate that we are using public money wisely. Mr Wells has made the point that we need to be able to be clear about the cost of these training opportunities set against the cost of reoffending. The cost of reoffending will be significantly more than the cost of giving people training that will equip them to contribute to society. We need to be absolutely clear that our primary function is to serve the public by building safer communities. That is what we are for, and it is important that everything that we do is framed in that way.

Mr McCaughey: The public expect us to do something with prisoners and seize the opportunity that prison affords to challenge and change distorted attitudes and behaviours that cause people to commit offences in the first place. That is what the interventions and programmes that we are seeking to put together, along with our colleagues in the community and the probation service, will address.

Mr A Maginness: I want to ask about the number of remand prisoners. I know it is a variable, but what levels have you got?

Mrs S McAllister: Interestingly, we have done an analysis of the population which we hope to share with you when it is completed. The number of remand prisoners has gone down against the backdrop of the rise in remands. That is not to say there is not more that we could be doing collectively as a justice system to look at alternatives to remanding people in custody. We will continue those discussions with the probation service and voluntary and community sector organisations that provide bail accommodation, for example.

Mr A Maginness: So, there might be a further report on that coming down the line.

Mrs S McAllister: Yes.

The Chairperson: Thank you Sue and your team for coming along today. It has been a longer session than I anticipated, but it has been very worthwhile. I appreciate it.

Mrs S McAllister: Thank you.